OXFORD

MODERNISM AND THE MUSEUM

ASIAN, AFRICAN, AND PACIFIC ART AND THE LONDON AVANT-GARDE

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OXFORD ENGLISH MONOGRAPHS

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Modernism and the Museum

Print ISBN 9780199593699, 2010

PRINTED FROM OXFORD SCHOLARSHIP ONLINE (www.oxfordscholarship.com)

Introduction

Rupert Richard Arrowsmith

There is a problem with the study of Modernism as a global phenomenon. Histories of the period have been written, until very recently, by scholars with little or no knowledge of culture provinces other than their own, resulting in a situation where the dots of apparently discrete geographical regions are not adequately connected by lines of influence. In the Western part of the Eurasian continent, and in the United States, this situation has led to a distorted view of Modernism as essentially a European invention, with comparable movements on other parts of the globe characterized as imitative of 'advanced' art and literature in Europe, or—paradoxically—as reactionary and propagandistic. The possibility of multi-directional, transnational exchange in aesthetic concepts, art-historical knowledge, and literary and artistic technique is thus discounted, played down, or at best acknowledged in tentative and misleading ways.

This last tendency is most obvious in monographs on Western visual artists and authors whose work demonstrates an undeniable engagement with the products of extra-European cultures. Even the most recent studies on Jacob Epstein and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska—to give just two examples—are replete with vague expressions such as 'African-style', 'Japanese aesthetics', and 'Indian influence'; the rare attempts that are made to identify works that may have extended such influence invariably contain factual errors, while the circumstances under which Western artists may have encountered

artefacts from Africa, Japan, or India do not undergo any form of evidence-based investigation. [1]

[1] See, e.g., Anne Middleton Wagner, *Mother Stone: The Vitality of Modern British Sculpture* (New Haven and London, 2005); Richard Cork, *Jacob Epstein* (London, 1999); Roger Cole, *Gaudier Brzeska: Artist and Myth* (Bristol, 1995).

Even David Summers's ambitious *Real Spaces* project, which attempts to revolutionize the study of global art history, buries the contribution of Asian, African, and Pacific art to the development of Modernism in the West beneath a layer of nebulous concepts, and so ignores the direct, demonstrable, and enormous impact of such works on particular artists at crucial cultural turning points. [2]

[2] David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*(London and New York, 2003).

More effective work on the influence of extra-European visual cultures has been completed with regard to Modernist literature, but the view presented is still very far from adequate. Zhaoming Qian's two immensely popular books on Chinese art and early twentieth-century poetry in the West serve to illustrate a growing interest in the idea of transnational cultural exchange among academics and students alike. [3]

[3] Zhaoming Qian, *Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams*(Durham, NC, and London, 1995); and *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art*(Charlottesville, Va., and London, 2003).

Though important, Qian's books are somewhat limited in scope, focusing on loosely connected authors working on different sides of the Atlantic, and seeking to link the works of these only with the aesthetic conventions of historical Chinese painting.

Modernism and the Museum represents the first stage of a rigorous engagement with the issues outlined above. It takes Ezra Pound and Jacob Epstein as core case studies, and tracks the development of their separate but related dealings with extra-European art, and those of related figures such as Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Eric Gill, T. E. Hulme, Laurence Binyon, Richard Aldington, Amy Lowell, Charles Holden, William Rothenstein, Ford Madox Ford, James Gould Fletcher, James Havard Thomas, W. B. Yeats, and D. H. Lawrence. The nature of the investigation is rigorously historical, and presents much previously unpublished evidence from the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum (the V&A), the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Tate Gallery, and several private collections. What emerges is a view of London's museum network—especially the British Museum—as the

West's most significant hub of global aesthetic exchange during the years leading up to the First World War.

Since the work of theorists Ian Jenkins and Irit Rogoff during the 1990s, and of Frederick Bohrer and Tim Barringer more recently, the design, purpose, and inherent ideology of museums in general have come under increasing critical scrutiny. [4]

[4] Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes in the Sculpture Galleries of the British Museum 1800–1939* (London, 1992); Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (eds.), *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (London: 1994); Frederick Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture* (2003); Tim Barringer, *Imperial Visions* (2001).

Modernism and the Museum for the first time applies the tools thus developed to London's museum environment during the rise of Western Modernism to analyse the Eurocentric narratives built into the very layouts of these institutions, and to assess the ways in which these narratives may have modified the reception of artworks from other culture provinces by the city's artists and authors. In breaking away from the Graeco-Roman tradition to explore Indian, Assyrian, and African conventions of sculpture, Epstein is seen to have challenged existing notions of aesthetic hierarchy among various cultures, exchanging this for a relativistic conception in which the art traditions of any culture province may be drawn upon without restriction. During the same period, Pound is shown putting aside early approaches to poetry derived from medieval European verse in favour of adapted Japanese conventions, Chinese imagery, and Korean aesthetics studied at the exclusive Students' Rooms at the British Museum.

What the beginnings of Modernism in Europe essentially represented, then, was the opening-out towards the rest of the world of a culture province that had previously been extraordinarily provincial and chauvinistic. Artists and authors of other regions, particularly those of the great Asian civilizations of India, China, Korea, and Japan, had been experimenting with European conventions since the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the West, by contrast, poets turned their attention to the European past—to Florence or to Provence; while sculptors quibbled interminably over what the Greeks had intended with regard to the accurate depiction of the human body. It took the West another hundred years to come to terms with the idea of global cultural exchange, but by the 1900s the tide of aesthetic influence had turned and was surging the other way in full flood.

—Ma patrie…elle est par le monde;

Et, puisque la planète est ronde,

Je ne crains pas d'en voir le bout…

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1 The Dead Hand of Athens

Jacob Epstein, James Havard Thomas, and Provincialism in European Art

Rupert Richard Arrowsmith

At the time of Jacob Epstein's first visit in 1905, the British Museum in London was home to the most dynamic, the most diverse, and in many cases the most dubiously acquired international sculpture collection on Earth. Its masterpieces included classical Buddhist relief carvings from Amaravati in India; elegant Congolese hardwood pieces; technically advanced brass castings from the city of Benin; imposing Assyrian and Egyptian monumental sculpture; graceful temple statuary from Lykia in the eastern Aegean; intricate Japanese miniature works in wood and ivory; expressionistic items in various media from the Pacific islands; and a group of damaged Athenian architectural decorations known as the Elgin Marbles. In its exterior design, in its gallery layout, and in the arrangement and labelling of items within these galleries, however, the museum tended strongly to privilege European exhibits seen as conforming to, or at least historically connected with, classical Greek canons of beauty. Such exhibits had been marshalled into a series of connected rooms on the ground floor that were recognized as the section of the museum dedicated to fine art. Artworks perceived as unconnected to the European tradition, or whose aesthetics depended on non-Greek canons of beauty and methods of construction, were positioned far from this sacred precinct and presented as valuable only in terms of their anthropological or theological significance.

Such tension between the museum's European and extra-European collections would have been perceptible to the astute visitor even before the building had been entered. The overwhelmingly Hellenic appearance of Robert Smirke's sober Ionic façade is intensified further by a tympanum sculpted by the Royal Academician Richard Westmacott to resemble a combination of the Elgin Marbles and the Aegina Pediment—an earlier Greek work that at the time was represented inside the building by a

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plastercast. [1]

[1] The original Aegina Pediment, created between 510 and 480 BCE, had been acquired by Crown Prince Ludwig I of Bavaria for the Munich Glyptothek in time for the opening of that rival of the British Museum in 1830. The British Museum's plaster version of the figures had originally been housed in Room 18 on the ground floor (Plan 1), but was relocated before 1905 to the Archaic Greek Sculpture Room, represented on the plan by Room 12.

Westmacott's 1847 group of neoclassical figures would have presented few aesthetic surprises to Epstein in particular, as he walked across the institution's courtyard in 1905. The American sculptor had studied at two of Paris's four academies of art—the rigidly neoclassicist École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts and the less formal Académie Julian—since his arrival in Europe three years previously, and would have been highly conversant with both the technical methods and the compositional conventions employed in producing the arrangement.

Because the historical movement from 'archaic' Greek statuary to high-classical work had depended largely on an alteration in technique from stone carving towards work in clay for eventual casting in metal alloy, the key skill for academic sculptors to master was modelling. If the desired end product was to be a marble figure rather than a bronze, the job of copying the piece into stone was usually turned over to a team of industrial stonemasons. By 1905, these skilled copyists were able rapidly to reproduce the clay original with the assistance of engineers' measuring devices and machine tools, and without the necessity for supervision by the artist. In terms of aesthetics, the academic sculptor's objective was to tread a line between idealism and naturalism, with intra-academic debate during the nineteenth century focusing almost exclusively upon how great a degree of naturalism was permissible. Westmacott himself, who had studied under the great neoclassical sculptor Canova in the 1790s, favoured greater idealism, meaning he sketched mainly from Greek and Roman originals and plastercasts in order to avoid reproducing the bodily imperfections of living models in his finished work. Just such a set of idealized figures may be seen inhabiting the British Museum tympanum, arranged under the title *Progress of Civilisation* (Fig. 1). The motif is that of humanity 'growing more civilised', to quote the most popular of the *fin de siècle* guides to the institution. Figures in a 'savage condition' in the lateral corners of the tympanum are shown crouched among flora and fauna very alien to Europe including banana plants, elephants, and maned lions. Towards the centre of the composition, however, the figures straighten up into very Greek-looking allegories of 'Mathematics, the Drama, Poetry, Fine Arts, Natural History, '. [2]

[2] William J. Lee, *Treasures of the British Museum: Historical and Descriptive Notes* (London, 1892), 11.

Such heavy-handed symbolism, along with a

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Fig. 1. *Progress of Civilisation*, tympanum frieze by Richard Westmacott, 1847–51. Marble. British Museum, London. In situ. *(Author's photograph)*

pointedly Eurocentric conception of what might constitute civilization, was common to the greater mass of public sculpture produced during the Victorian period.

In 1905, the narrative of progress encoded in the façade of the British Museum did not remain confined within the triangular borders of the building's tympanum, but was extended by the positioning of that arrangement in relation to two other artworks located at the front of the building. It is seldom remembered that, from 1869 until 1940, a pair of large-scale stone figures from Rapa Nui (Easter Island) stood in the shadows between the column bases of the museum's frontal portico, some 12 metres beneath the upward-pointing arrow of Westmacott's tympanum.[3]

[3] The two carvings had been removed from Rapa Nui (Easter Island) by the Royal Navy frigate HMS *Topaze* in 1868. The *Hoa Hakananai'a* was initially presented to Queen Victoria, who donated it to the British Museum, where the second carving had already found its way. The two figures remained outside the main entrance to the museum until they were moved inside because of the institution's closure during the Second World War. In 1970 they were again moved, the *Hoa Hakananai'a* to the Museum of Mankind in Burlington Gardens and the *Moai Hava* into storage. The *Hoa Hakananai'a* was returned to the British Museum in 2000 and put on display in the new Wellcome Trust Gallery (Jo Anne Van Tilburg, *Hoa Hakananai'a* (London, 2004), 7–10).

Whether the *Moai Hava* and the *Hoa Hakananai'a* were intended to provide a contrast to the smooth marble statuary above them is unclear, but a more profound difference in production techniques and in aesthetic values would be difficult to imagine. Rather than modelling an original in clay that could be copied into a more durable material later, the Polynesian sculptors had carved their designs directly into rectangular slabs of volcanic rock (Fig. 2). While the smaller *Moai Hava* makes use

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Fig. 2. *Hoa Hakananai'a*, *c.*1000 CE. From Orongo, Rapa Nui (Easter Island). Basalt. 2.2 m high. *(British Museum, London)*

of a pumice-like base material known as tuft, the *Hoa Hakananai'a* is one of a very small number of Rapa Nui sculptures fashioned from basalt, a much denser and less tractable volcanic substance. The 'groove-and-keel' method used in rendering facial and bodily features in such rock was partly responsible for the representational conventions that evolved in the art of the island. Two parallel incisions were created using a hand-pick, and the resultant central 'keel' knocked out to create a rounded cavity such as the eye sockets visible on the *Hoa Hakananai'a*. This systematic removal of

material stands in clear opposition to the gradual addition of clay entailed by academic technique, and results in a rhythmic interaction between concave and convex surfaces that would later fascinate European Modernist sculptors such as Eric Gill, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, and Aristide Maillol. 'The features strike the viewer with a certain indefinable feeling of awe,' one Edwardian museum-goer observed in 1910, adding, however, that the statues were 'comparatively rudely carved'. [4]

[4] Unnamed correspondent, 'The British Museum', *London Magazine* (July 1910).

In 1905, the preference of Rapa Nui artists for formal abstractions and for a raw, textured surface to their carvings would certainly have seemed crude and incomprehensible to a mind conditioned to accept the illusionistic intentions and polished, 'soap-bar' contours of classical Greek sculpture as the only art worthy of the name. As the chapters to follow will confirm, even Jacob Epstein was unable to contemplate experiments with the conventions of Oceanic and sub-Saharan African art until he had first come to terms with those of Indian, Assyrian, and Egyptian sculpture—three traditions that possessed, by comparison, far more in common with Western aesthetic norms as they existed before the First World War. Whether intentional or not, the positioning of Westmacott's figures high above the British Museum's entrance and those of the Rapa Nui sculptors hidden in the shadows beneath would doubtless have reinforced for most Edwardian observers the perception that European art was more ideologically progressive, more aesthetically advanced, and more technically accomplished than that of other culture provinces.

Official guidebooks issued by the British Museum demonstrate that exactly such hierarchic thinking also determined the positioning of exhibits inside the institution well into the twentieth century. The foldout plan included with editions issued between 1901 and 1914 shows

a layered arrangement to the main sculpture galleries, which then occupied the ground floor of the building's West Wing. Long, corridor-like exhibition halls are stacked outwards from the museum's central court and bisected by a wide access passage. The official guide explains that these layers represented 'the Egyptian, the Assyrian and the Greek...in four parallel lines, running North and South'. [5]

[5] *A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum (Bloomsbury)* , 3rd edn (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1901), 4. Guides to specific areas of the museum could be purchased at stands throughout the building for a shilling each; the General Guide was available in the entrance hall priced at 2*d*.

A present-day reader, accustomed to museums arranged on the archaeological

principles that became popular in the mid-twentieth century, might assume that this arrangement was intended to divide the collection into chronological bands. A closer look at the contents of each layer, however, shows that this was not in fact the case. The innermost of the 'parallel lines', for example, not only consisted of the Egyptian sculpture at the northern end of the hall, but also included the Roman material in Room 8 on the plan. The two outermost 'lines', which consisted mainly of Greek artefacts, defied sequential order equally radically, with Hellenistic exhibits from the fourth century BCE placed in the layer beneath sculpture from the Parthenon that had been created a century earlier. To complicate matters further, this late, Hellenistic material shared space with pre-classical statuary such as the plastercast of the Aegina Pediment mentioned above. Though confusing in the light of more recent museum practices, the early twentieth-century layout of the sculpture galleries would have made perfect sense to an Edwardian visitor if, like Jacob Epstein, he or she had been educated amid the apparent cultural certainties of Europe's art academies. The reason for this is simple: artists and not archaeologists had designed the museum, and perceived aesthetic value rather than scientific considerations had determined the ordering of its exhibits.

The same grand narrative of artistic precedence that had shaped the doctrines of art academies around Europe also ensured that high-classical Athenian sculpture retained its position as the British Museum's holy of holies. It was a narrative that had taken shape during the mid-eighteenth century, finding its most influential voice in the writings of the Austrian art historian Johann Winckelmann, whose *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* , or 'History of Ancient Art', [6]

[6] Johann J. Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (Dresden, 1764). Sections of this had been 'translated and discussed in Britain by the 1760s' according to Frank M. Turner's *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London, 1981), 40. The sections of the work dealing with Greece received their most comprehensive English translation in *The History of Ancient Art* , trans. G. H. Lodge (3 vols.; Boston, 1849–72).

was published in 1764. The key idea of this work was that the production of sculpture should be understood not in relative terms—with each period and location valued on its own merits—but as a universal bell curve implying progress upwards to a very specific high point of achievement followed by a steady cultural decline. The 'grand and square' aesthetics of high-classical sculptors such as Phidias and the 'flowing beauty' of Praxiteles' late-classical work were, therefore, seen as representing the

finest art not merely of Greece, but of the world. [7]

[7] Winckelmann, *History of Ancient Art* , trans. G. H. Lodge, iii (Boston, 1872), 234.

As Phidias was reputed to have been involved with the creation of the Elgin Marbles, these were placed at the apex of the British Museum's own system of galleries, with the layer beneath occupied by the 'archaic' and Hellenistic material that Winckelmann had thought represented the upward and downward slopes respectively. The odd mixture of Roman and Egyptian pieces that has been noted in the lowest tier of this arrangement conforms to the same way of thinking. In Winckelmann's model, the 'misshapen and similar' monuments of Egypt are tentatively positioned as clumsy precursors of archaic Greek work, while Roman art is dismissed as shoddy imitation. As late as 1908, the official guide was able to reinforce this lowly position by stating that the Romans were 'not an artistic people; they were content to borrow their art from Greece'. [8]

[8] *A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum* , 3. This negative view of Roman art, though occasionally questioned, received no substantial challenge until the late twentieth century. Paul Zanker's *Klassizistische Statuen Studien zur Veranderung des Kunstgeschmacks in der Romischen Kaiserzeit* (Mainz am Rhein, 1974) is an example of one high-profile work that attempts to reclassify Imperial Roman sculptures as copies that have been brought to perfection rather than second-rate imitations.

In the late 1840s the question of whether sculpture from the Assyrian excavations of Austen Henry Layard and others should be incorporated into the above system led to a great deal of debate, not all of which was very polite. The eventual solution—whereby the new material was wedged awkwardly into a narrow new corridor between Egypt and archaic Greece—will be described in detail in a later chapter. Suffice it to say here that the survival into the twentieth century of a museum layout based on subjective artistic taste rather than historical considerations is not as surprising as it might seem. The position of Royal Academy president continued to carry with it *ex officio* trusteeship of the British Museum, and academicians were routinely appointed to senior curatorial posts well into the later

nineteenth century. As Ian Jenkins has shown in his excellent study of power relations within the institution, curators with archaeological rather than aesthetic backgrounds had begun by the 1900s to reform the display of individual artefacts, but the grand hierarchy of the sculpture galleries remained unaltered until the Second World War. [9]

[9] Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes in the Sculpture Galleries of the British Museum 1800–1939* (London, 1992), 229.

Not all the sculpture at the British Museum was accorded a position in the ground-floor galleries devoted to fine art, however. Often lightly described or completely overlooked in Victorian and Edwardian guidebooks, the upper floor of the building was where acquisitions seen as unconnected to the Greek tradition had found their way, including exceptional examples of sculpture from India, Burma, Sri Lanka, Japan, China, the Pacific islands, the Americas, and Africa. Unlike the pieces on the ground floor, whose status as 'pure' art was underlined by the absence of contextual information regarding their social relevance and religious significance, those upstairs were mixed together with non-sculptural exhibits and presented instead as an anthropological resource.

The display of metal and stone sculpture from India highlights very clearly the difference in presentation between these two carefully separated areas of the museum. A particularly fine cast alloy [10]

[10] Chola dynasty sculptures in metal are not strictly classifiable as bronzes; they are usually cast in an alloy known as *panchaloham*, which consists mainly of white lead mixed with copper, silver, gold, and a small amount of iron.

figure of the goddess Parvati—the approximate aesthetic equivalent of an Aphrodite image in the Greek sculptural pantheon—could be seen situated next to a brand new 'model of a car or moveable temple from the Carnatic [Karnataka]' at the centre of a room labelled 'Brahminism and Other Eastern Religions' (Fig. 3). An adjoining gallery contained a display labelled only 'Buddhism', which consisted in a disordered mixture of Indian sculpture displayed alongside a set of Chinese altar vases—which latter items were actually produced for use in a Taoist, not a Buddhist, context. [11]

[11] *A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum*, 57.

In the cases of both these displays, the intention was clearly to present Indian sculpture as a helpful illustration of Asian religious iconography with little or no aesthetic value.

Such provincial attitudes on the part of museums with regard to extra-European artworks undoubtedly ensured that the idea of imitating and adapting their techniques and aesthetic features was very slow in occurring to sculptors working in the West. When such a breakthrough finally did arrive, it was a thoroughgoing reinterpretation of the British Museum collections by non-academic artists such as Jacob Epstein, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, and Eric Gill that not only made it possible, but defined the character and direction of British Modernist sculpture at the same time. Even a sculptor as unconventional and broad-minded as Epstein took several years, however, to allow a growing fascination for extra-European work seen in the museums of London and Paris directly to influence his

Fig. 3. *Parvati*, mid-sixteenth century CE. From Southern India. Bronze. 40 cm high. *(British Museum, London)*

own practice. Until the seminal experiments carried out during his work on the British Medical Association project of 1907–8, it would instead be radical figures associated with the academies such as Auguste Rodin and James Havard Thomas that Epstein would do his best to emulate.

Most of the artworks admired by Epstein in Paris had been created, like the *Hoa Hakananai'a* at the front of the British Museum, using techniques of direct carving. At the Louvre, his attention had particularly been caught

by 'early Greek work [and] Cyclades sculpture'—both genres that pre-dated the advent of modelling in Greek art and that relied on chiselling into blocks of limestone or marble. Another destination during this period was the Trocadéro, soon to be the scene of Picasso's own first experiences with African art, where Epstein looked at 'a mass of primitive sculpture none too well assembled'. [12]

[12] Ibid. 23.

Similarly to the displays of extra-European art in London, this was presented as anthropological material and exhibited amid a display that even included dummies dressed up to look like African villagers. [13]

[13] Gilles Aubagnac, 'En 1878, les sauvages entrent au musée de l'Armée', in Nicolas Bancel et al., *Zoos humains* (Paris, 2002), 351.

The sculpture itself consisted mainly of coastal West African hardwood pieces, which had again been created by cutting and gouging into difficult materials such as ebony and rosewood. Back at the Louvre, a directly carved 'limestone bust of Akhenaton' from Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt was also an object of special interest for Epstein. This pharaoh's unsuccessful attempt to replace Egyptian polytheism with exclusive worship of the 'Aton', or solar disc, ensured that he was vilified by later generations as a heretic. The unusual experiments in sculptural form over which he also presided were equally short-lived, and involved mannerist bodily distortions and an expressionistic treatment of facial features that are unique in Egyptian art.

Though Epstein would eventually employ a range of styles and sculpting methods derived from all three of the art traditions mentioned above, he stuck during his student years to conventional claywork, creating pieces that were only notionally connected with extra-

European cultures. He carefully destroyed all these early experiments when he left Paris, but later described the most ambitious of them as 'a group of sun worshippers'. The title links the work decisively with Epstein's interest in the court of Akhenaton, and the art historian Richard Cork has suggested that it may have represented his first attempt at direct carving.[14]

[14] Richard Cork, 'Image from Stone', in Evelyn Silber (ed.), *Jacob Epstein, Sculptures and Drawings* (Leeds, 1989), 23.

Photographs of the piece that were published in an obscure 1912 newspaper without Epstein's permission demonstrate, however, that this was not the case.[15]

[15] Unnamed correspondent, 'Ghetto Youth who Stirred the Paris Art World', *World* (Sunday supplement), 27 Oct. 1912. In a letter to John Quinn of 28 Nov. 1912, Epstein writes of the article: 'it is truly shameful. It was evidently concocted by a damned journalist in conjunction with a fool of a brother I have in New York. The photographs are of things that I did as a student years ago and which I did not know still existed and which I should never allow to be published' (Quinn Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations). Images from the article are reproduced in Elizabeth Barker, 'New Light on Epstein's Early Career', *Burlington Magazine*, 130/1029 (Dec. 1988), 996.

The images show a

group of kneeling males with raised arms who are very reminiscent of the main figure in El Greco's *Opening of the Fifth Seal* . This visionary work was then in the collection of École des Beaux Arts member Ignacio Zuloaga, and would be 'quoted', along with facial conventions derived from Gabonese (Fang culture) carvings at the Trocadéro, in Picasso's seminal painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* some three years later. The material used in constructing Epstein's 'sun worshippers' is undoubtedly clay, modelled with a deliberately rough expressiveness that is very obviously inspired by Rodin rather than by anything from Egypt. 'I hurled myself at the clay,' the sculptor later recalled of his technical approach during the Paris years; 'I worked at the school with a sort of frenzy.'[16]

[16] Jacob Epstein, *Let there be Sculpture: An Autobiography* (London, 1940), 27.

It would in fact be 1907 before Epstein attempted to transfer aesthetic features derived from extra-European art into his own work, and his first serious attempt at direct carving in the round would not take place until the Christmas of 1910.

Epstein cited a fascination for the collections of the British Museum as his primary motivation for moving from Paris to London in the summer of 1905, but, when it came to the practical business of creating and selling his own works, it was again the style and technique of a contemporary sculptor that he emulated. The relocation came about as a result of a short trip by Epstein that included a tour of London's museums and galleries. 'A visit to the British Museum settled the matter,' he recalled in 1940, 'as I felt that I would like to have a very good look round at leisure'.[17]

[17] Ibid. 30.

Epstein's habit of impulsively smashing up pieces with which he had become unsatisfied has meant that there is almost no three-dimensional record of projects attempted during his first year in London.[18]

[18] Richard Buckle's claim that Epstein's '1st Portrait of Mrs Epstein' was made shortly after the sculptor's arrival in London (*Jacob Epstein, Sculptor* (London, 1963), 13) does not sit easily with Epstein's own version of events nor with the sculptor's established biography. Epstein recalled in his own version of events that 'I made this portrait of my wife in 1912. Leaning upon her hand, she looks towards the future with extreme confidence' (*Let there be Sculpture,* 116). Epstein did not in any case marry Margaret Dunlop, who modelled for the sculpture, until 1907.

'I felt extremely discouraged at this time,' he recalled later, 'and started destroying all that was in the studio.'[19]

[19] Epstein, *Let there be Sculpture* , 31.

Fortunately, a sketch and a written description of one important work give a very clear indication of Epstein's direction during this wilderness period, despite the demise of the piece itself. The flattish, profile view given in the sketch has led some critics to assume that the finished *Girl with a Dove* was a directly carved relief, and Richard Cork has attempted to link the work with a Greek funerary carving now in New York's Metropolitan Museum.[20]

[20] *Grave Relief: Girl with Doves* from Paros, 455–450 BCE, reproduced in Richard Cork, *Art beyond the Gallery in Early Twentieth Century England* (New Haven and London, 1985), 15.

Though there are some circumstantial correlations in motif between the 30-centimetre relief from Paros and Epstein's drawing, the aesthetics of the two are widely at odds with one another. The idealized, full features of the Greek piece contrast strongly with the

deliberately awkward, uncompromisingly naturalistic physique of *Girl with a Dove*, which seems to waver unsteadily on its overly large feet. Perhaps more importantly, the little Paros carving was not in New York at any time when Epstein could have seen it. Before the First World War it had been used as an integrated wall decoration at the country estate of the Earl of Yarborough in northern Lincolnshire—a place Epstein never visited—and it did not enter the Met collection until 1926. Fortunately the private papers of the architect Charles Holden, who visited Epstein's studio in 1906, include a description of the work that confirms its true characteristics. This describes the 'delicate and sensitive figure' not as a relief but as a sculpture in the round, of 'life-size or slightly over'. [21]

[21] Charles Holden, untitled notes about his collaboration with Epstein on various projects, 3 Dec. 1940, File No. AHP/26/25/1, p. 4, Archive of the Royal Association of British Architects, Victoria and Albert Museum (hereafter cited as RIBA).

In understanding the significance of *Girl with a Dove* as a clue to Epstein's changing aesthetic preoccupations, it is far more productive to view it in the context of London's contemporary art scene at the time of his arrival from Paris.

In 1905, London was in the grips of what the academic painter James E. Christie described as a 'great furore' over a single item of sculpture submitted to the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy by James Havard Thomas. Though the neoclassical 'soap-bar' contours of mid-century works such as Westmacott's *Progress of Civilisation* had yielded by the *fin de siècle* to an interest in the greater physical naturalism proposed by sculptors such as Frederick Pomeroy, Edward Onslow Ford, and Hamo Thornycroft, the human body continued to be represented

at the Academy in a strongly idealized and often sentimental way. Works such as Pomeroy's *Nymph of Loch Awe* of 1897, and Onslow Ford's *The Snowdrift*—first exhibited in 1902—might seek to emphasize the mortality and fragility of the human form rather than its grandeur, but their main aesthetic strength is an extraordinary rendition of healthy muscle and bone beneath a flawless skin. Any internal asymmetries and surface imperfections that accurate observation of a living body might have yielded have been assiduously rectified. It was precisely such a sculptural approach that Ezra Pound soon found cause to deplore as relying 'solely on the pretty, the "caressable"' in order to please the tactile imagination rather than the intellect. [22]

[22] Ezra Pound, 'Affirmations: Jacob Epstein', *New Age*, 16/12 (21 Jan. 1915), 311.

Not surprising, then, that Havard Thomas's submission for the 1905 exhibition was rejected for displaying too clearly 'the defects of a common and ill-bred Italian model...the too-prominent collar bones, the clumsy articulations, the thick ankles, the misshapen feet' (Fig. 4). [23]

[23] Anonymous reviewer in *Athenaeum*, 13 May 1905.

Not surprising either that Hamo Thornycroft, in spite of his credentials as a proponent of the New Sculpture, was instrumental in that rejection. [24]

[24] 'Hamo Thornycroft and H. H. Armstead, representing the sculptors, decided that 'Mr Havard Thomas's life-size statue...did not possess sufficient merit as a work of art to enable its inclusion in the annual exhibition of our national art' (anonymous contributor), 'Art and Artists', *Star Daily*, 2 May 1905.

Havard Thomas's private papers show how annoyed he was at the idea that this as yet untitled piece had somehow stepped outside the Greek tradition of sculpture as it was understood by the Academy. 'I have, I feel certain, arrived at the first principles of Greek sculpture,' he had explained to the photographer Peter Henry Emerson while working on the controversial figure a year previously on the island of Capri. [25]

[25] Havard Thomas, letter to P. H. Emerson, 8 Aug. 1904, Box XLVII, Uncatalogued Archive No. TGA924 (Havard Thomas), Tate Gallery Archive.

The academic painter George Clausen later recalled a similar defence of the new artwork's 'Greekness'. 'I believe the ancient sculptors', Thomas told him, 'were as certain in setting up a statue as the engineer is today in designing a bridge'. [26]

[26] George Clausen, undated manuscript for an obituary of Havard Thomas, Box XVII, Uncatalogued Archive No. TGA924 (Havard Thomas), Tate Gallery Archive.

For Thomas, such certainty consisted in a kind of medical naturalism attained by the careful measurement of his model's body. 'As the maritime compasses are to the sailor, so is the geometrical compass to the sculptor,' he noted; 'they must be continually referred [to, or] we should assuredly drift into

Fig. 4. ***Lycidas*** **by James Havard Thomas, 1892–1905. Bronze cast of original black wax figure. 1.63 m high.** ***(Tate, London)***

error'.[27]

[27] Undated fragment containing handwritten text, Box XVIII, Uncatalogued Archive No. TGA924 (Havard Thomas), Tate Gallery Archive.

These mathematical instruments were applied so rigorously that he was able to observe that the variation in the line of a model's belly 'after say 12 hours of taking food and that of 2 hours after is

1.60 cm'.[28]

[28] Undated fragment containing handwritten text, Box XVIII, Uncatalogued Archive No. TGA924.

The spat between Thomas and the Royal Academy did not then represent an attempt by an outsider to alter the basis of European sculpture away from the conventions of classical Greece, but a squabble between insiders over what those conventions had actually been. Most Academicians fell in with the idea that classical Greek art had by definition offered an idealized view of the body, while Thomas contended that a 'faithful representation of individual nature in its natural environment' had been the true objective.[29]

[29] Undated, handwritten manuscript of a speech, Box XVIII, Uncatalogued Archive No. TGA924 (Havard Thomas), Tate Gallery Archive.

Unwilling to suggest that a sculpture judged to be outside the Greek tradition might be worthy of display at the Academy, supporters of Thomas began to propose that the unnamed statue was grounded in pre-classical aesthetics, while the artist himself settled for giving it a title derived from Greek literature. Critic David Getsy quotes one sympathetic reviewer as suggesting the designation 'genuine archaic' for the piece.[30]

[30] Unidentified 1905 review by 'B.N.' of the New Gallery exhibition where *Lycidas* was eventually shown, quoted in David J. Getsy, *Body Doubles: Sculpture in Britain 1877–1905* (New Haven and London, 2004), 158.

William Blake Richmond—a full professor at the Academy and Thomas's ally in the affair—agreed, adding that it was 'the most Greek

statue that has been made in modern times'. [31]

[31] W. B. Richmond, quoted by Thomas in a letter to the photographer P. H. Emerson, 8 Aug. 1904, quoted in Getsy, *Body Doubles*, 157.

An uncatalogued letter from the artist Thomas Spencer Jerome now in the archives of the Tate Gallery show that it was only after the work's rejection that Thomas decided to give it a name at all. 'What a devil of a time you have had,' he wrote to the sculptor in April 1905; '[the Academicians] must have their eyes in their asses if they couldn't see that the "Lycidas" (I see you have a new name) was the real stuff '. [32]

[32] Thomas Spencer Jerome, letter to Havard Thomas, 18 Apr. 1905, Box XVIII, Uncatalogued Archive No. TGA924 (Havard Thomas), Tate Gallery Archive.

The use of Theocritus' (and Milton's) name for a Greek goatherd-poet was very obviously intended as a retrospective bid for academic approval. Any closer analysis of this decision would be difficult to justify, as another supporter of Thomas, the author Norman Douglas, has indicated that its selection was more or less random. In his 1917 novel *South Wind*—a barely disguised account of his own sojourn on Capri—Douglas reveals that he himself had come up with 'Lycidas' after having been asked merely to 'root out a well-sounding and classical' name with 'vague yet distinguished' qualities. [33]

[33] Norman Douglas, *South Wind* (London, 1917), 59.

Contemporaries both of Epstein and of Havard Thomas would have based remarks relating to early Greek approaches to sculpture upon the small number of original 'archaic' pieces held by the British Museum, the best known of which was the late *kouros* [34]

[34] The term *kouros* (pl. *kouroi*), meaning 'youth', is popularly used to describe the highly conventionalized marble statues of male figures produced in abundance in mainland Greece roughly between 600 and 480 BCE.

known popularly as the Strangford Apollo. That a second display featuring pre-classical Greek works was available in London has been almost entirely forgotten, even by museum historians. This consisted in a large collection of plastercasts, which were initially shown at the South Kensington Museum, but which were relocated to the British Museum in 1907. [35]

[35] A. H. Smith, *A Guide to the Collection of Casts of Sculpture in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the British Museum* (London, 1913), introduction, p. B2. See also David M. Wilson, *The British Museum: A History* (London, 2002), 239.

By the end of the Second World War the collection, originally intended to fill the gaps in London's Greek art collections by providing facsimiles of notable pieces in other countries, had been variously donated to alternative museums and private collectors. As a twenty-first-century curator of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum has kindly pointed out, many were even used during the Second World War as targets for military shooting practice, [36]

[36] Thorsten Opper, letter to RRA, 15 Mar. 2006.

an ignominious fate that reflects the declining popularity of casts as objects worthy of museum display after the 1920s. During their tenure at the British Museum, the casts were exhibited from 1909 in a large wooden shed just west of the museum's main entrance, and the collection is certainly what provided the motivation for Ezra Pound's proposed 'monograph on Greek sculpture before Phideas' in 1916. 'The *Moscophoros* [*sic*] is good,' the poet would tell John Quinn that year, 'Greece had one really fine sculptor and has carefully forgotten his name.' That a reproduction of the *Moschophoros* or 'calf-bearer' figure—which Pound liked to describe more colloquially as 'the chap with the calf' [37]

[37] Pound to Quinn, 26 Aug. 1916, reproduced in *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts*, ed. Harriet Zinnes (New York, 1980), 240–1, 280.

—was one of the 'archaic' casts displayed is confirmed by curator A. H. Smith's contemporary guide to the collection, a publication that from 1913 could be purchased at the entrance to the shed for a shilling and two pence. [38]

[38] Smith, *A Guide to the Collection of Casts of Sculpture*, 14.

It is interesting to note that supporters of much of Epstein's early Modernist work would also attempt, like the defenders of the *Lycidas*, to

legitimate it by placing it within the relatively unthreatening fold of 'archaic' Greek influence. Epstein's projects from 1907 onwards largely made use of conventions derived from much further afield, however; and attempts to pin the 'archaic' label on the *Lycidas* are equally fanciful. There is no correlation, for example, between its deliberately loose-limbed, asymmetrical posture and the strict lateral symmetry of works such as the *Moschophoros* and the Strangford Apollo. Neither is there any connection between the solid, rigidly upright pose of these two works and the hunched-over, flailing form of the *Lycidas*, which seems permanently off-balance. Thomas's holistic, moulded

treatment of musculature, no doubt obtained via his intensive measurement regime, is likewise completely at odds with the linear etching of muscles and grid-like abdominal 'six-pack' seen in most *kouroi.* Such claims by contemporary observers, then, were not based even remotely on objective comparison. 'Archaic' Greece instead seems to have been used as a convenient category into which any sculpture with problematic aesthetics could be bundled willy-nilly. It is not a tendency that has gone away. Even David Getsy, whose recent book on the New Sculpture movement contains an otherwise excellent chapter on Havard Thomas, optimistically includes a photograph of the pseudo-archaic Apollo of Piombino to highlight perceived similarities with the *Lycidas* that certainly do not exist. [39]

[39] Getsy, *Body Doubles*, 158.

If anything, Thomas seems to have identified his art with that of Greece more in terms of *weltanschauung* than by its conformity to a set of standardized representational conventions. In his unpublished notes at the Tate Gallery, the key objective of sculpture is set out as 'the unalloyed demonstration in a plastic form of the highest, the most complete and the most complicated organism in nature—Man'. [40]

[40] Undated, manuscript for a speech, Box XVIII, Uncatalogued Archive No. TGA924 (Havard Thomas), Tate Gallery Archive.

Despite the difficulties of Thomas's academic peers in comprehending his work and its subtle philosophical connections with their own, it is finally this clear continuity of the sculptor's thinking with classically inspired humanism and notions of progress in art that invalidate Getsy's subsequent attempt to cast *Lycidas* as the first identifiably Modernist sculpture produced in Britain. [41]

[41] David J. Getsy, 'The Lycidas "Scandal" of 1905: James Havard Thomas at the Crux of Modern Sculpture in Britain', in David J. Getsy (ed.), *Sculpture and the Pursuit of a Modern Ideal in Britain* c.*1830–1930* (Aldershot, 2004), 186.

Though Epstein may be seen periodically to have flirted with the Havard Thomas approach, it

was a conspicuous anti-naturalism based on formalized aesthetic and iconographic conventions that would form the true basis of *avant-garde* art in pre-war London.

Epstein's initial sculptural experiments after the move from Paris may be conclusively linked to 'Lycidas' via their unusual method of assembly, and also via a letter from Epstein to Thomas that has never previously been published. Finding the traditional academic technique of clay modelling inadequate to the reproduction of medically accurate surface detail, Thomas used the *Lycidas* to pioneer an innovative new method. Using proportions derived from his medically accurate system of measurements, the sculptor first built a wooden infrastructure resembling an attenuated mannequin doll. Next, layers of black wax were gradually modelled over the wood until the requisite appearance of flesh stretched over organic tissue had been achieved. Charles Holden's notes confirm unequivocally that this was precisely the technique used by Epstein to create the figure of an awkward young girl just a year and a half after his arrival in London. 'I went to see Epstein in his studio on the Fulham road,' writes Holden; 'he was working on the figure of a young girl holding a dove in her cupped hands [Fig. 5]. It was done in black wax and I was very impressed.' [42]

[42] Charles Holden, untitled notes about his collaboration with Epstein on various projects, 3 Dec. 1940, File No. AHP/26/25/1, p. 4, RIBA.

After watching Epstein create a second work—the *Narcissus* of 1909–10—using exactly the same system, Holden was reminded enough of Thomas's work to make the connection himself. 'He prepared a fine figure,' the architect recalled later; 'over life size—in wax I believe—with something of the spirit of Havard Thomas' "Lycedas" [*sic*] about it.' [43]

[43] Charles Holden, untitled manuscript on the connections between sculpture and architecture, n.d. (but probably 1939–40), File No. 26/23/5, p. iii, RIBA.

What has remained unknown until now is that Epstein had not only contacted Thomas soon after his arrival in London, but had even visited the older artist's studio on more than one occasion in order to learn the wax sculpting method at first hand. A search through the uncatalogued mass of Havard Thomas's personal papers in the Tate Archive reveals a short note from Epstein containing the following lines: 'I should very much like to come and see you again and to see your figure "Lycidas" and the casts and drawings.' [44]

[44] Uncatalogued letter labelled 'E10' from Epstein to Havard Thomas, undated but certainly from 1905–6, Uncatalogued Archive No. TGA924, Tate Gallery Archive.

The note is undated, but the return address is given as Fulham Road—the very address visited by Holden

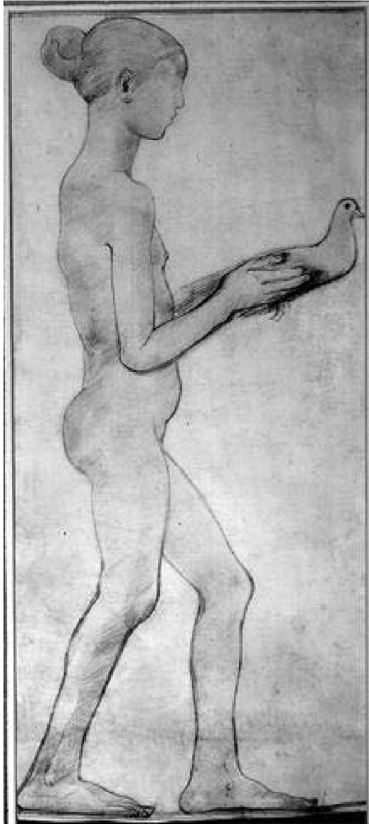

Fig. 5. *Girl with a Dove*, by Jacob Epstein, 1906. Pencil on cardboard. 48 × 21cm. *(Walsall New Art Gallery, United Kingdom)*

in early 1907, and a place Epstein would leave that same spring for larger premises in Cheyne Walk. During the early days in London, Epstein clearly saw in Thomas's extreme interpretation of the classical Greek idiom a way forward for Western art. It must not be overlooked, however, that, soon after Holden's visit to the Fulham Road studio, Epstein made a conscious decision to destroy the black wax *Girl with a Dove*, despite the architect's protest that 'it was worth preserving'. [45]

[45] Charles Holden, untitled notes about his collaboration with Epstein on various projects, 3 Dec. 1940, File No. AHP/26/25/1, p. 1, RIBA.

Narcissus, the other sculpture to have been created using Thomas's

techniques, later met an identical fate beneath Epstein's hammer. Holden, who had witnessed the painstaking genesis of this second wax piece, would express shock that the sculptor was so suddenly able to cast aside 'a work of great distinction already approaching completion' despite the time and financial commitment invested in it. In retrospect, however, it seems very clear that, by the time of this second incident early in 1911, Epstein had realized the futility of attempting to extend the European artistic tradition as it was understood by sculptors such as Rodin and Thomas. 'It is impossible to copy nature exactly,' he would later reflect; 'a mathematically correct rendering of a person would neither be a work of art or a likeness'. [46]

[46] Jacob Epstein, in Arnold L. Haskell, *The Sculptor Speaks: Jacob Epstein to Arnold L. Haskell—a Series of Conversations on Art* (London, 1931), 67.

The fact of the matter was that a new, quite different basis for avant-garde sculpture had suggested itself to Epstein as the result of experiments carried out between Holden's first meeting with the sculptor in 1906 and the destruction of the *Narcissus* five years later. The reason Holden had appeared at the Fulham Road studio at all that morning had been to hand Epstein his first ever large-scale commission: to create sculptures for the façade of a new British Medical Association headquarters sited on London's Strand. It was the decorative scheme for this project, conceived jointly between the two men, that finally set Epstein on the road towards an aesthetic and technical revolution with its origins very far indeed from classical Greece.

2 An Indian Temple on the Strand

Charles Holden, Ananda Coomaraswamy, and London's First Modernist Sculptures

Rupert Richard Arrowsmith

During the interwar period Charles Holden designed such iconic Modernist buildings as the Senate House tower of London University, London Transport's imposing headquarters on the Broadway, and a series of underground railway stations that would be imitated all over Europe. Despite his increasing renown, however, he continued to be viewed by his peers as a solitary, maverick character who was denied membership of the Royal Academy as late as the 1940s, and who also refused the offer of a knighthood on two separate occasions. Described by the journalist Paul Vaughan, who interviewed him in 1958, as 'stiff backed, yet...slightly diffident and almost shy', Holden had begun secretly to take issue with contemporary European approaches to architecture as early as 1905. [1]

[1] Paul Vaughan, typescript entitled 'Historical Note' detailing an interview with Holden that took place on 5 Mar. 1958; typescript is dated 14 Mar. 1958; File No. AHP/1/16/1, p. 1, RIBA.

In that year, an anonymous article appeared in the *Architectural Review* recommending nothing short of a paradigm shift in existing concepts of the built environment. 'We must begin at the foundation and not at the cornice,' the article urged, referring to the confirmed fondness of Edwardian architects for lavishly decorated stucco façades; 'we must put aboriginal force into our work, and leave it to speak for itself: no mere ingenuity will suffice; tricky combinations of style and smart inventions are fool's play.' [2]

[2] 'Thoughts for the Strong', anonymously published in 'Notes', *Architectural Review* , 18/104 (July 1905), 27.

The reserved Holden did not publicly admit to his authorship of the article until nearly fifty years later, but he began to put its principles into

effect in his own designs straight away. [3]

[3] The archive of the Royal Institute of British Architects contains a short note dated 16 July 1951 addressed by Holden to J. M. Richards, at that time editor of the *Architectural Review* , admitting to having anonymously submitted 'Thoughts for the Strong' and another piece, 'If Whitman had been an Architect', during 1905 (File No. AHP 26/20/1). The archive also contains Richards's amused response, thanking Holden for resolving a mystery from 'before I was born' (File No. AHP 26/20/2).

Exactly what he had meant by 'aboriginal force' is made clearer in a series of undated, handwritten notes to be found among his private papers. The strident tone of these paragraphs is very close to that of the anonymous writings in the *Architectural Review* , suggesting that they represent the rough drafts of further articles planned by the architect for publication in 1905. 'Necessary to get back to early times,' the notes argue. 'Complete dependence on static form of coordination in early work—rock cut temples and the stratified & many levelled architecture of Indian temples. The massive very numerous columns...of the Egyptian temples.' [4]

[4] Charles Holden, undated manuscript entitled 'Modern Archit.', File No. AHP/26/1/8, RIBA.

There was certainly more than just a hint of Indian temple architecture in Holden's design for the new building for the British Medical Association (BMA) in London's Strand (Fig. 6). His description of such structures as 'stratified and many levelled' is accurate with regard to indigenous Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain styles rather than to the Persian-style architecture introduced by the Mughals. Though vague, Holden's notes are clearly based on observation, and suggest that he had studied engravings or photographs of Indian buildings at first hand.

In 1905, such visual material was readily available via the outstanding Indian collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The V&A, which had originally been called the South Kensington Museum, was officially renamed by Queen Victoria in her last public appearance in May 1899. [5]

[5] Queen Victoria laid the foundation stone for the redesigned museum on 17 May 1899; she died in Jan. 1901. The building was officially opened by Edward VII on 26 June 1909 (*The Victoria and Albert Museum: General Guide to the Collections 1913–14* , 4th illustrated edition (London, 1913), 8).

The building subsequently underwent extensive extension and renovation, which included the assembly of an ambitious replacement façade designed by future Royal Academy president Aston Webb. This new frontage, with its anarchic encrustation of mixed-up gothic, Byzantine, and Italian Renaissance decorative elements held up by a steel frame, must have confirmed every one of Holden's fears about 'tricky combinations of style' in contemporary European architecture. Its construction ensured that the building

Fig. 6. The British Medical Association Headquarters (429 Strand, Westminster), designed by Charles Holden as partner of Adams, Holden & Pearson, 1908–9. Grey Cornish granite and Portland stone cladding a steel frame, slate roof. ***(Photograph courtesy of the British Monuments Record)***

remained closed until 1909, but fortunately the Indian collections were at that time situated to the east of the main museum on the site now occupied by Imperial College, and remained fully accessible to visitors. [6]

[6] Divia Patel (curator of the Asian Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum at the time of writing), letter to RRA, 30 Nov. 2006.

Because the V&A collections were essentially geared towards design rather than art and

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ethnology, the items on display included photographs and drawings of Indian buildings as well as architectural fragments and large-scale plastercasts taken from archaeological structures on various parts of the subcontinent.

Another easily accessible resource was James Fergusson's well-known *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* , which had been available since 1876. The volume contained many detailed engravings of Indian temple buildings along with descriptions of typical design features, including the complex stratification noted in Holden's writings. This multi-layered aesthetic, which another authority on Indian architecture has likened to 'the dynamic force of plant-forms breaking out from an inner centre, pushing upwards and outwards from a fertile soil', certainly finds its equivalent in the complex upper stories of Holden's BMA design. [7]

[7] 'VCI', writing in *Guide to Indian Artworks in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London, 1978), introductory note.

Bradley and Pevsner, in their encyclopaedic study of buildings in Westminster, pay particular attention to exactly such features. The 'uncompromisingly cylindrical columns and many short sharp horizontals' noted in the volume certainly evoke the mass of variously proportioned pillars, pilasters, and corbels found particularly in Hindu and Buddhist approaches to construction. [8]

[8] Simon Bradley and Nikolaus Pevsner, 'No. 429 Strand', in *Buildings of England: London* , vi. *Westminster* (New Haven and London, 2003), 356.

Precisely such features, Fergusson's 1876 study points out, were used 'for architectural effect, and neither [the Buddhists] nor the Hindus who succeeded them in the north ever hesitated to use pillars of two or three diameters in height, or to crowd them together to any required extent'. [9]

[9] James Fergusson, *A History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (London, 1876), 332.

Fergusson's reasons for preferring Indian architecture to the contemporary building styles of Europe were essentially the same as Holden's. Like the architect, Fergusson valued clarity of design and truth to materials, seeing the late-nineteenth-century tendency to conceal a building's infrastructure beneath heavily decorated stone cladding and stucco as ‘anomalous and abnormal’. With their blocky pillars and layered construction, the design of both Indian and Egyptian buildings instead drew attention to the structural dynamics of the building and to the monumental beauty of the stone itself, Fergusson considered, proposing the same aesthetic connection between the two civilizations that Holden's notes on architecture assume. [10]

[10] Fergusson remarks that Indian architectural projects ‘equal the Egyptian even in extent, and though at first sight so different, in some respects present similarities that are startling...[there are] many similarities that will occur to anyone familiar with both styles’ (ibid. 379).

‘Those who observe what failures the best educated

and most talented architects in Europe are constantly perpetrating’, Fergusson continues, ‘may, by a study of Indian models, easily see why this is inevitably the result’. [11]

[11] Ibid. 5.

Some of the engravings illustrating Fergusson's treatise were based on original images from an 1855 survey carried out by the pioneer Anglo-Indian photographer William Pigou. The original tintypes of these were donated to the South Kensington Museum by the East India Company in 1880. Pigou's project had begun as an attempt to catalogue archaeological sites in the lower portion of the subcontinent, and had focused heavily on the Hindu and Jain temple complexes at the site then referred to as ‘Hullabeed’—actually Halebidu in the present-day state of Karnataka. The Halebidu complex of Hoysaleshawara, which Fergusson's book holds up as the Asian equivalent of the Parthenon, is particularly well endowed with decorative sculptures of individual male and female figures. These are elaborately posed, and their high-relief rendering means that they appear to occupy somewhat restrictive rectangular boxes—a widespread decorative convention of Indian temple design that Fergusson further exemplifies with engravings of similar carvings from the earlier Buddhist complex at Gwalior in Rajasthan. This approach to architectural decoration, so alien to the multi-figured frescoes and the shallow decorative reliefs preferred by sculptors working in the Greek tradition, is very likely what inspired Holden to include ‘some figures posted in the niches on the third or fourth floor’ of the BMA façade to ‘break up the surface of that level’. [12]

[12] Vaughan, ‘Historical Note’.

If Holden had imagined an Indian-style scheme of decoration for the BMA from the very beginning, he was certainly barking up the correct tree when he approached Epstein with the commission for the carvings. Critics Ezio Bassani and Malcolm McLeod have noted briefly in their study of Epstein's collecting habits that his first passport—issued by the American authorities just prior to the sculptor's departure for Paris in 1902—has a mysterious address pencilled onto its back cover. [13]

[13] Ezio Bassani and Malcolm McLeod, ‘The Passionate Collector’, in *Jacob Epstein Sculpture and Drawings* (Exhibition Catalogue) (London, 1989), 16.

It is in fact the address of the Musée Guimet in the Place d'Iéna—an institution whose collection during the pre-war years consisted almost entirely of

sculpture from India and South East Asia. While he may not have learned of the Musée Guimet before taking up residence in Paris, it is highly improbable that Epstein would then have chosen to use his passport as a handy place on which to scribble its address. Far more likely that he wrote it on the single item he would be sure not to forget when he embarked on the long voyage across the Atlantic—an interpretation of the evidence that would mean he attached significant importance to the Guimet even while resident in New York. Whether Epstein had heard of the museum before arriving in Paris or not, a fascination for its Indian exhibits definitely explains his fixation—almost impossible to fulfil in pre-war France—on hiring a model from the subcontinent for his work at the Académie Julian just a few months before Epstein's relocation to London. ‘I daresay there is not another model like him in all Paris,’ the sculptor remarked after his eventual location of a young Sikh, adding that the man's ‘form gives him a very sculptural appearance’. [14]

[14] Letter to Edward Ordway, 4 Feb. 1905, quoted in E. Barker, ‘New Light on Epstein's Early Career’, *Burlington Magazine* (Dec. 1988), 906.

The unpublished diaries of the sculptor Eric Gill, now held at the Bancroft Library at Berkeley, confirm that looking for Indian sculpture was also Epstein's main objective in early visits to the V&A and the British Museum. [15]

[15] Bancroft Library MSS Division, UC (Berkeley), reproduced in microfilm at the Tate Gallery Archive (TAM 70).

Gill records that Epstein took him to South Kensington specifically to view Indian material on 22 March 1910—a day's gallery-browsing that the two topped off by attending an evening performance by 'Japanese wrestlers'. [16]

[16] Diaries of Eric Gill, entry for 22 Mar. 1910, ibid.

His diary entries for mid-November of the same year are even more intriguing. On the 11th of that month, Gill notes that he accompanied Epstein on a morning visit to Roger Fry's Post-Impressionist exhibition at the Grafton Gallery before heading across to the British Museum, which was about ten minutes' walk away. Though the diary does not specify exactly which galleries Epstein wanted to look at during this excursion, a thumbnail sketch drawn in the space for the following day's entry strongly suggests that the museum's collections of Indian sculpture—at that time unrivalled in Europe—had commanded the majority of the two artists' attention. The drawing shows a raised hand with an eye staring out from the centre of its palm, a symbol likely to have been derived from

the tendency of Indian artists to place tiny lotus blossoms resembling eyes at the centres of sculpted figures' palms. This feature was visible in very many of the artworks then on display at the British Museum, most obviously in a large figure of the bodhisattva Avalokitesevara that had stood in the upstairs galleries since 1872 and was one of the largest carved pieces in the building. Gill's diary entries were made at about the time that he began to speak to his friends of establishing a cult religion 'under the sign of the Ithyphallus' , [17]

[17] Augustus John, quoted in Fiona MacCarthy, *Eric Gill* (London and Boston, 1989), 102.

a statement suggesting at least some knowledge of iconography related to the Hindu god Shiva, of whose penis-shaped *lingam* carvings several were available at the British Museum. Gill's enthusiasm for Indian work intensified during the period following these museum visits; Epstein's, on the other hand, seems to have peaked around the time of his initial collaboration with Holden.

The BMA project itself is now regularly cited in surveys of twentieth-century art as the first clear example of Anglo-American Modernist sculpture. [18]

[18] See, e.g., Anne Middleton Wagner: *Mother Stone: The Vitality of Modern British Sculpture* (New Haven and London, 2005); Stephen Gardner, *Epstein: Artist against the Establishment* (London, 1992); Richard Cork, *Jacob Epstein* (London, 1999).

It is usually understood as marking a revolution in aesthetics far more significant than those proposed by *Lycidas*, *Girl with a Dove*, or any other contemporary three-dimensional artwork (see Figs. 4 and 5). Despite this consensus among art historians, however, attempts to shed light on the unusual posturing, iconography, and representational conventions of Epstein's figures have been tentative and unsatisfactory, largely because they attempt—almost without exception—to interpret them with reference only to provincial European concerns. In actual fact, however, the revolution represented by the BMA figures and by Epstein's subsequent work consisted precisely in its ability to reach beyond Europe for its technical and aesthetic inspiration. It is only in such a transcultural context that its significance to the study of Modernism in general can be properly understood.

The first common misconception about the BMA figures is that they tend to be lumped together into a single series, when in fact they fall into two very distinct groups with very distinct purposes. Holden pointed this out to the *British Medical Journal* in an interview shortly after he and Epstein had settled on a plan for the sculptures. The first group to be produced, he said, would 'represent medicine and its allied

sciences, chemistry, anatomy, hygiene, medical research and experiment'. [19]

[19] Anon., 'The British Medical Association—the New Offices', *British Medical Journal* , 7 Dec. 1907, p. 1664.

These six figures, which include the four on the side of the building facing London's busy Strand and the first two around the corner on Agar Street, can hardly be termed controversial; in fact they are no more challenging to Edwardian norms than the symbolic statuary produced in large quantities by academicians such as Pomeroy and Thornycroft. A few years later, Ezra Pound amused himself at the expense of exactly such 'allegorical ladies in night-gowns holding up symbols of Empire or Commerce or Righteousness' in his articles on art and architecture for the *New Age* magazine. 'One might irreverently suggest', he mocked, 'that such statues be made by the gross, with detachable labels'. [20]

[20] Ezra Pound, 'Affirmations: Jacob Epstein', *New Age*, 21 Jan. 1915, p. 311, reproduced in *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts* , ed. Harriet Zinnes (New York, 1980), 11.

Holden seems deliberately to have planned for the positioning of this first, rather unadventurous, series by Epstein on the exposed Strand façade of the building precisely because its anodyne character was unlikely to offend the public. Such cautiousness, if it did exist, would be strongly vindicated by subsequent events.

While the first BMA series was almost entirely ignored, the second group of twelve figures running down the more concealed Agar Street façade inspired the most spectacular artistic brouhaha of the early twentieth century. Holden wanted this new series to be 'as wide in scope as [the poetry of Walt] Whitman', [21]

[21] Charles Holden, untitled notes on his collaboration with Epstein on various projects, 3 Dec. 1940, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, File No. AHP/26/25/1, p. 1, RIBA.

and directed Epstein to produce a 'series of figures telling the evolutional scheme of man's development from primitive inchoate form to the highest perfection of manhood and womanhood'. [22]

[22] Anon., 'The British Medical Association—the New Offices'.

Epstein responded by creating a number of unusually posed male and female nudes at various stages of sexual maturity, all but one of which were approved by Holden as 'exactly what I had hoped to find' in approaching the young sculptor for the commission (Fig. 7). [23]

[23] Holden, untitled notes on his collaboration with Epstein.

The story of the malevolent campaign against these artworks by the *Evening Standard* newspaper and 'the Religious Vigilance Society, or some such name' during the summer of 1908 is quite well known, as is that of their deliberate destruction

Fig. 7. The BMA Headquarters. Detail showing Epstein's figures (from left) *Maternity/Parvati*, *Youth*, *Newborn*, and a second treatment of *Youth*, 1907–8. *(Photograph courtesy of the British Monuments Record; original sculptures have been destroyed)*

when the government of Rhodesia took over the lease of the building almost thirty years later. [24]

[24] Holden's notes record that the affair began in June 1908 with an official complaint by a group calling itself the National Vigilance Society. The complaint was about the *Maternity* carving on the Agar Street façade of the BMA building. The front page of the *Evening Standard* soon afterwards described the figures surrounding the *Maternity* as 'statuary which no careful father would wish his daughter, or no discriminating young man his fiancée, to see' (9 June 1908). Though the BMA assiduously defended Epstein's work and blocked calls for its removal, the figures were destroyed in 1937 after the building's new tenants claimed that they were structurally unsafe and constituted a physical danger to pedestrians walking below (Holden, untitled notes on his collaboration with Epstein).

The individual figures that caused the greatest degree of controversy—namely, the *Maternity*, the *Nature*, and the four *Maidenhood* sculptures—are clearly very different from anything produced at the Royal Academy or by Epstein himself prior to this. What has been extremely unclear among both Epstein's peers and more recent critics of the project, though, is exactly what these artworks represent, and exactly why they should be seen as forming the vanguard of pre-war Modernist sculpture in London.

The *Maternity* figure was the first of Epstein's BMA sculptures to be targeted for attack, and it is in the preparatory drawings for it that the first crucial clue to the meaning of the series as a whole is to be found. Holden would later speak of his surprise at the strong accusations of 'indecency' that were levelled against what he considered 'one of the finest pieces of the group and one of the most successful from an

architectural point of view'.[25]

[25] Ibid. 1–2.

'People fell of buses to get a glimpse of it,'[26]

[26] Charles Holden, notes for a speech to be given at Bolton Art Gallery, 15 Oct. 1954, File No. AHP/26/26/1–2, p. 2, RIBA.

he remembered of the subtly swaying outline of a pregnant woman, her face turned into the corner of her niche as though to escape such aggressive scrutiny. Holden had first seen a sketch of the figure a year previously, when Epstein had submitted a set of drawings 'in a very few days' in response to Holden's stated requirements for the BMA (Fig. 8).[27]

[27] Holden, untitled notes about his collaboration with Epstein.

That drawing, which is now in the Garman Ryan Collection at Walsall's New Art Gallery, is not, however, titled *Maternity* at all. Instead, it is the name of the Hindu goddess Parvati that is underlined in ink at the top of the page. The deity, who represents the patron of motherhood and consort of the phallic god Shiva, is the goddess most frequently depicted in Hindu art, providing the motif for several works held at the British Museum, including the fine alloy figurine that was described in Chapter 1. Kathleen Epstein, the sculptor's second wife, has pointed out that the inscription on the drawing does not appear to be in her husband's handwriting.[28]

[28] Kathleen Epstein, 'Notes on the Plates', in Richard Buckle (ed.), *Epstein Drawings* (London, 1962), no. 15, p. 52.

The fussy, deliberate lettering with its tailed-off 'i' and its extravagantly crossed 't' certainly bears little resemblance to that used in Epstein's pre-war missives to Havard Thomas and other contemporaries. Such stylistic details do, however, stand up to a systematic comparison with the script of Charles Holden's various manuscripts at the Royal Institute of British Architects, as well as exhibiting similar traits with regard to the relative sizes of individual characters. Holden was, after all, the one who had commissioned the sketches, and it seems entirely plausible that he added the title to the drawing of the pregnant woman during the discussion of the BMA project that took place at his second meeting with Epstein in early 1907. If the writing is Holden's—and I am prepared to claim that it is—then it demonstrates with great effectiveness that the two men

Fig. 8. Preparatory sketch for the BMA *Maternity/Parvati*, by Jacob Epstein, 1907. Pencil and ink line on paper. 50 × 30.5 cm. *(Walsall New Art Gallery, United Kingdom)*

were united from the very beginning in bringing a building based on Indian rather than European aesthetic principles to London's Strand.

One unexpected factor in the bringing together of Holden, Epstein, and elements drawn from Indian temple design must have been the shared interest of the two men in Walt Whitman. Holden's insistence that the second BMA series of sculptures should be ‘as wide in scope as Whitman’ was not the first time he had taken the American poet's name in vain. Alongside the architect's anonymous article for the *Architectural*

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Review mentioned above, a second one entitled ‘If Whitman had been an Architect’ also appeared. In it, Holden apes the poet's exuberant style while once again criticizing the European tendency to disguise the beauty of exposed stone and ironwork. ‘Come, you modern buildings, come!’ the article runs. ‘You shall be as naked as you choose.’ [29]

[29] Charles Holden, ‘If Whitman had been an Architect’, published anonymously in the ‘Notes’ section of *Architectural Review* , 17/103 (June 1905), 258.

Epstein himself had become a fan of Whitman after attending readings of the poet's work at New York's Community Guild in 1897, and had used Central Park as a venue for reading *Leaves of Grass* in the years leading up to his departure from the city. Some preparatory figure drawings based on the ‘Calamus’ section of this poem were completed by Epstein either during this period or shortly after his arrival in Paris, demonstrating the importance of Whitman's thinking to the sculptor during his student years. Another segment of *Leaves of Grass* comes to mind more insistently when reading Holden's articles and his notes praising Indian architecture, however, and that is ‘Passage to India’. This sings of ‘the strong, light works of the engineers’ while also invoking ‘the dark, unfathomed retrospect’ to be found near ‘the streams of the Indus and the Ganges, and their many affluents’. Holden's desire to emulate the ‘aboriginal force’ of Indian hieratic architecture while also finding beauty in ‘that derrick and steam crane’ doubtless incorporates Whitman's linkage of ‘ye facts of modern science’ with ‘you temples fairer than lilies, pour'd over by the rising sun’. [30]

[30] Further research among Holden's unpublished papers reveals that the architect's small personal library included a first edition of E. M. Forster's 1924 novel *A Passage to India*—a work known to have been inspired in some measure by Whitman's poem of the same name (Charles Holden, handwritten inventory of book collection (n.d.), File No. AHP/28/40, RIBA).

Despite his encouragement of Epstein with regard to the *Maternity/Parvati* figure, however, Holden's tolerance for such experiments was not limitless, and the sculptor's next work, to which he gave the working title *Nature*, would find itself vetoed even before it had left the studio.

Nature has always been the most heavily discussed of all the BMA sculptures (Fig. 9). When he saw the full-sized clay version of the figure, even Charles Holden baulked at the probable public reaction to its voluptuousness and immediately told Epstein he could not include it on the building's façade. Considering the uproar that would soon greet the comparatively tame *Maternity/Parvati*, Holden's worries were justifiable. At the time, however, his decision angered and disheartened

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Fig. 9. *Nature*, by Jacob Epstein, 1907–8. Clay. 213 cm high. Lost. *(Photograph courtesy of the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, United Kingdom)*

Epstein, who considered the *Nature* to be 'one of the best' of his creations to date. [31]

[31] Jacob Epstein, *Let there be Sculpture: An Autobiography* (London, 1940), 33.

More recent critics have felt disoriented and threatened less by the figure's sexuality than by its anomalous aesthetics and iconography, which have never been satisfactorily contextualized. The task of doing this has not been helped by the fact that only two photographs of reasonable quality were ever taken of the clay sculpture,

which has since been destroyed or lost. In these pictures, the *Nature* stands in a slightly awkward cross-legged posture, one hand extended, palm outward, the other grasping what appears to be a leafy twig containing fruit or seeds. Richard Cork's 1985 study—still the best general introduction to the BMA project—suggests that the figure represents 'Eve apparently depicted in the act of removing her traditional fig-leaf'. [32]

[32] Richard Cork, *Art beyond the Gallery in Early Twentieth Century England* (New Haven and London, 1985), 19.

Cork notes the figure's 'strangely twisting' posture, and 'generously proportioned' physique, but does not draw these elements into his interpretation of the figure as Eve, probably because they do not reflect standard European conventions in the portrayal of this particular biblical character. In actual fact, no other feature of the second BMA group supports even a tentative interpretation of the scheme based on Christian mythology. The key to Epstein's symbolism, then, is definitely not to be found here.

Though there are very obvious connections between the *Nature* and the four sculptures described by Epstein as representing *Maidenhood*, [33]

[33] 'The other eight figures represent Youth and Maidenhood' (Arnold L. Haskell, *The Sculptor Speaks: Jacob Epstein to Arnold L. Haskell—a Series of Conversations on Art* (London, 1931), 17).

the latter figures are still more complex, stylized, and alien to European sculptural norms. Written as recently as 2005, Anne Middleton Wagner's discussion of the BMA series is quite baffled by their sinuous postures. 'What is striking', she remarks, 'is how much Epstein thinks it necessary to push and pull the sculpted body to make it stand for joy in life'. [34]

[34] Wagner, *Mother Stone*, 36.

Cork is little better off, describing the *Maidenhood* image given at Fig. 10 as a ‘strange and convoluted woman...lifting her leg off the ground like a dancer about to undertake a leap’. He can only speculate that Epstein may have been thinking back to his student memories of watching Isadora Duncan perform in Paris. [35]

[35] Cork, *Art beyond the Gallery* , 50.

A 1903 letter from Epstein now in the archives of the New York Public Library shows, however, that he had not been impressed by Duncan, complaining that she ‘looked puny at the Trocadero with a full orchestra on a vast stage’. [36]

[36] Epstein, letter to Edward Ordway (from Paris), 12 Apr. 1903, Epstein Personal–Miscellaneous Archive, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Moreover, the lifted leg of Epstein's dancer crosses the other in a shape resembling a stiffly drawn number 4—a stance that would

Fig. 10. *Maidenhood*, by Jacob Epstein, 1907–8. Plaster. 210 cm high. Lost. *(Photograph courtesy of the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, United Kingdom)*

clearly make any kind of leap a physical impossibility. While it is almost entirely absent from European sculpture, however, the ‘figure-4 leg’ is a ubiquitous convention of Indian sculpture observable in relief carvings as well as in free-standing statuary. Known in Sanskrit as *padasvastika*, the posture originated in the carvings of *yaksas*, or female nature spirits, used to decorate even the most ancient Buddhist and Jain shrines; it was later brought into Hindu architectural sculpture and may be found throughout the subcontinent.

What Cork has called the ‘curiously twisting’ stance of the *Maidenhood* figures is also readily explained in terms of Indian aesthetics. In the

preparatory sketch for Epstein's *Maternity*, the same pen that added the *Parvati* inscription has also traced a thick ink line along the back of the figure, which emphasizes the subtle lateral ‘S’ suggested by its stance. The posture of the British Museum's *Parvati* figurine (see Fig. 3) is almost identical, for both works seem to employ an aesthetic convention as essential to the Indian canon of beauty as the *contrapposto* is to the European. Defined by art historian B. N. Goswamy as an idealized arrangement where ‘the knee bends, the hip

projects, and the head tilts so that the body forms an “S” curve’, [37]

[37] B. N. Goswamy, *Essence of Indian Art* (San Francisco, 1986), 279.

it is known as the *tribhanga*, meaning ‘bends three times’ in Sanskrit. If the physique of a javelin or discus-thrower is best suited to the purposeful forward implication of the *contrapposto*, then it is the *devadasi*, or temple-dancer, that represents the ideal of this stationary, swaying aesthetic.

Such contrasts in posture between Indian and European work serve to highlight the essentially homoerotic preoccupations of Greek statuary compared with the fixation on the female physique of sculptors from the subcontinent. In the Greek tradition, the male body has always represented the unequivocal basis for nude figure compositions, with unclothed female equivalents conspicuously absent before the late classical period. These preferences were carried over into the norms of the European art academies, and female nudes such as Praxiteles' *Knidos Aphrodite*—of which a Roman copy stands in the British Museum—were considered risqué by Royal Academy members even as late as 1864. In that year, Richard Westmacott's son, himself a sculptor, was able to express concern in his influential *Handbook of Sculpture Ancient and Modern* that the piece might ‘induce a lower standard of taste and fancy in the public’. [38]

[38] Richard Westmacott [the younger], *Handbook of Sculpture Ancient and Modern* (Edinburgh, 1864), 176.

When compared with comparable work from India, however, Praxiteles' work seems positively androgynous, the slablike trunk and muscular shoulders of the Aphrodite visibly harking back to their masculine sculptural precedents. In a tradition where the female body has always been seen as the foundation of figurative art, it is instead depictions of the male form that tend towards androgyny. In Indian sculpture, narrow waists and flared hips are the rule, even in cases when warriors or athletes are represented. Hardly surprising then that Epstein, who, according to Eric Gill, was ‘quite mad on sex’ in an unequivocally heterosexual way, found the conventions of the subcontinent more germane to his own interests than those of Greece.

Figs. 11 and 12. Jain column base (details), eleventh century CE. Probably from Gujarat, India. Limestone. 106 cm high. *(Author's photograph; sculpture is in the British Museum, London)*

The artworks that lie behind Epstein's *Maidenhood* figures are easily locatable among the Indian artworks acquired by the British Museum prior to 1906. One of these is an eleventh-century column base, one of the largest of the Indian exhibits in those days, which probably

came originally from the Jain shrines of Gujarat (Figs. 11 and 12). The carvings upon this resemble Epstein's work for the BMA so convincingly that a pictorial comparison might almost be allowed to stand without comment. 'Whenever I had done a new piece of work,' Epstein remarked

Fig. 12. Continued

of his early years in London, 'I compared it mentally with what I had seen at the [British] Museum.' [39]

[39] Epstein, *Let there be Sculpture*, 32.

The over-blown *tribhanga* stance of the Gujarati sculptures has certainly found its way into the *Maidenhood* figures via exactly such a process of mental comparison, while the figure-4 positioning of the

Fig. 13. *The Departure of Prince Siddhartha (Gautama Buddha) from Kapilavastu* , second century CE. Fragmentary drum slab from the great stupa at Amarvati, India. Limestone. 110 cm high. *(Author's photograph; sculpture is in the British Museum, London)*

legs also demonstrates unarguable similarities. The aesthetic conventions used by the Jain sculptors of Mount Abu had been adapted from idealized images of the female form observable at earlier religious sites around India. One such image—part of the British Museum's outstanding collection of carvings from the Buddhist stupa at Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh—seems to have given Epstein the raised left arm, inclined head, and abdomen detail used in the *Maidenhood* figures (Fig. 13).

That no Western sculptor had previously attempted to 'branch out' into the aesthetics of India was largely due to the unfavourable historical relationship that had been set up by European scholars between Indian and Greek art. By the time Henry Cole, the first president of the South Kensington Museum, restated it in his 1874 catalogue of the Indian exhibits at the South Kensington Museum, this grand narrative had already hardened into an article of faith among archaeologists. The essential idea was that the concept of representative figure sculpture had not occurred to anyone in India or eastern Asia before the arrival of Alexander III of Macedon in the late fourth century BCE. Greek colonists from Bactria, a province straddling the borders of present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan, were said subsequently to have produced statuary for Buddhist rulers in northern India, and thus to have founded the entire tradition of temple sculpture in that culture province. Predictably, the style of Buddhist sculpture that flourished in Gandhara—a region bordering Bactria—until the middle of the fifth century CE was generally considered superior to later, more obviously indigenous schools because of its perceived aesthetic proximity to the Greek 'original'. In a narrative twist worthy of Richard Westmacott the Younger, virtuoso carvings from historical points of cultural apex—such as the Jain carvings and the alloy *Parvati* mentioned above—were seen as representing a profound *devolution* in aesthetic value that was due to local artists supposedly having misapplied or forgotten the lessons they had been taught by the Westerners.[40]

[40] Henry H. Cole, *Catalogue of the Objects of Indian Art Exhibited in the South Kensington Museum* (London, 1874), introduction.

Despite its preference for Indian buildings over those of nineteenth-century Europe, even James Fergusson's *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* follows the same pattern, insisting doggedly on the ultimate derivation of most Indian techniques of construction and architectural decoration from Greece via Bactria, and from Rome via assumed maritime connections in later centuries.

The British Museum's exhibition strategy with regard to the above-mentioned Amaravati sculptures illustrates the position occupied by

Indian sculpture in the nineteenth-century European consciousness very clearly. Stupas were originally reliquary mounds, built to house the cremated physical remains, funeral urn, and pyre embers of Gautama Buddha. Over time the stupa evolved conceptually into an object of

veneration in its own right, and several thousand such monuments were built by the emperor Asoka—an enthusiastic Buddhist convert —during his reign from 273 to 232 BCE. One of the most impressive of these was constructed at Amaravati in south-eastern India, and was gradually decorated over the next four hundred years with some of the world's most brilliant examples of relief sculpture. By the nineteenth century the regional population was predominantly Islamic rather than Buddhist, and concern was beginning to mount among the colonial administration that the site was being quarried by local villagers seeking building materials. Most of the reliefs were therefore removed in two separate conservation campaigns by government officials Colonel Colin Mackenzie and Sir Walter Elliot in 1816 and 1845 respectively, and were donated to the British Museum by the East India Company in 1880 after a short stint as ornaments at the organization's premises in London's financial district. [41]

[41] Mackenzie—at that time the Surveyor General of India—removed 11 carvings in 1816, 9 of which were sent to the East India Company's premises in London's Leadenhall Street (the material was relocated to the Company's Whitehall offices in 1861). Elliot, another official of the colonial government, removed a much larger haul of carvings from the site in 1845, and eventually 121 pieces had followed the original 11 to London. The British Museum was notified that it would receive these Amaravati pieces—along with most of its other large Indian sculptures—when the company decided to redistribute its collection of Indian art in 1879. The remainder of these items went to the South Kensington Museum, which later became the V&A (David Wilson, *The British Museum: A History* (London, 2002), 172).

Despite their very obvious technical merit, however, they were not incorporated into the main system of sculpture galleries in the way that new material from the eastern Aegean and from Mesopotamia had been a few years previously. Instead, they were used to line the balustrades of the principal staircase, which provided the primary link between the regimented collections of the ground floor and the more eclectic display upstairs. The positioning of the Amaravati carvings, then, seems deliberately intended to mark them as an introduction to that separate region of the museum. During the 1900s they would have hung there in limbo between floors, uncomfortably suspended somewhere between art and anthropology.

By the time Epstein began work on the BMA project, there had been surprisingly little improvement with regard to scholarly attitudes towards Indian sculpture in Europe. Alfred Foucher, who would become one of France's most highly respected art historians during the interwar period, published in 1905 his *L'Art Greco-Bouddhique du Gandhara* .

Though the treatise was ostensibly sympathetic towards Indian art and art from Asia in general, such sympathy extended only as far as such works could be historically linked to the Greek tradition. The term 'Graeco-Buddhist', introduced for the first time in the title of the volume, was intended to indicate the derivative nature of Buddhist art in the same way that 'Graeco-Roman' had traditionally been used to emphasize the dependence of Roman art on styles established by the Greeks. The very image of Gautama Buddha himself had been developed as merely 'an Indianized version of Apollo' according to Foucher's analysis, for which no figurative precedent existed among the 'swarming effects' and 'systematic overcrowding' of the 'wood and ivory carvers' whose decorative schemes were the only form of art believed by the author to have existed prior to the Greeks' arrival in the region. Rather than proposing a genuine reappraisal in the West of Asian aesthetics, then, Foucher was effectively dismissing indigenous techniques and forms as barbarous while praising those that seemed to reinforce the European canon as it was then understood. 'This figure of Buddha,' Foucher writes at the end of his astonishing piece of aesthetic propaganda, 'which, smiling at us from the depths of the Far East, represents for us the culmination of what is exotic, nevertheless came originally from a Hellenistic studio'. [42]

[42] A. Foucher, *L'Art Greco-Bouddhique du Gandhara: Étude sur les origines de l'influence classique dans l'art Bouddhique de l'Inde et de l'Extreme-Orient* (Paris, 1905). Translated by L. A Thomas and F. W. Thomas as *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art* (London, 1917), 130, 85, 136.

In addition to suggesting elements of the *Maidenhood* figures, the Buddhist reliefs of Amaravati seem to have made fundamental contributions to another of Epstein's figures for the BMA. Probably the finest of all the Amaravati reliefs is a storyboard-like carving from the second century BCE describing the nativity of Prince Siddhartha, the Indian aristocrat who would eventually become Gautama Buddha (Fig. 14). The baby prince does not appear in the narrative physically, for early Buddhist sculpture tended to represent sacred figures aniconically—meaning that symbols are used instead of bodies and faces. Where a newborn child might be expected to appear in the swaddling bands of the midwives, therefore, only two stylized footprints are visible on the carved surface. The effect of this lacuna is that Maha Maya, the mother of the Buddha, becomes the visual focus of the composition. She is shown most clearly at the bottom right of the relief, standing with her

Fig. 14. *The Birth of Prince Siddhartha (Gautama Buddha)* (detail), second century CE. Drum slab from the great stupa at Amaravati, India. Limestone. 157 cm high. *(Author's photograph; sculpture is in the British Museum, London)*

leg crossed over in a version of the familiar *padasvastika*, and with the rest of her body bending laterally in the *tribhanga* posture. With regard to the current discussion, however, the most interesting thing about her pose is the fact that she is grasping the overhanging branch of a nearby tree. This gesture identifies her with a very common genre of *yaksa* carving known as a *shalabhanjika*, the key feature of which is a leafy twig shown held in the figure's raised hand. The connection between the woman and the tree in such compositions is one not of identification, as

it is with the Greek *hamadryad*, but of symbolism: the biological fertility and the nurturing element of female psychology in metaphoric linkage with comparable aspects of the vegetable world. [43]

[43] B. N. Goswamy notes that *shalabhanjikas* are 'not necessarily the spirits of trees but partaking of the sap of life that flows in them' (*Essence of Indian Art*, 36).

Epstein would have been able to see a second *shalabhanjika* decorating the largest object to be kept on exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum during the pre-war period. This was a 10-metre-high plastercast of the eastern gateway at Sanchi, another of the subcontinent's most significant Buddhist stupa complexes, which included lavish carvings created a century or so after the panel from Amaravati described above. Historian Tim Barringer has speculated upon the ingenious techniques that may have been required by the colonial authorities to make such a replica, which would have attracted the attention of any visitor to the V&A if for no better reason than its enormous size. [44]

[44] Tim Barringer, 'The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial Project', in Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (eds.), *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum* (London, 1998), 148.

Though the plastercast itself was unfortunately dismantled and consigned to the depths of a storage depot long ago, a photograph of it in

the museum's archives demonstrates that only one of the many decorations—aside from the large elephants on the top—could be made out clearly from any distance away. [45]

[45] V&A catalogue number 1872-113-122.

This was a *shalabhanjika* occupying the corner between the right pillar of the gateway and the butt of its lowest lintel. With her legs arranged *padasvastika*, she grasps the leaves of an overhanging tree in exactly the manner not only of the Maha Maya from Amaravati, but also of another female figure carved two thousand years later for an office building in London—Epstein's *Nature*.

When the photograph of the *Nature* is examined more attentively, it becomes increasingly apparent that Epstein intended the figure as a contemporary *shalabhanjika* to decorate the BMA building in the manner of a Buddhist stupa or a Jain or Hindu temple. Though the coarse grain of Epstein's 1907 photograph makes identification of the branch held by the figure difficult, it is at least possible to see that its leaves resemble small flames, each individual leaf forming an elongated heart shape like the spades on a standard playing card. These are joined to round seeds about the size of a horse chestnut, but with a circular marking in the centre. The term *shalabhanjika* literally means 'breaker of the branch of the Shal tree', but the leaves of the Shal (*Shorea robusta*)

are considerably broader and less tapering than the ones held between the fingers of Epstein's figure. [46]

[46] The Shal (*Shorea robusta*) is specifically mentioned in Buddhist mythology as having suddenly burst into fruition when touched by Maha Maya. Gautama himself is said in some traditions also to have died lying between two such trees.

On the other hand, the tree type depicted in Indian sculpture of this kind is, in practice, far from constant. S*halabhanjikas* are often to be found grasping other varieties of spiritually significant flora, with Lotus flowers or Pipal foliage among the most popular. Leaves of the Pipal (*Ficus religiosa*), known to Buddhists as the tree of *bodhi*, or enlightenment, do closely match the flame-like shapes of those in Epstein's carving. [47]

[47] *Bodhi* is derived from the Sanskrit *budh*—understand—and *gaha*—thoroughly. Buddhist tradition states that Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment while sitting beneath a Pipal tree located about 100 kilometres from Patna in the north Indian state of Bihar. The Pipal is therefore considered sacred in most permutations of Buddhism and features regularly in both the art of the subcontinent and that of South East Asia.

Since the fructive potential of the *shalabhanjika* is considered to be in tune with that of the tree itself, the inclusion of fruit or seeds among the leaves held by the figure is an essential convention of the sculptural genre. The seeds of the Pipal are spherical with a raised circular area on the crown where the seed joins the branch, and have the same relative dimensions as those depicted in the *Nature*. Carvings of these distinctive leaves and seeds feature prominently throughout the Amaravati reliefs at the British Museum, providing an excellent set of models that Epstein could have used.

Another element of the *Nature* that links it convincingly with Indian sculptural traditions is the unusual position of the figure's left hand, which is offered palm outward, fingertips pointed straight down. Evidently thrown by the lack of relevant precedent for this signal in European art, Cork again interprets it as deliberate exhibitionism. 'The expansive gesture of her open left hand', he writes, suggests that 'she is brandishing her breasts with an admirable lack of embarrassment'. [48]

[48] Cork, *Art beyond the Gallery* , 19.

In Indian sculpture, however, exactly this hand position is known as *varadamudra*—a standardized gesture signifying giving or abundance. It is almost always performed with the left hand, as Epstein would have been able to note from the very large number of examples at the British Museum. One of these, a cast metal Buddha image presented by the Secretary of State for India in 1905, would have been the newest arrival at the Indian galleries when the sculptor made his first visits. Another—a gilded Sri Lankan bronze of Parvati in her Mahayana

Buddhist aspect as the goddess Tara—possesses very obvious physical similarities to Epstein's *Nature* and *Maternity/Parvati* figures; even today this piece is one of the largest and most eye-catching of all the museum's Indian exhibits (Fig. 15). Such examples of the *varadamudra*—assuredly—are what inspired the enigmatic open left hand of the BMA *Nature.*

The sophisticated way in which Epstein has applied iconographic elements such as *mudras* and symbolic flora to his own work implies a deeper understanding of such matters than could have been obtained from museum-browsing alone, especially as none of London's museums in those days provided the informative labels that now assist visitors. Fortunately, however, Epstein's earliest friendship in London was with a confirmed Indiaphile who maintained a particular interest in the sculpture and architecture of the region. This was the painter and author William Rothenstein, who, H. G. Wells once said, had the power to bring 'India—which has so persistently remained

away there, spectacular, marvelous, inaccessible—into the proximity of a personal acquaintance.' [49]

[49] H. G. Wells, introduction to *Drawings Made in India by William Rothenstein*, exhibition catalogue, the Chenil Gallery, 1911.

By the time he befriended Epstein in 1907, Rothenstein was already planning a tour of the country's great temple cities that would take place three years later. [50]

[50] Rothenstein's description of the meeting has Epstein appearing on his doorstep in 1907 with a letter of introduction from Bernard Shaw. 'Shaw couldn't help him,' the account runs; 'he thought his drawings mad, like burnt furze bushes...but Epstein deemed I would think otherwise, so Shaw sent him to me' (William Rothenstein, *Men and Memories* (London, 1932), 87).

The tour would include such sculpture-rich sites as Ellora, Gwalior, Elephanta, Bhubaneswar, and Puri, as well as the highly inaccessible frescoes of Ajanta in central India. [51]

[51] See my article 'An "Indian Renascence" and the Rise of Transnational Modernism', *Burlington Magazine* (Apr. 2010).

Epstein was not the only soon-to-be Modernist to knock upon Rothenstein's door in 1907, however. 'Another figure appeared who was destined, though no one suspected it then, to stand high among English sculptors,' Rothenstein recalled when he wrote his autobiography. 'This was Eric Gill, who was not yet a sculptor, however, when I got to know him...I was charmed by Gill's blithe temper and we became great friends.' [52]

[52] Rothenstein, *Men and Memories* , 89.

Given the shared interests of the two men and Rothenstein's skill as a social networker, it is reasonable to assume that they were introduced to one another under his roof soon afterwards. Whatever the

Fig. 15. *Tara*, eighth century CE. From Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. Gilt alloy. 143 cm high. *(Author's photograph; sculpture*

is in the British Museum, London)

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circumstances of this first meeting, Gill knew Epstein well enough by the following year to refer to him as a friend, and by late 1910 the two were planning their own tour of India in imitation of Rothenstein's own. [53]

[53] Eric Gill, from his letter defending the BMA sculptures in the *British Medical Journal* , 4 July 1908, quoted in Cork, *Art beyond the Gallery* , 26.

It was a third member of Rothenstein's circle, however, who is most likely to have provided detailed information on Indian art to Gill and Epstein. In a remarkably similar way to Pablo Picasso, Epstein became increasingly reluctant after the First World War to acknowledge extra-European influences in his early work. Consequently, even when such influences may be said unquestionably to exist, there are few overt hints in his autobiographical writings to identify their exact origin. Gill, fortunately, was never one to hold back on such matters. 'I dare not confess myself his disciple; that would only embarrass him,' he wrote in his own autobiography about the Anglo-Ceylonese art historian Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy. 'It is absurd to say that he has influenced me, that would imply that his influence has borne fruit. May it be so—but I do not claim it.' [54]

[54] Eric Gill, *Eric Gill: Autobiography* (London, 1940), 174.

Coomaraswamy's father was a Tamil aristocrat, his mother English; he had been born in Ceylon but had attended school and university in England, graduating from University College London in 1900 with a first in Geology. For his work on mineralogy in Ceylon between 1902 and 1906, the university awarded him a doctorate, but Coomaraswamy's intellectual interests were already beginning to tend in a different direction. By 1906 he was spending as much time researching Ceylonese and Indian art and design as examining rock samples, and spent much of the following year in India taking and collecting photographs of Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu sculpture. [55]

[55] Roger Lipsey: *Coomaraswamy* (3 vols.; Princeton 1977); Jag Mohan, *Ananda K. Coomaraswamy* (New Delhi, 1979).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the fashion across Asia for experimentation with European artistic techniques and concepts of beauty had all but overwhelmed indigenous traditions of art production. Coomaraswamy wondered whether it might be possible to change the direction of this aesthetic tide so that Asian concepts of taste flowed westwards instead; he understood only too well from his time in England, however, that Europe's academies and museums would strongly resist any challenge to the aesthetic hegemony of Greece.

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A reading of Foucher's *L'Art Greco-Bouddhique du Gandhara* made it very clear to Coomaraswamy that museum-trained scholars could not be relied upon to perceive the particular, independent qualities of art from the subcontinent. 'The main difficulty seems to have been that Indian art has been studied so far only by archaeologists,' he wrote, articulating a key realization. 'It is not archaeologists, but artists...who are the best qualified to judge of the significance of works of art considered as art, and to unravel the influences apparent in them.' [56]

[56] A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Influence of Greek on Indian Art* (Broad Campden, 1908), 1.

It was upon artists, then, that he focused his campaign, taking over William Morris's Kelmscott Press for the printing of monographs and pamphlets, [57]

[57] Flyleaf to Coomaraswamy's *The Aims of Indian Art* (Broad Campden, 1908). Coomaraswamy's use of the press is described in S. Durai Raja Singam, 'Portrait of a World Teacher', in *Ananda Coomaraswamy: The Bridge Builder* (Kuala Lumpur, 1977), 7.

and becoming a familiar face at William Rothenstein's home during the same year that Epstein and Gill were also in regular attendance. [58]

[58] Rothenstein recalled later that he had first met Coomaraswamy 'while staying with Ashbee at Campden'. This would have been during Rothenstein's involvement with C. R. Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft, based at Chipping Campden, a venture that was forced into liquidation early in 1907 (Rothenstein, *Men and Memories*, 231).

Coomaraswamy's initial objective was to disentangle Indian art from a European narrative that presented it as nothing more than an obscure and corrupted offshoot of Hellenism. To that effect he decided in 1908 to deliver a paper on the subject to the European Oriental Congress, which was due to gather that year in Copenhagen for its annual meeting in August. It was a brave step; the audience at the convention consisted mainly of the very archaeologists and museum curators with whom Coomaraswamy begged to differ. His presentation, ironically titled 'The Influence of Greek on Indian Art', began by attacking the idea that no figurative sculpture had existed in India before the arrival of Alexander. Doubtless having noted the use of historical sources such as Pausanias in contemporary writings on the Greek tradition, he cited descriptions of figurative sculptures in Vedic texts such as the *Mahabharata* as evidence that such artworks

had existed in India at least five hundred years before the beginning of the Common Era. Such sources showed, Coomaraswamy continued, that Indian sculptors had worked before their contact with the Greeks mainly in hardwoods and precious metals—materials ill equipped to have survived intact the passage of

time or the devastating Islamic invasions of the eleventh to fourteenth centuries. While he admitted the influence of Greek aesthetics on the sculpture of the Gandhara region, this was presented not as the defining moment of Indian art, but as a momentary aesthetic incursion with few lasting effects outside an increase in the popularity of stone as a base material for figure carving. 'So far from foreigners having given India the ideal type of Buddha,' he went on, in a pointed attack on Foucher, 'Gandhara sculptures should perhaps be regarded as the work of late Greeko-Roman [*sic*] craftsmen striving in vain to interpret Indian ideals'. In other words, Greek sculptors, attempting to translate traditional Indian motifs into their own idiom, had badly misunderstood the entire premise of the region's aesthetics. 'Indian art', Coomaraswamy explained, 'is concerned not with the representation of perfect men, but with the intimation of divinity. Its greatest manifestations have, though perhaps not so conspicuously as in Egyptian art, that sense of "Being beyond Appearance", which we miss in Greek representations of beautiful Olympians.' Despite the scholarly composition of the audience at Copenhagen, it was to working artists that Coomaraswamy again directed his final appeal. 'No *artist*', his presentation continued, clearly rebuking his listeners, 'could suppose that the work of the Gandhara School was the real foundation of Indian figure sculpture, or that Indian art could have been founded on such a decadent Greeko-Roman basis'. [59]

[59] A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'The Influence of Greek on Indian Art' (advance copies of a paper read at the Oriental Congress, Copenhagen, Aug. 1908; Broad Campden, 1908), 1–2 (emphasis added in final quotation).

Coomaraswamy certainly began his long friendship with Eric Gill in 1907, and it seems very unlikely that he would not have struck up an acquaintance with Epstein as well during this year of artist-chasing centred around William Rothenstein's house. Gill's close friend and literary executor William Shewring has written in a little-known memoir on the subject that 'it was about 1906' when the future sculptor was introduced to Coomaraswamy. Despite Shewring's caveat that 'it may be that I am a year or two out', he has no hesitation in naming the engineer of the meeting as Rothenstein. [60]

[60] William Shewring, 'Ananda Coomaraswamy and Eric Gill', in S. Durai Raja Singam (ed.), *Ananda Coomaraswamy: Remembering and Remembering Again and Again* (Kuala Lumpur, 1974), 189.

Given that Gill, Epstein, and Coomaraswamy all became friends with the painter in the same year, and that his home generally served as an unofficial nexus point for

Fig. 16. The BMA Headquarters. Detail showing Epstein's figures: five treatments of *Youth. (Photograph courtesy of the British Monuments Record; original sculptures have been destroyed)*

various artists, poets, and scholars, it is entirely reasonable to imagine that Rothenstein shared his drawing room with all three of them on several occasions. By January of 1908, still seven months before the rumpus over Epstein's sculptures for the BMA, Gill was in any case attending Coomaraswamy's lectures on Indian aesthetics. After one of these, held neither at an academic institution nor at a museum but in the more businesslike environment of the Art Workers' Guild in Holborn, [61]

[61] Meetings of the guild had been held at Clifford's Inn and Barnard's Inn in Holborn since 1884; the headquarters of the organization at the time of writing—6 Queen Square, Bloomsbury—was not acquired until 1914 ('The Art Workers' Guild—Information', anonymous leaflet (n.d.), Sackler Library, Oxford), 2).

Gill noted in his diary that Coomaraswamy had presented 'a *most splendid* paper'. [62]

[62] Diaries of Eric Gill, entry for 10 Jan. 1908, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, microfilm copy, Tate Gallery Archive (TAM 70).

The idea that Epstein had access to fairly specialized information about Indian iconography, whether this had come originally from Rothenstein or from Coomaraswamy, helps explain the concluding mystery of the BMA sculptures: the figures of young men that complete the second series (Fig. 16). Cork describes these as 'somewhat narcissistic'

because of their exaggerated postures and apparently coy way of tucking their faces away behind raised arms, before dismissing them as 'a relatively anonymous foil' to the more complex female figures. The fact that Epstein designed not one but six variants on this theme —two for each of the three *Maidenhood* pieces—suggests, however, that a more significant relationship probably exists between the two motifs. Given the extraordinary number of connections between the BMA figures and Indian sculpture, perhaps it comes as no surprise to learn that depictions of men shielding their eyes are regularly to be found in direct association with *yaksa* carvings and other genres of female image, especially at Buddhist sites. B. N. Goswamy describes one such male figure from Mathura in northern India as 'attempting to control his feelings, unable to bear the sight of the dazzling beauty on the pillar'. [63]

[63] Goswamy, *Essence of Indian Art* , 64.

Epstein's male figures, then, are not coyly hiding their faces, but may be read as blocking their own views of the young women in an attempt to maintain emotional detachment. The only male not to be shielding his gaze is shown staring directly at the pregnant *Maternity*/*Parvati*, quite possibly illustrating the biological end result of the attraction so assiduously repressed by his peers (see Fig. 7).

Epstein himself clearly had no intention of maintaining such detachment, for he acquired at some point his own original, eleventh-century carving of a particularly curvaceous Hindu female figure in sandstone from Rajasthan. While the sculptor's unstable financial position during the early London years makes it unlikely that this piece was purchased much before the 1920s, it was clearly one of his most highly cherished acquisitions. A photograph of Epstein taken at his house in 1959 shows that the Indian carving occupied a pedestal in the living room, and the image of the sculptor posing next to the piece suggests that he had selected it deliberately for inclusion in the camera's field of view. [64]

[64] This is the British Museum's *Sandstone Figure of a Hindu Goddess* (Cat. No. OA 1962.4-20.1); probably carved in Rajasthan during the eleventh century. It is not permanently on display, but is kept as a reserve item accessible only through the Asia Department's Students' Room.

Fascinatingly, after Epstein's death in 1959, the figure became a part of the very same British Museum collection that had inspired him to seek new paradigms for his work outside the provincial boundaries of the Greek tradition. Epstein's 1907–8 experiments in iconography and aesthetics do not, however, mark the limit of the innovations suggested

to artists in London by carvings from the subcontinent. The year 1910 would see the same exhibits at the British Museum and the V&A inspire a revolution in materials and techniques that would determine the character and direction of Modernist sculpture in the West in the most fundamental way possible.

3 Haunting the Reading Room

Ezra Pound and the British Museum's Egyptian and Assyrian Collections

Rupert Richard Arrowsmith

The great circular Reading Room at its heart meant that the British Museum was as important to poets and novelists as it was to visual artists in the years leading up to the First World War. Ernest Rhys, one of the poets who used the facility on a daily basis during this period, has described it as 'the most extraordinary club in the world, where one met poets and lunatics, beggars and literary bigwigs'. [1]

[1] Ernest Rhys, *Wales England Wed: An Autobiography* (London, 1940), 194.

Major literary figures to be encountered there after the *fin de siècle* included George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, and William Butler Yeats. 'I spent all my days in the British Museum,' Yeats later recalled of the pre-war years. 'I remember often putting off hour after hour consulting some necessary book because I shrank from lifting the heavy volumes of the catalogue.' [2]

[2] W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London, 1926), 149. Yeats was first admitted to the Reading Room on 29 June 1887 (Reading Room Membership Register for 1887, British Museum Central Archive).

By 1912 there were a thousand volumes of this catalogue arranged around the circular dais occupied by the library superintendent at the centre of the room; these referred to eighty thousand books stored on the open-access shelves lining the inner walls of the Reading Room, and nearly ten million stored in external presses. [3]

[3] R. A. Peddie, *The British Museum Reading Room: A Handbook for Students* (London, 1912), 14.

Reading desks radiated outwards from the superintendent's central hub like the spokes of a wheel, and were able to accommodate about 450 individuals beneath a dome that was second only to that of Rome's Pantheon in diameter, though it was constructed, not from ancient concrete and pumice stone, but from papier-mâché with a thin outer shell of copper to protect it from the

weather. [4]

[4] David M. Wilson, *The British Museum: A History* (London, 2002), 118.

Then, as now, overcrowding at the capital's premier venue for study was a problem. Gertrude Rawlings's 1916 guide speaks acidly of the 'dogs in the manger' who have no legitimate research objectives, and yet who 'monopolise valuable places in the Reading Room of the national library'. 'Quite literally,' she concludes, 'their room is preferable to their company'. [5]

[5] Gertrude Burford Rawlings, *The British Museum Library* (London, 1916), 89–90.

Such conditions ensured that, when Ezra Pound made his first visit to that 'focus of learning' in 1906, application criteria for admission were extremely strict. [6]

[6] Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (London, 1938), 219. A section of this essay provides one of Pound's few commentaries on his 1906 visit to the Reading Room.

'Persons desiring to be admitted to the Reading Room must apply in writing to the Director, specifying their profession or business, their place of abode, and the particular purpose for which they seek admission,' R. A. Peddie's 1912 handbook advises, stipulating also that a character reference should be provided by 'a person of recognized position'. [7]

[7] Peddie, *The British Museum Reading Room*, 9.

Pound, who in 1906 was still registered as a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania, was able to propose 'Lope de Vega / Spanish plays' as his topic of enquiry, which got him temporary admission for a period of one week. [8]

[8] Reading Room Membership Register for 1906, entry for 2 July, British Museum Central Archive.

He had just hot-footed it from Madrid, where he had been researching the same topic at one of the Royal Libraries. By this, Pound doubtless meant the eighteenth-century Royal Public Library established by Philip V rather than those at the Escorial and the Palacio Real, which in those days were for the use of the royal family only. [9]

[9] L. J. McCrank, 'National Library of Spain', in *The International Dictionary of Library Histories* (Chicago, 2001), 231.

The Royal Public Library had, however, been incorporated into Spain's new Biblioteca Nacional in 1896, and it is at this new institution in central Madrid that he would actually have done his reading. Though at that time the library's holdings relating to Lope de Vega remained

unsurpassed in the world, Pound was already feeling the pull of the circular Reading Room, deciding that 'the Brit. Museum' would be a preferable workplace, and leaving for London after just a few days. [10]

[10] Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*, 219.

The facilities at the British Library were undoubtedly more user-friendly than those in Spain, but Pound's decision to relocate was

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probably tied in to a greater extent with changes in his research interests and a keen admiration for the poets of the Reading Room, both living and dead. Just a year before his visit, the British Museum had completed the implementation of an advanced new indexing system consisting of printed entries on easily updatable loose-leaf pages [11]

[11] Rawlings's 1916 guide describes this new system as an experimental 'moveable unit' catalogue. It allowed the Reading Room to reduce the physical size of its catalogue from more than 3,000 handwritten, heavily annotated books to 1,000 printed, loose-leaf volumes that could be updated easily via the substitution of pages. All books acquired by the museum prior to 1881 had been catalogued using the new method by 1900, with arrivals from 1882–9 added by 1905 (Rawlings, *The British Museum Library*, 161–4).

rather than the bound, handwritten volumes still used in Madrid, where much of the collection in any case remained uncatalogued. [12]

[12] Massimo Angel, 'Libraries and Librarianship in Spain', *International Federation of Library Institutions and Associations Journal,* 2 (1993), 131–46.

Perhaps more importantly, Pound's academic interests were already shifting away from Spanish Renaissance literature and towards that of medieval Provence. The British Museum's extensive holdings of books and manuscripts relating to the literature of this region had already heavily informed the works of the Pre-Raphaelite poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. According to his brother, Rossetti had been 'greatly in the habit of haunting the reading room at the British Museum, and there perusing any poetic volumes that caught his fancy'. [13]

[13] William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer* (London, 1889), 162. W. M. Rossetti gives the date as 1848 or 'in and about that year'.

Such poring over medieval material had led to the writing of *The Blessed Damozel*, a piece Pound had rated highly enough a year previously to buy a bound copy for his friend Hilda Doolittle. [14]

[14] Hilda Doolittle, in John Farrar (ed.), *The Cantos of Ezra Pound: Some Testimonies* (New York, 1933), 17.

While he ostensibly joined to study Spanish Renaissance drama, then, most of Pound's initial week at the Reading Room was probably spent perusing his own wish-list of medieval material. As explained to Dorothy Shakespear eight years later when she joined the Reading Room, 'nobody pays the slightest attention to what you do or what books you read'. [15]

[15] Letter to Dorothy, 12 Jan. 1914, reproduced in *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear: Their Letters 1909–1914*, ed. Omar Pound and A. Walton Litz (London, 1985), 297.

The poet's future wife seems to have understood this approach to library membership perfectly, for she replied: 'I say I am studying Symbolism, but...I mean privately to study Ching Chang Chinese!' [16]

[16] Letter from Dorothy, 6 Jan. 1914, reproduced in ibid. 295.

Whether Pound looked at material related to Rossetti during this first visit or not, however, the original

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poet of the Reading Room would return to haunt the first poems he wrote at the museum after an absence of two years.

When Pound returned to London on a more permanent basis in August 1908, he soon became psychologically dependent on the British Museum as a workspace for poetry composition. One of his first acts on reaching the capital was to ask for full membership of the Reading Room, but the Byzantine application procedure ensured that this was not granted—as the membership register shows—until 8 October. [17]

[17] Pound's official subject of study is this time given as 'Latin lyricists of the Renaissance' (Reading Room Membership Register for October 1908, British Museum Central Archive).

Significantly, Pound had been unable to produce any verse in London before his readmission to the 'highly uncomfortable seats' [18]

[18] Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*, 219.

at the core of the museum, but was able to write to his father two days afterwards of having 'put out some new lines'. [19]

[19] Letter to Homer Pound, 11 Oct. 1908, quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (London, 1988), 100.

Several things had happened while he had been away to improve the Reading Room still further as a workspace for writers. Improved electric lighting had been installed during a period of refurbishment that had taken the greater part of the previous year to complete. 'There are now five arc lamps,' Rawlings's guide says, 'a glow-light practically for every two readers, and other glow lights over the catalogue desks and bookshelves'. [20]

[20] Electric light had been installed in the Reading Room in 1879 (the earliest application in Britain of the new technology to a public building), but had been limited to a few bulbs only (Rawlings, *The British Museum Library*, 88).

The papier-mâché dome had changed in colour from sky blue to white and gold in a further attempt to improve ambient lighting. R. A. Peddie's handbook to the Reading Room notes that a supply of ink, plus a penrack and penwiper were also now provided in a recess at the back of every desk, in addition to a blotter and paper-knife on the writing surface itself. [21]

[21] Peddie, *The British Museum Reading Room*, 14.

With such excellent—not to mention free—provision for writers in terms of both equipment and surroundings, it is hardly surprising that so many took advantage of the Reading Room, whether they intended to read anything or not.

By April 1909, when Pound wrote his 'Ballad of the Goodly Fere', the surroundings of the Reading Room had become an indispensable

ingredient in his composition ritual. [22]

[22] The writing of the poem is dated by Pound's letter to his father of Apr. 1909: 'I have this morning written a Ballad of Simon Zelotes...' (quoted in Carpenter, *A Serious Character*, 117). Simon the Zealot is Pound's narrator in 'Ballad of the Goodly Fere'.

'I woke rather late and started for the museum with the first four lines in my head,' he recalled of the 'Ballad' in an early memoir. Pound was at this time living at his first Kensington digs in Langham Street, a considerable distance from the museum. Even to journey by Tube to the British Museum underground stop that then existed on the Central Line would have taken about forty-five minutes. Pound was a strong walker, and would doubtless have preferred to go on foot if the weather had allowed it. [23]

[23] The journalist Arthur F. Thorn has recalled being forced by Pound to walk to Kensington from Chancery Lane on the far side of the museum in 1912. According to Thorn's account, Pound 'used to cover great distances in London...he moved with such long strides that I found it difficult to keep up the pace' (quoted in Patricia Hutchins, *Ezra Pound's Kensington: An Exploration 1885–1913* (London, 1965), 108).

The most direct route from Kensington to Bloomsbury was—and is—to cut across Hyde Park to Mable Arch and then along the length of Oxford Street. Even with the short cut across the park, this would, however, have taken ninety minutes through the drizzle of an English spring. [24]

[24] Patricia Hutchins's guess that Pound walked along Kensington Road to the south of Hyde Park towards Mayfair, where he 'took short cuts through the prosperous districts towards the museum', is extremely unlikely to have been the case. Such a detour adds at least thirty minutes to an already long journey without contributing anything, even in terms of scenery. Pound probably did not use motor buses to travel to the museum. He told Hutchins in a letter of 6 Dec. 1956 that he had not begun using this method of transport 'as a means of exploring London' until 1912 (Hutchins, *Ezra Pound's Kensington*, 49, 94).

Merely that the poet was prepared to make such a journey with the first lines of a new poem held precariously in his memory is a good indicator of the museum's importance as a place to set things down. When Pound finally arrived on that April morning, he 'wrote the rest of the poem at a sitting, on the left side of the reading room, with scarcely any erasures'. [25]

[25] Ezra Pound, 'How I Began', *T.P.'s Weekly* (London), 6 June 1917, p. 707.

In the process he had monopolized desks in a way that would surely have angered Ms Rawlings, as Ernest Rhys, that great chronicler of happenings at the Reading Room, has recorded. 'Once,' Rhys recalls, 'when the Reading Room was very full I saw him sprawled diagonally over two desks littered with books and papers, writing his "Ballad of the Goodly Fere"'. [26]

[26] Rhys, *Wales England Wed* , 196.

It would be several years before Pound began to use extra-European artworks at the British Museum as the inspiration for technical experiments

in his poetry, but he started using motifs derived both directly and indirectly from them almost immediately. That he began with the Assyrian collections is doubtless again the fault of Rossetti, who had come out of the Reading Room [27]

[27] As the circular library was not completed until 1857, Rossetti would technically have written 'And Thus in Nineveh' in the Reading Room's earlier location in the Large Room—a wide space on the ground floor of the museum's North Wing, which is now the Wellcome Gallery.

in 1850 to watch a sixteen-tonne sculpture from Paul-Émile Botta's excavations near Mosul in modern-day Iraq being hauled through the front doors of the museum. [28]

[28] William Michael Rossetti initially claimed that his brother's poem 'The Burden of Nineveh', which features a colossal Assyrian statue, had been drafted in '1851, or at any rate 1852' (*Dante Gabriel Rosetti as Designer and Writer*, 137). However, he confidently revised this vague chronology to 'the autumn of 1850' in a later account (*The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London, 1911), 649). The second date would be more in line with the arrival of the two bull-bodied *shedu*, which were brought to the museum that year after their purchase from the French by the British Resident in Baghdad, Henry Rawlinson. A complicating factor in the dating of the poem and the identification of the actual exhibit seen by Rossetti is the fact that the museum acquired two lion-bodied *shedu* in early 1852 via Layard's excavations ('Reception of Nineveh Sculptures at the British Museum', *London Illustrated News*, 8 Feb. 1852, p. 184). Layard's *shedu*, however, have feline, clawed feet, whereas Rossetti's poem specifically mentions that the carving he examined possessed 'hoofs behind and hoofs before'; this in addition to twice employing the word 'bull' to describe the exhibit. These are two seemingly obvious facts that seem to have been overlooked in George P. Landow's otherwise useful web resource *Victorian Web*, where the poem is illustrated with a photograph of a sculpture with a lion's body. Landow alleges that this clawed figure 'is probably Rossetti's 'winged beast from Nineveh'' in clear contravention of the evidence (www.victorianweb.org/authors/dgr/5.html, 22 May 2007).

The sculpture was of a human-headed winged bull, a guardian spirit known in the Akkadian mythologies of Assyria and Babylon as a *shedu*, which had originally been sited at the entrance to the palace of the emperor Sargon II in the eighth century BCE (Fig. 17). The poet went back into the Reading Room and got Layard's *Nineveh and its Remains*—an account of Austen Henry Layard's slightly later excavations in the same vicinity—from the open-access shelves, where a copy of it had stood since its publication the previous year. [29]

[29] Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains: With an Account of a Visit to the Chaldean Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezidis, or Devil Worshipper, and an Inquiry into the Manners and Arts of the Ancient Assyrians* (London, 1849).

Back at his chair, Rossetti combined Layard's notes on ancient Assyria with his own encounter with the *shedu* to create a poem describing an age when 'the cymbals clashed, the chariot shook, | And there was life in Nineveh'. The poem, entitled 'The Burden of Nineveh', contains a fascinating error, in that Rossetti, who was familiar with academic methods of sculpture, assumes the *Shedu* to have been modelled in clay, mistaking the cuneiform

Fig. 17. *Shedu*, 710–705 BCE (Neo-Assyrian). From the palace of Sargon at Khorsabad, northern Iraq. Alabaster. 4.42 m high. *(British Museum, London)*

writing etched into its flanks for marks left by woven matting wrapped around the piece to protect it 'ere it dried'. 'What song did the brown maidens sing,' the poet wonders, 'From purple mouths alternating, | When that was woven languidly?' Like the Egyptian and many of the Indian sculptures in the museum, however, the *Shedu* was actually carved from a single block of solid alabaster stone; a technical detail whose colossal importance for Modernist sculpture will be explored in the next chapter.

Given Pound's confirmed interest in Rossetti and his similar 'haunting' of the Reading Room, it is hardly surprising that one of the first poems to be composed there was a new meditation on the lost chansons of the exact same Assyrian city. [30]

[30] Humphrey Carpenter has plausibly argued that 'And Thus in Nineveh', 'Marvoil', and 'The White Stag' were the first of Pound's London poems (*A Serious Character*, 100). All three were eventually published as part of Pound's *Personae* volume (London, 1909).

'And here in Nineveh have I beheld | Many a singer pass and take his place,' he wrote, probably late in 1908; 'In those dim halls where no man troubleth | his sleep or song.' Pound would have known about Layard's *Nineveh and its Remains* from a single footnote appended by Rossetti to his own poem on the subject, and would have been able to find the actual first-edition copy of the work that had been used by the Victorian poet on the Reading Room's open-access shelves. Peddie's handbook indicates that this would have been kept among the books on archaeology and ancient languages on the right side of the Reading Room, directly opposite Pound's usual seat. [31]

[31] Books on Art and Archaeology, including writings on Assyriology, were shelf-marked 2031–4 on the right-hand side of the Reading Room. Next to them was the Oriental Languages section, which included cuneiform translations and also Egyptological works on hieroglyphics; these volumes were positioned next to the library entrance (Peddie, *The British Museum Reading Room*, foldout plan of the Reading Room open-access shelves).

As the subtitle to Layard's book suggests, the archaeologist had attempted, in addition to a factual description of the digs themselves, to provide some insight into 'the manners and arts of the ancient Assyrians'. It is likely to have been this more speculative section of the work that caught the attention both of Rossetti and of Pound. In Nineveh, 'wine was drunk immoderately,' Layard explains; 'even the guards were intoxicated'. The narrator of Pound's poem prefers 'to drink of life | As lesser men drink wine', however, and the main thrust of

his deceptively simple Nineveh piece suggests that smaller, less obvious Assyrian exhibits than the museum's hulking *Shedu* had helped to inspire it.

As well as the Assyrian monumental statues and relief carvings that shared the ground-floor sculpture galleries with artworks from Athens, Rome, and Luxor, the museum kept many examples of Mesopotamian written work on permanent exhibition, including everything from popular astrological texts to full-scale poetic epics. These works were inscribed in cuneiform on clay tablets, and constituted the remains of the great libraries created at Nineveh by the Assyrian kings Sennacherib (705–681 BCE) and Ashurbanipal (669–627 BCE)—both of whom had

been avid book collectors. [32]

[32] Layard had unearthed the library of Sennacherib in 1849 in the so-called South West Palace of Nineveh. Ashurbanipal's library was discovered in 1852 by Layard's assistant, Hormuzd Rassam, in another part of the site. Because of problems with the storage and transportation of the clay tablets after their disinterment, the libraries were subsequently mixed together to the point where it is now impossible to identify the origin of any individual piece.

Not only Assyrian literature was represented, for the kings' scribes had produced copies of texts from the region's older civilizations such as those of Ur and Babylon. [33]

[33] Assyriologist George Smith's near contemporary description of the tablets sent back by Layard runs as follows: 'The agents of Ashur-Bani-Pal sought everywhere for inscribed tablets, brought them to Nineveh, and copied them there; thus the literary treasures of Babylon, Borsippa, Cutha, Agane, Ur, Erech, Larsa, Nipur; and various other cities were transferred to the Assyrian capital to enrich the great collection there' (*The Chaldean Account of Genesis* (London, 1872), 28).

During the pre-war years, examples of such texts were shown not in the downstairs galleries but in the Babylonian and Assyrian Room on the Museum's upper floor (Plan 2, Room 32), where no fewer than eight full-sized table cases were given over to their display. [34]

[34] Before the First World War, there were actually ten table cases in Room 32, but the final two—cases I and J—contained Syriac stone-engraved tablets rather than the more ancient clay-inscribed works from Nineveh.(*A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum (Bloomsbury)* , 8th edn. (London, 1908), 49). Only a handful of clay tablets are now displayed at the British Museum.

Placed prominently among these was an example known then as 'The Flood Tablet'—the most famous of all the literary works recovered from Nineveh.

Because of the sheer number of cuneiform texts recovered as a result of Layard's excavations (more than 20,000 fragments had been returned to the museum during the 1850s alone [35]

[35] Most of the tablets arrived between 1854 and 1855, a short time after the *shedu* sculptures (E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Babylonian Story of the Deluge and the Epic of Gilgamesh with an Account of the Royal Library of Nineveh* (London, 1924), 24).

), this piece did not come under scrutiny until 1872. George Smith, the young Assyriologist to whom the tablet was at that time passed for translation, was astonished to find that the text on it represented not only a very early rendition of the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, but also the most ancient version of the biblical deluge myth ever to have been discovered. According to the prominent archaeologist E. A. Wallis Budge, Smith was so excited by this that he ran around the room shouting things, then 'began to undress himself'. [36]

[36] E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Rise and Progress of Assyriology* (London, 1925), 166.

Smith's translation was published the same year under the title *The Chaldean Account of Genesis* , [37]

[37] Smith, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis* .

and a copy was kept on the open-access shelves of the Reading Room amid other translations

of the Gilgamesh story until it was relocated to the new British Library building in 1993. Humanity, this particular version of the great-flood story runs, had so irritated the gods with its noise that a sudden inundation was arranged as punishment—an act that unexpectedly wiped out the entire species apart from one man. Upon visiting the land of the dead in a much later epoch, the text continues, the hero Gilgamesh discovered that this very flood survivor, who went by the name of Ut Napishtim, had been granted immortality by the gods and left to preside over the underworld. We may be entirely certain that Pound knew this obscure episode of Mesopotamian literature in some detail, for he specifically mentions the name of George Smith's custodian of the departed in the course of a 1915 essay on Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. [38]

[38] Two years after Rossetti's death in 1882, Leonidas Le Cenci Hamilton published an epic poem based on existing Gilgamesh material kept at the British

Museum Reading Room, where he also composed his own poetry. However, *Ishtar and Izdubar* , which follows Smith's initial translation in using the transcription 'Izdubar' to refer to Gilgamesh, totally omits the Ut Napishtim episode and so cannot be considered the main source for Pound's knowledge of the Mesopotamian poem (Leonidas Le Cenci Hamilton, *Ishtar and Izdubar* (London and New York, 1884), reprinted in R. F. Harper (ed.), *Babylonian and Assyrian Literature* (New York, 1901), 3–156.

Describing the cessation of aesthetic instincts that he believed occurred in Englishmen upon reaching middle age, Pound here remarks, 'you look sadly back over the gulf, as Ut Napishtim looked back at the souls of the dead, the live man is no longer with you'. [39]

[39] 'Affirmations: Gaudier Brzeska', *New Age*, 4 Feb. 1915, pp. 409–11, reprinted in *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts* , ed. Harriet Zinnes (New York, 1980), 30.

It is a better-known chapter of the Gilgamesh legend, however, that helps elucidate Pound's own literary excursion to Mesopotamia. The final episode of the epic concerns the protagonist's funeral, wherein the widespread regional custom of 'death-following' meant the king's still-living courtiers, wives, and entertainers had to be entombed alongside his corpse. Though this practice was not fully understood until Leonard Woolley's discovery of the 'great death pit' (technically known as Site PG 789) at the ruins of Ur during the 1920s, earlier commentators on the Gilgamesh legend had been aware of its existence via other Mesopotamian inscriptions. It is hardly surprising that Pound's 'And thus in Nineveh' has received virtually no attention whatsoever from the critics, for the lines quoted earlier in this discussion seem at first glance to be a somewhat hackneyed allusion to life's general brevity. However, when the reader notes that 'the custom is full old' and considers for a second time that 'here in Nineveh' the poet has 'beheld | Many a singer pass and

take his place | In those dim halls where no man troubleth| His sleep or song', a clear resonance with 'death-following' is difficult to dismiss. Pound's speaker in the poem directs his remarks, not to Gilgamesh, but to Raama, whom the Old Testament presents as a royal son of Cush, the biblical founder of the city. [40]

[40] Genesis 10:7.

This additional detail not only demonstrates Pound's awareness of the pre-Assyrian nature of his material, but also confirms that the verses are addressed to a dead king—perhaps the same king with whom the poem's narrator will enter the grave later that day, 'Ere the night slay light | With her blue sword.'

If 'And thus in Nineveh' had been inspired by the Assyriological writings on the open-access shelves of the Reading Room combined with casual browsing of the Mesopotamian exhibits in the Museum's upper-floor galleries, Pound's next meditation on tombs owes its theme and imagery still more obviously to materials discovered by the poet at the same two locations. The differences between the earlier poem and the later in terms of narrator also tend to signal an alteration in Pound's poetic loyalties over the intervening years. Whereas the Assyrian piece offers a glimpse into a deliberately exoticized Near Eastern milieu reminiscent of the 'Orientalist' paintings produced by Rossetti's contemporary Holman Hunt and others, Pound's 1912 poem 'The Tomb at Akr Caar' occupies itself rather with a consideration of life *after* death as it was understood by the Egyptians. The narrator of the verses speaks not shortly before the descent towards the grave—as in 'And thus in Nineveh'—but beyond it, amid the 'jagged dark' of the sealed tomb's interior.

Pound's interest in Egyptian funerary practices would have been encouraged during 1911 and 1912 by a deepening involvement with the circle of W. B. Yeats, whose Monday-evening meetings at Woburn Buildings near the British Museum he regularly attended during those years. Going to these gatherings would have involved dealings with occultists such as the prominent Theosophist G. R. S. Mead; the actress and former head of the esoteric Golden Dawn society Florence Farr; and Olivia Shakespear, author on mysticism and the mother of Pound's future wife. All were fascinated by Egyptian spirituality, especially with regard to conceptions of the soul. Mead's *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in Western Tradition*, published in 1919, would summarize his research into Ptolemaic, Alexandrian concepts of the human spirit. In this analysis, this 'subtle body' was seen as unitary, and attached to the material body during

life by a 'silver cord'. [41]

[41] G. R. S. Mead, *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in Western Tradition* (London, 1919).

Farr was more interested in pre-Hellenistic approaches to the same topic, and in 1890 co-authored two plays with Olivia Shakespear, which both make use of concepts derived from the Pharaonic Period. One of these, *The Shrine of the Golden Hawk* , includes an episode where the lead character, Nectoris, encounters and speaks with her own subtle body. This appears on the character list as 'The Ka'—a completely separate character to be played by a different actress. 'She is the double or other self of Nectoris,' Farr and Shakespear's character list explains: 'the Ka is frequently represented on ancient frescoes as a smaller figure walking behind the king or queen. It represents the subtle body, and supports and strengthens the more material body.' [42]

[42] Florence Farr and Olivia Shakespear, *The Beloved of Hathor* and *The Shrine of the Golden Hawk* (London, 1900), 4.

Pound chose the name Nikoptis for the character in his own piece, and the poem's insights into the nature of the Egyptian soul have obvious connections with those articulated in *The Shrine of the Golden Hawk* .

Despite its connections with occultist writings of the time, however, Pound's own characterization of the Egyptian afterlife owes more to scholarly works on the subject that were readily available from the Reading Room at the British Museum, and to direct examination of related exhibits in the nearby galleries. In contrast to Mead's image of the subtle body linked to the material by a cord, or the conversation between the soul and the corporeal self described by Farr and Shakespear, Pound presents a situation where an individual's intangible components are radically alienated from their erstwhile physical shell. 'I am thy soul, Nikoptis,' a disembodied voice reminds its unresponsive former host. 'I have watched | These five millennia, and thy dead eyes | Moved not, nor ever answer my desire.' Upstairs at the pre-war British Museum, hanging on the wall of a gallery containing mummies and mummy-cases, [43]

[43] This was the Second Egyptian Room (Plan 2, Room 29).(*A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum* , 45).

was a large-scale copy of an Egyptian painting that provides a startling visual correlate to Pound's lines (Fig. 18). This image, labelled 'the soul visiting the body' according to the 1908 guidebook, depicted a delicate winged figure hovering over its mummified material remains. It had been enlarged from an illustration on the most famous and valuable Egyptian manuscript in the museum, a version of the Egyptian Book of the Dead known as 'The Papyrus of

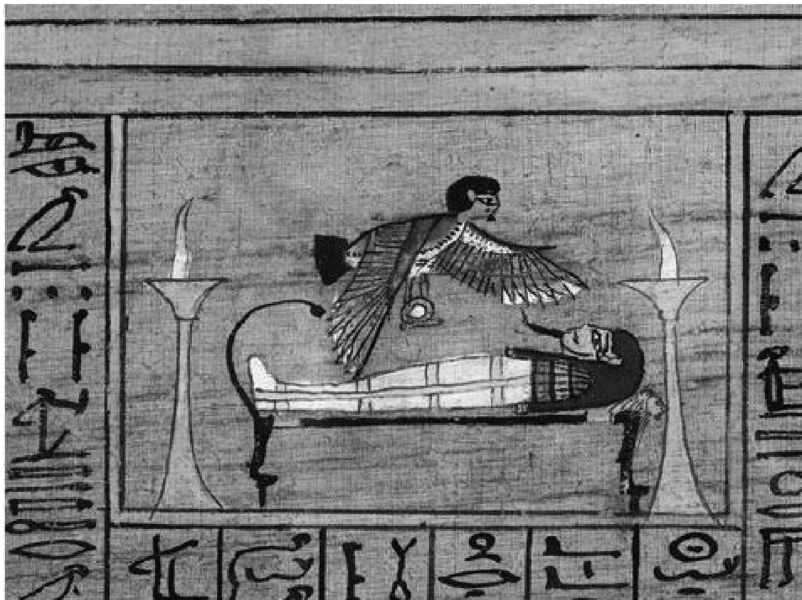

Fig. 18. 'The Papyrus of Ani' (detail showing the *ba* hovering above the body of the deceased), *c.*1275 BCE (Nineteenth Dynasty). From Thebes, Egypt. Mixed media on papyrus. *(British Museum, London)*

Ani' after its dedicatee, a notable scribe of the Eighteenth or Nineteenth Dynasty. [44]

[44] 'The Papyrus of Ani' is a version of the generic Egyptian funerary text known as 'The Book of the Dead'. Early versions of this narrative feature in the 'pyramid texts' of Egypt's Old Kingdom, with more involved versions committed to papyrus during the Middle and New Kingdoms. The British Museum holds three slightly different papyrus versions, with 'The Papyrus of Ani' representing the most coherent and thoroughgoing account. This version was completed during either the Eighteenth or Nineteenth Dynasties for the funeral of an influential scribe—the Ani of the title. E. A. Wallis Budge's *fin de siècle* discussion of the papyrus estimates that it was created during the Eighteenth Dynasty 'between 1500 and 1400 years B.C.' (*The Book of the Dead—The Papyrus of Ani in the British Museum: The Egyptian Text with Interlinear Transliteration and Translation, Introduction, etc.* (London, 1895), introduction, p. cxlvi), while Raymond O. Faulkner's more recent discussion prefers the Nineteenth Dynasty around 1250 BC (in Carol Andrews (ed.), and Raymond O. Faulkner (trans.), *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (rev. edn., London, 1985), 43–50).

Though this item's fragility prevented its public exhibition, Pound would have been able to examine a full-colour facsimile displayed

in two frames, which in those days ran along the wall of the adjoining gallery. [45]

[45] The Third Egyptian Room (Plan 2, Room 30) contained 'a coloured fac-simile of the illustrated Papyrus of Ani' held in two frames (*A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum*, 46).

In the papyrus, the winged figure and its former body seem boxed in by hieroglyphic texts, calling to mind the claim of Pound's 'soul' persona to 'have read out the gold upon the wall, | And wearied out my thought upon the signs'. Pound had certainly researched Egyptian written characters himself around this time, for he was able not long afterwards to direct Dorothy Shakespear towards 'those Egyptian language books' in her mother's library. [46]

[46] Letter to Dorothy, 14 Jan. 1914, reproduced in *Letters*, ed. Pound and Litz, 302.

He would not have needed, however, to read the text in the original. A lavish volume by E. A. Wallis Budge containing printed reproductions of the hieroglyphics with a side-by-side English translation and an essay on the meaning of the text was available from the same open-access shelves on the right-hand side of the Reading Room that held Austen Henry Layard's and George Smith's books on Assyriology. In addition to his own work with the museum's Assyrian tablets, Budge was in charge of the museum's Egyptian holdings, and was considered Britain's premier authority on the ancient culture of that region. [47]

[47] This volume is currently held offsite by the new British Library—shelfmark OP-BM 111 DSC.

Pound certainly kept an eye on the shelves containing Egyptological writings, where works by museum curators appeared as soon as they had been published, owing to the Reading Room's status as a legal deposit library; a few years later he was able to tell John Quinn that Wallis Budge's contemporary, W. M. Flinders Petrie, had 'just brought out a book on Egyptian sculpture that you will want'. [48]

[48] Letter to John Quinn, 26 Aug. 1916, John Quinn Memorial Collection, New York Public Library, reproduced in *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts* , ed. Zinnes, 241.

It is unlikely, then, that Pound would have ignored the 'Papyrus of Ani' translation, which is even now considered one of the most important of the museum's historic publications. The poet may even have browsed through it on his original excursion to the Reading Room in 1906. The 'Note Precedent' to 'La Fraisne' (the opening poem of *A Lume Spento*, written in Venice during 1908) makes direct reference to the Egyptian Book of the Dead in its

generic form, and 'The Papyrus of Ani' was at that time recognized as by far the most complete extant version of such material. [49]

[49] Pound explains rather tortuously in this note that he had felt 'myself divided between myself corporal and a self aetherial "a dweller by streams and in woodland", eternal because simple in elements "*Aeternus quia simplex naturae*" Being freed of the weight of a soul "capable of salvation or damnation", a grievous striving thing that after much straining was mercifully taken from me; as had one passed saying as one in the Book of the Dead, "I, lo, I, am the assembler of souls", and had taken it with him, leaving me thus *simplex naturae*, even so at peace and transient as the wood pool I made it' ('Note Precedent to "La Fraisne"', reprinted in *Collected Early Poems* , ed. M. J. King (London, 1977), 8).

What is proposed in all versions of the Egyptian Book of the Dead is that a deceased individual's separate physical and spiritual components should be ritualistically maintained in order that they might achieve a species of recombination in the hereafter. In Pound's 'The Tomb at Akr Caar', however, at least one of these vital components appears to be missing. There is in the lines already quoted a sense that the statuesque, material body and the flowing, ethereal 'soul' do not make up the full complement of the living man, for the personality of the original being is absent. The papyrus would have explained to Pound that, for the Egyptians, the soul/body division was far more complex than the straightforward dualism assumed in Farr and Shakespear's play. Aside from an individual's physical shell, the Egyptian texts posit several intangible 'components' aside from the *ka* that interlock to create a complete unit. The *ka* is one of the most significant of these, but it is not considered an equivalent to the 'soul' or 'subtle body' but rather represents a being's 'abstract individuality or personality endowed with all his characteristic attributes'. [50]

[50] Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead* , introduction, p. xlii.

Wallis Budge's additional observation that 'the *ka* dwelt in the man's statue just as the *ka* of the god inhabited the statue of the god' gives further evidence that Pound had read the Egyptologist's work. 'It is for my Ka,' he wrote to Dorothy Shakespear two years later, attempting to explain the significance of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's directly carved *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound* . [51]

[51] Letter to Dorothy, 8 Mar. 1914, reproduced in *Letters*, ed. Pound and Litz, 315.

'The Papyrus of Ani' particularizes several other intangible aspects of the living being, including the *khaibit*, representing an individual's shadow, both literal and metaphorical; the *khu*, which is a 'shining and translucent casing or covering of the body'; and the *sekhem*, which

Wallis Budge admits that he is completely at a loss to explain. [52]

[52] ‘It is very difficult to find any expression which will represent the Egyptian conception of the *Sekhem*’ (Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead* , introduction, pp. lxii–lxx).

The most important component of all, however, is the *ba*. Significantly for our interpretation of Pound's poem, the Egyptologist makes clear that it is this component and not the *ka* that ‘has always been translated by [the word] “soul”’ because of its ‘exceedingly refined and ethereal’ nature. It is surely the *ba* of the deceased—which once ‘leapt aflame’ through the now immobile limbs of the entombed body —that Pound chooses as his narrator. ‘The funeral offerings of meat, cakes, ale, wine, unguents, etc., were intended for the *ka*,’ Wallis Budge continues, and thus we read that the soul who narrates Pound's poem has not touched these, but has ‘left the jars sealed, | Lest thou should wake and whimper for thy wine.’ Pound would have seen an actual set of exactly the containers described here, again in the upper-floor galleries of the British Museum. Occupying seventeen wall cases in the Fourth Egyptian Room (Plan 2, Room 31) was ‘a beautiful collection of vases, bowls, saucers, and other vessels, which were placed in the tombs to hold wine, oil, honey, sweetmeats, perfumes, and cosmetics for the dead.’ ‘Some are very ancient,’ the official guidebook observes of these; ‘the contents of some of them, when found, were still in a liquid condition’. [53]

[53] *A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum* , 47.

The reasons for such careful provisioning of the tomb are made clear by Wallis Budge. If not properly attended both by the *ba* and by the being's surviving relatives, ‘it seems as though the *ka* must have perished,’ the curator concludes his introduction to the ‘Papyrus of Ani’. This is evidently what has come to pass in Pound's poem, which describes a forlorn attempt at interaction between dead matter and inchoate spirit in the absence of a personality principle that could have unified the remaining, alienated components. Such non-physical elements of a deceased being, when ‘gathered together into a form which resembled him exactly’, are known collectively as that being's *Osiris*, Wallis Budge notes elsewhere in his commentary. The familiar legend of Isis ‘gathering the fragments of Osiris's body’—which the curator gives here in its entirety—is thus regarded as a metaphor for just such a mustering of scattered spiritual essences as has been frustrated in ‘The Tomb at Akr Caar’. [54]

[54] Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead* , introduction, p. lxx (note 2), and p. li.

Pound's use of precisely this legend as the central metaphor of his article series ‘I Gather the Limbs

of Osiris’—written contemporaneously with the ‘Akr Caar’ poem—suggests again that ‘The Papyrus of Ani’ may well have informed both. [55]

[55] The series ‘I Gather the Limbs of Osiris’ ran in the *New Age* from volume 10, issue 5 (30 Nov. 1911) to issue 13 (25 Jan 1912), and from issue 15 (8 Feb. 1912) to issue 18 (29 Feb. 1912). The series was mainly concerned with Pound's attempts to resurrect the *corpus poetarum* (*New Age* , 10/6, 7 Dec. 1911, p. 131).

Certain generalizations, then, may be made about the relationship between the British Museum and Pound's verse between 1908 and the first part of 1912. Clearly the association of the Reading Room with the Pre-Raphaelites, W. B. Yeats, and other poets admired by Pound had been one of the leading attractions of the library as a place of composition. The esoteric nature of many of the open-access materials on the library shelves, however, and the fact that a large percentage of these volumes were directly associated with the museum's archaeological collections, began very gradually to expand the poet's interests away from his initial research into Spanish drama and Troubadour poetry until they began to include cultural material originating from outside Europe. However convincing we find the parallels between Rossetti's poem on the museum's Assyrian sculptures and Pound's ‘And thus in Nineveh’, or between Wallis Budge's translation of ‘The Papyrus of Ani’ and Pound's ‘The Tomb at Akr Caar’, though, there are few direct connections to be made between particular objects on display at the museum and the imagery and poetic techniques used in creating such works. The poet seems, if anything, to have been more interested in written commentaries on exhibits at the museum than he was in learning directly from the items themselves. Just as we have noted with regard to Jacob Epstein’s early work in London, it would take time for Pound to engage more meaningfully with artworks that would have seemed alien and perhaps irrelevant to the aesthetic norms of European literary culture as they were then understood. It would be the autumn of 1912 before exactly such artworks would inspire Pound to propose a revolution in poetic technique comparable to the sculptor's adoption of direct carving in its impact on the future character of Modernism.

Gill, Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska, and the Direct Carving Revolution

Rupert Richard Arrowsmith

In the years following the First World War, the most obvious single characteristic of high Modernist sculpture in Britain would be an almost dogmatic emphasis on direct carving as the only technique worthy of the artist's consideration. The careers of Henry Moore, Frank Dobson, Barbara Hepworth, and John Skeaping were all defined by an engagement with various approaches to stone-cutting, with eschewal of Greek-style modelling in clay a virtual article of faith. In the cases of the first two sculptors, the British Museum provided excellent technical examples to be assessed and learned from, leading to eclectic styles of carving with no single identifiable point of cultural origin. 'In my formative years 9/10 of my understanding and learning about sculpture came from the British Museum,' Moore reflected at the height of his career. [1]

[1] Henry Moore, *Henry Moore at the British Museum* (London, 1981), 7.

Dobson concurred, adding in 1930 that 'it is possible for the curious to make research into the products of all the sculptors since the beginning of man, and it seems to me that this is largely responsible for what we call modern sculpture'. [2]

[2] Frank Dobson, untitled letter, *Architectural Association Journal* , 45/518, 24 Mar. 1930, p. 358.

For pre-war artists such as Jacob Epstein, Eric Gill, and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, however, the route towards this global view of sculpture from the narrow and provincial European standpoint offered by the academies of Paris and London was a hazardous one filled with doubt, failed experiments, and frequent retreats into more familiar artistic styles.

The four-year development of Epstein's now famous sculpture for the tomb of Oscar Wilde, with all its visions, revisions, and abandonments,

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illustrates the gestation of such key Modernist imperatives very effectively. The Wilde project oversaw not only Epstein's adoption of direct carving with the assistance of Eric Gill and the expansion of his interest in extra-European sculpture to include Assyrian and Egyptian as well as Indian work, but also the emergence of Gill as an important sculptor in his own right. An encounter with the final design settled upon by Epstein prompted Gaudier-Brzeska to recant his allegiance to classical Greek modelling and to Rodin, and sent him into the more obscure areas of the British Museum in search of inspiration for his own carvings in stone. Finally, as Chapter 7 will show, the Wilde monument provided the young philosopher T. E. Hulme with an aesthetic epiphany that would revolutionize his thinking about aesthetics, ethics, and the political direction of European society.

The commission for the tomb was awarded by Wilde's friend and literary executor Robert Ross in the wake of the rumpus over the BMA figures, and Epstein's initial sketches for the new project suggest a desire on the part of the sculptor to withdraw back into a more conservative artistic idiom. [3]

[3] Epstein's autobiography has the following: 'I heard of the commission to do the tomb of Oscar Wilde the day after it had been announced at a dinner given to Robert Ross by his friends at the Ritz' (*Let there be Sculpture: An Autobiography* (London, 1940), 65). The dinner took place on 1 Dec. 1908.

Such feelings would have been reinforced by the controversy that still clung to the reputation of Wilde himself, and by the widely differing opinions in society at large about how—or indeed whether—he should be commemorated. Epstein later told the dance critic Arnold Haskell that the production of these initial designs had been 'an exceedingly difficult task from the point of view of pleasing people'. Wilde's detractors in the popular press considered the poet 'wholly repellent, deserving of no monument', while his 'enthusiastic admirers' suggested a sculpture of 'a Greek youth standing by a broken column'. [4]

[4] Jacob Epstein, in Arnold L. Haskell, *The Sculptor Speaks: Jacob Epstein to Arnold L. Haskell—a Series of Conversations on Art* (London, 1931), 19.

The earliest of Epstein's sketches for the project features two variations on this rather predictable motif. The first places a classically inspired figure on either side of a stylized pillar, while the second features the base of a fluted Ionic column with a robed figure leaning on it in an attitude of grief. 'Anything original was certain to give offence of some kind,' [5]

[5] Ibid. 20.

Epstein later observed of the commission, and

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in this initial proposal there was nothing to provoke either the pro- or the anti-Wilde camp, or even the anti-Epstein camp.

The two designs that followed attempted to reprise the Havard Thomas method of naturalistic sculpture that Epstein had previously employed for the *Girl with a Dove*, while retaining the overall Greek approach to aesthetics demanded by Ross and his friends. These were the black wax *Narcissus* that was described in detail in Chapter 1, and another study that has come to be known as the *Garden Statue*—actually a stylized portrait of the model Nina 'Euphemia' Lamb. [6]

[6] Nina Forrest, wife of the painter Henry Lamb, was nicknamed 'Euphemia' because of her perceived resemblance to Mantegna's painting *St Euphemia*, now in the Capodimonte national museum in Naples.

Properly speaking, this latter work was not created for the Wilde tomb but for an outstanding commission that pre-dated it, but Epstein worked on it side by side with the black wax *Narcissus*, and it provides a further indication of his technical and aesthetic preoccupations between 1909 and early 1910. We might recall Charles Holden noting immediately that the *Narcissus* looked a lot like Havard Thomas's *Lycidas*, and it must have been the close, objective treatment of the model's body in addition to the piece's unusual construction material that brought him to this conclusion. 'After so much that was large and elemental,' Epstein later wrote of his technical methods in the creation of these post-BMA works, 'I had the desire to train myself in a more intensive method of working...I began a series of studies from the model, which were as exact as I could make them. I worked with great care, and followed the forms of the model by quarter inches.' [7]

[7] Epstein, *Let there be Sculpture*, 56.

This is a very obvious reference to the precise measurement techniques Epstein had learned from Thomas a few years before, but there is something subjective, perhaps mythic, in the enigmatic arm gestures and facial expressions of both the new figures. The surface detail and lower-body posture of the *Narcissus* are virtually identical to those of *Lycidas*, but the unusual flowing appearance of the figure's hair, which also appears in the diaphanous dress of the *Garden Statue*, is something that Thomas would never have introduced into one of his own, pointedly naturalistic projects. The older sculptor had opposed the contemporary use of such stylization on the grounds that 'the real is only real when the whole is real'. [8]

[8] James Havard Thomas, unpublished manuscript of a speech, Box XVIII, Uncatalogued Archive No. TGA924, Tate Gallery Archive.

Despite such inconsistencies, however, it was almost certainly Havard Thomas

who recommended to Epstein the British Museum exhibits that seem to have suggested these developments in the two sculptures.

George Clausen, an academic painter and a close friend of Havard Thomas, recalls in an unpublished memoir that the sculptor enjoyed frequent visits to Greek collections around London, and was particularly interested in 'the Nereid Monument in the British Museum'. [9]

[9] George Clausen, unpublished, handwritten note about Havard Thomas addressed to Ashley Gibson, 11 Nov. 1924, Uncatalogued Archive No. TGA924, Tate Gallery Archive.

This display—a selection of columns, friezes, and figure sculptures taken from a Lykian structure at Xanthos in what is now Turkey—occupied Room 21 of the ground-floor layout. The position of the sculptures, which formed part of the 'layer' immediately beneath that of the Elgin Marbles in the carefully arranged hierarchy of the West Wing, reflected the fact that they had been produced according to Hellenistic tastes and were therefore to be considered somewhat decadent in the academic view. The Nereid figures themselves represent sea nymphs, or perhaps the embodiment of sea breezes, their most obvious aesthetic innovation being—in the words of the 1908 official guidebook—'the treatment of the draperies, and the clearer suggestion of the forms of the limbs under them'. [10]

[10] *A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum (Bloomsbury)* (London, 1908), 17.

The jarring contrast perceived by critic Richard Buckle between the 'Greek treatment of rippling drapery' in Epstein's *Garden Statue* and 'Euphemia's clinging dress' is easily resolved when the revealing chitons of the Nereids are examined, particularly when it is realized that all the original sketches for Epstein's work were taken with Mrs Lamb posing nude.

Epstein seems, then, to have combined life drawings made in the careful, systematic manner of Havard Thomas with the aesthetics of a monument made more than two thousand years previously to produce an extraordinary hybrid of ancient and contemporary references. He had clearly been fascinated in particular by the way the diaphanous material of the chiton clings to the legs of the Neried, for in the preparatory clay study for the sculpture the separate surfaces of cloth in Euphemia's skirt close in behind her calves to form a wavy triangle of material—just as is the case with the Lykian figures. By the time of the final, marble version, Epstein's attention seems to have shifted to the rippling effect of the Nereids' chitons as they are disturbed by a light sea

wind, as the surface of Euphemia's dress now finds itself decorated with a series of parallel ruffles that partly obscure the bodily details beneath. While the finished *Garden Statue* was dutifully passed in 1910 to its sponsor Lady Ottoline Morell, however, the *Narcissus* was destroyed by Epstein to make way for a much more radical conception of the Wilde monument.

Though Epstein felt obliged to employ recognizably Greek, or at least European, forms in his initial designs for the Wilde tomb, his other work during the second half of 1910 and the early months of 1911 shows a continued engagement with work from India, and it was this engagement that finally led him to the idea of discarding academic modelling techniques completely and carving the monument directly in stone. The above developments occurred precisely during the period when the sculptor was making regular visits to the Indian galleries at the British Museum and the V&A in the company of Eric Gill, and it is no coincidence that this most intense period of friendship between the two men went hand in hand with Epstein's awakening to the possibilities of direct carving. In 1910 Gill was not yet renowned as a sculptor, but rather as a letter-cutter for public monuments whom Epstein would even call in to inscribe the base of the Wilde tomb when it was complete. Whereas Epstein's fascination for Indian stone sculpture during the creation of the BMA figures was based on aesthetics and iconography, then, Gill would primarily have been interested in the carving skills used in their production. He would say as much a short time later in an essay written for Ananda Coomaraswamy, who began in 1912 to publish his large collection of photographs of Indian sculpture as the periodical *Visvakarma*—a picture resource that Coomaraswamy characteristically intended ‘for those who are interested *as artists* in Indian art’ rather than for academics. [11]

[11] A. K. Coomaraswamy, Editorial Note to *Visvakarma*, part VIII (July 1914).

Indian temple sculptors had ‘avoided the [clay] model but carved that which they loved and as they loved it’, Gill notes in the piece, which focuses almost entirely upon technique. ‘They were clear, clean and hard about everything from the beginning to the end.’ [12]

[12] Eric Gill, Introduction to *Visvakarma*, part VIII (July 1914), 7.

As Gill's diaries and his letters to William Rothenstein show, the summer and autumn of 1910 were spent making ambitious plans with Epstein to construct a full-scale temple complex of their own, to be decorated with carvings inspired specifically by Indian technical and

aesthetic approaches. Gill was by this time living in the Sussex village of Ditchling, and the temple was to be constructed in the grounds of the nearby Asham House. Gill visited the site with Epstein on 14 and 27 September, writing to Rothenstein two days before the second visit that ‘Epstein and I have got the idea of doing some colossal figures together, a sort of twentieth-century Stonehenge’. [13]

[13] Gill diaries, entries for 14 and 27 Sept. 1910, Bancroft Library MSS Division, UC (Berkeley).

His diaries show that the two had been to the actual Stonehenge a short time previously, but how could the unadorned megaliths there have provided the inspiration for figure sculpture? Rothenstein's previously unpublished reply to Gill's letter makes the real precedent for the temple project very clear. ‘I doubt whether you have ever conceived what rock sculpture is; that it should have existed in India centuries ago in order to inspire you both was quite obviously preordained & foreseen,’ he wrote to Gill in November; ‘even if you see photography, you only look at the bits of rock which have been carved by men, you don't see the marriage between nature and man's handiwork which is solemnized perpetually, with the birds as choir and bats as pew holders, and an occasional tourist looking in at the door as a witness’.

Rothenstein was, of course, in India by this time on his six-month tour of exactly the kinds of site Gill and Rothenstein hoped to emulate, and his letter goes straight on to describe the Jain reliefs cut into the cliffside below Gwalior Fort in Rajasthan. These reliefs show *Tirthankaras*, the Jain equivalents of Buddhist *Bodhisattvas*—enlightened beings who have elected to remain in physical form in order to advise others rather than embracing *nirvana*. The figures are meditating in the standing position, as is the Jain preference, and their lack of clothing marks them out as members of the *Digambara*, or ‘air-clad’, sect. ‘I should like to have had you with me,’ Rothenstein writes to Gill and Epstein, ‘where the whole blooming sides of a rock fortress several miles large have been carved widely and robustly with archaistic figures of naked Gods & Goddesses...I really think you had better come here, if only for a month. It seems to me the one place a sculptor should come to.’ [14]

[14] Rothenstein to Gill, 26 Nov. 1910, uncatalogued, Tate Gallery Archive.

Gill's reply to the letter is enthusiastic, mentioning that he and Epstein had been studying photographs of Indian temples. ‘We have also had pictures of the carvings at Gwalior that you wrote about,’ it continues; ‘some day we will follow in your footsteps and go and see the

real things’. [15]

[15] Gill to Rothenstein, 20 Apr. 1911, reprinted in *The Letters of Eric Gill* , ed. Walter Shewring (London, 1947), 36–7.

Those photographs of the Jain *Tirthankaras* at Gwalior would soon have a very profound effect on both Gill's and Epstein's approaches to representing the human form.

The photographs themselves had most likely come from the large collection that Ananda Coomaraswamy had amassed during his travels around India, and some of Epstein's and Gill's subsequent work suggests that he had also shown them pictures of the subcontinent's erotic art. Coomaraswamy was a regular visitor to the temple of the Hindu sun god Surya at Konark, a thirteenth-century complex on the Bengal coast renowned for its carvings illustrating Tantra. This is a cult within Hinduism that relies upon the performance of formalized sexual acts as an ecstatic short cut to spiritual enlightenment. Coomaraswamy would take William Rothenstein down to Konark from Calcutta in February of 1911, not long before the painter's return to Europe. [16]

[16] See Rothenstein's letters from Puri to his wife Alice, Feb. 1911, Tate Gallery Archive.

The rest of London had to wait until 1913 for a reasonably accurate insight into the principles behind such artworks via Sir J. G. Woodroffe's controversial *Tantra of the Great Liberation* , but their implied sexual licence was doubtless interpreted on a personal basis by Epstein and also by Gill. Coomaraswamy himself would have been of little assistance in this regard, as he preferred to gloss over the carnal implications of much Indian sculpture, suggesting that it was there only ‘to suggest the eternal and inexpressible infinities in terms of sensuous beauty’. [17]

[17] ‘India is wont to suggest the eternal and inexpressible infinities in terms of sensuous beauty. The love of man for woman or for nature are one with his love for God. Nothing is common or unclean’ (Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Aims of Indian Art* (Broad Campden, 1908), 10).

Art historian Partha Mitter has criticized exactly such statements as typifying the European prudishness with regard to Indian art that he sees as having persisted for the greater part of the twentieth century. ‘In fact,’ Mitter notes, ‘this is belied by numerous religious hymns which graphically describe the physical beauty of the goddesses’. [18]

[18] Partha Mitter, *Indian Art* (Oxford and New York, 2001), 76.

Such considerations were quite irrelevant to Epstein, whose Asham drawing *One of the Hundred Pillars of the Secret Temple* shows such striking resemblances both in form and content to the erotic works to be seen at Konark that its derivation from them must be assumed rather than conjectured

Fig. 19. ***One of the Hundred Pillars of the Secret Temple*****, by Jacob Epstein, 1910–11. Pencil on paper. 42 × 25.5 cm.** ***(Private collection, London)***

(Fig. 19). A contemporaneous sculpture by Gill that he later titled *They*—but whose content is represented in his diary merely by the word 'fucking'—is likely to have been similarly inspired, while a later drawing by Epstein, *Totem*, gives further evidence of a close familiarity with Tantric art forms. [19]

[19] Gill diaries, entry for Sunday, 1 Jan. 1911, Bancroft Library MSS Division, UC (Berkeley).

Despite the more pronounced abstraction of this sketch compared with the Asham drawing described above, an

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Fig. 20. ***Tantric Group*****, eleventh century CE. From Chitragupta temple, Khajuraho, northern India. Sandstone. In situ.** ***(Author's photograph)***

inverted male figure may clearly be seen in sexual union with a female crouched above with her arms raised. This ambitious posture, which represents one of the sixty-four sexual positions of the *kama-sutra*, appears with conspicuous regularity among the more complex friezes at Konark and the still better-known temple site at Khajuraho (Fig. 20).

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The most important thing to come out of the Asham project was Epstein's decision to learn the technical business of stonecutting from Gill in order to produce a directly carved sculpture for the Wilde monument. Biographer Stephen Gardiner's claims that 'Epstein never used assistants on any project' and that the sculptor had 'carved the [BMA] frieze without a single assistant' are pure nonsense. [20]

[20] Stephen Gardiner, *Epstein: Artist against the Establishment* (London, 1992), 77, 93.

A letter discovered by Richard Buckle containing remarks by the sculptor Alec Mola reveals that a well-known firm of architectural carvers had been engaged to carry out the work. 'About 1912 or 13 I asked him if he had really carved...the Strand statues,' Mola writes, referring to a conversation with Epstein. 'He admitted that he had only "touched them up" in the stone—and that they were carved by a firm John

Daynond [*sic*] in Westminster Bridge Road'. [21]

[21] A. Mola to J. Stern, 25 Oct. 1942(?), quoted in Evelyn Silber, *The Sculpture of Epstein, with a Complete Catalogue* (London, 1986), 123. The actual name of the firm was John Daymond of Westminster Bridge Road.

As was noted in Chapter 1, Epstein's training at the Paris academies had consisted almost entirely in methods of clay modelling; his subsequent attempts at shallow-relief carving, such as the *Mother and Child* of 1905–6, display a very poor grasp of this entirely different method of working. What Epstein lacked, therefore, in the winter of 1910–11 was technical know-how, and Eric Gill was exactly the man to provide it. 'Epstein has decided to do the Wilde monument in stone and to carve it himself too,' Gill wrote to Rothenstein that January; 'that is why he is down here [at Ditchling]—getting into the way of stone carving.' [22]

[22] Gill to Rothenstein, 11 Jan. 1911, reproduced in *The Letters of Eric Gill* , ed. Shewring, 36–7.

Of the practice pieces completed by Epstein during his Christmas and New Year with Gill, the only full-sized sculpture was a directly carved version of the *Maternity/Parvati* from three years previously. Gill's January letter to Rothenstein mentions that Epstein was in the studio as he wrote, 'working on a large figure in stone'. This new *Maternity* was positioned in a very purposeful *tribhanga* stance; but a second feature emphasizes its Indian origins to an even greater extent. Running from the figure's right shoulder, across the chest and beneath the left breast may be seen a narrow band or string (Fig. 21). In Hinduism, this accessory is given the Sanskrit name *yajnopavitam*, and features in almost all sculptures of Hindu gods and goddesses, including the British Museum's alloy *Parvati*, although it is generally worn *upavitam*, meaning over the left shoulder. The fact that the cord is

Fig. 21. Jacob Epstein carving the 1910–11 version of *Maternity*, 1910–11. Hopton Wood stone, 210 cm. *(Photograph by Walter Benington courtesy of the Courtauld Institute, London; a modified version of the original sculpture is now in the Leeds City Art Gallery)*

worn over the right shoulder, *prachinavitam*, only in specific circumstances connected with funeral ceremonies was probably not known to Epstein, however, and his placing of the cord in this alternative position is unlikely to signify anything. Epstein must have realized even at this early stage that direct carving represented a crucial new direction for Western sculpture, for he had himself photographed twice working on the new *Maternity*. In both pictures, he stands in rather contrived poses that seem intended to draw attention to the mallet and chisel in his hands.

Two further works produced by Gill and Epstein in connection with the Asham project demonstrate the continued interest of the two

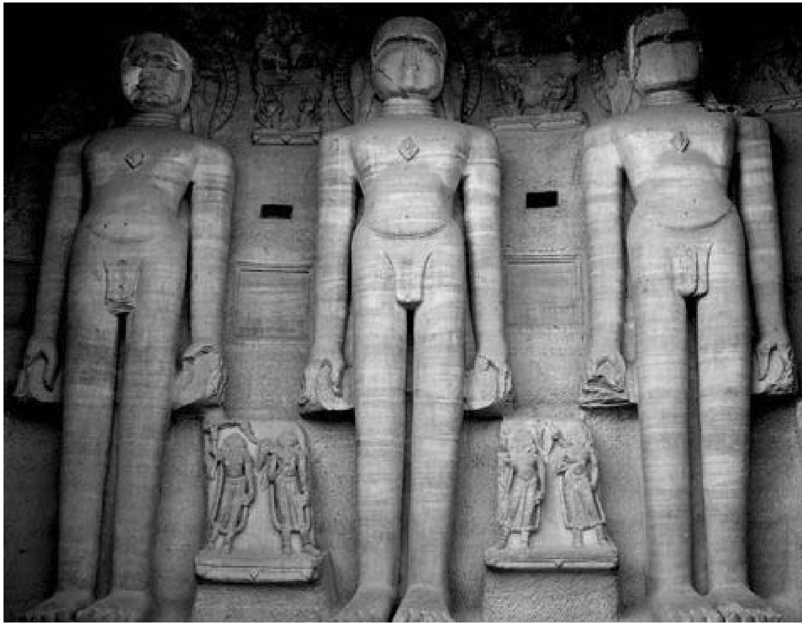

Fig. 22. Colossal *Tirthankara* reliefs, fifteenth century CE. From Gwalior, India. Sandstone. 10 m high. In situ. *(Author's photograph)*

sculptors in the photographs they had seen of the Gwalior *Tirthankaras* (Fig. 22). Gill's marble carving *Cocky Kid* was undoubtedly created at the same time as Epstein's *Sun God*—probably again over the Christmas period of 1910–11 that Epstein spent at Ditchling—and looks very similar. Indeed, Stephen Gardiner, whose biography of Epstein is unwaveringly hostile towards Gill, has gone as far as to accuse the erstwhile stonemason of wilful plagiarism. 'Gill lifted the idea from Epstein's work,' Gardiner states, 'and, not understanding it, produced the meagre figure he did'. Gardiner's own vague and unsubstantiated interpretation of the *Sun God* itself, however—that it 'could be the ancient Greek diagram of human proportion described by the circle and the square from the centrepoint of the navel'—ignores the fact that the aesthetics of the piece are totally and utterly at odds with those of Greece (Fig. 23). [23]

[23] Gardiner, *Epstein*, 81.

The surfaces of both Epstein's and Gill's pieces are defined by interlocking convex curves that eschew the concavities allowed in

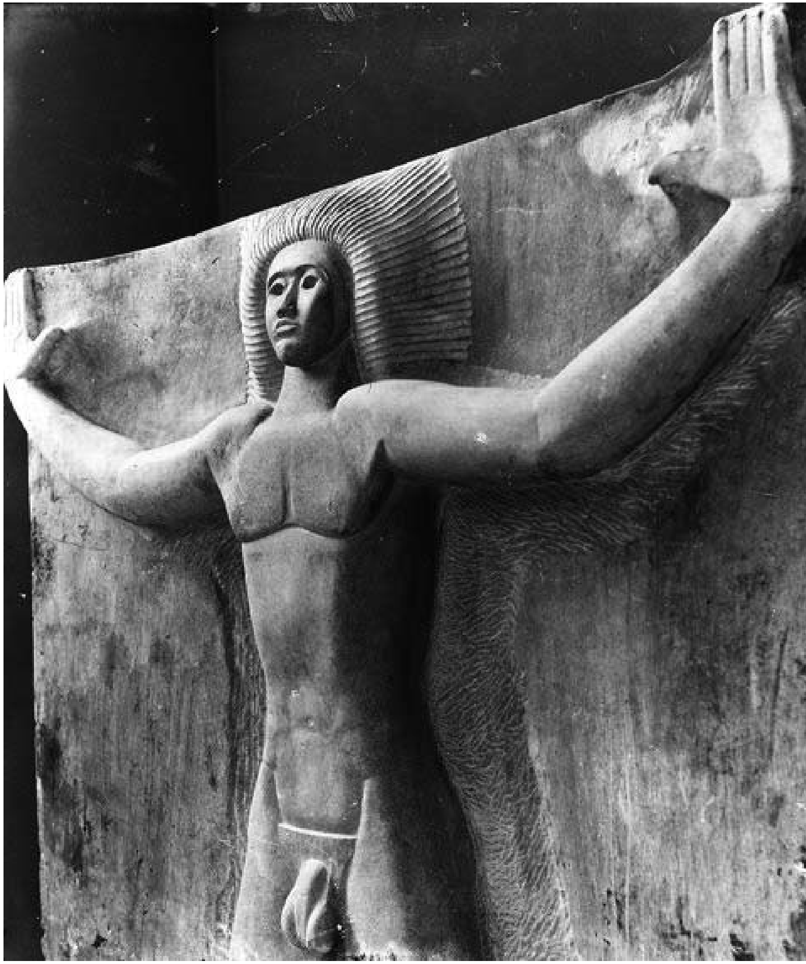

Fig. 23. *Sun God,* by Jacob Epstein, 1910–11. Hopton Wood stone. 2.13 m. *(Photograph of the original version courtesy of the Courtauld Institute, London; the current version—heavily modified by Epstein in 1935—is in the Metropolitan Museum, New York)*

Greek and academic sculpture, and are far more likely to have been jointly derived from existing statuary admired by both artists.

The Gwalior *Tirthankaras* were created used a technique of high-relief direct carving that left the hair and spine of the figure connected to the background block despite the fact that some excavation behind the

Fig. 24. *Double Tirthankara* (Mahavira and Rishabhadeva), eleventh–twelfth centuries CE. From Orissa, India. Schist. 69 cm high. *(British Museum, London)*

body had been completed—a method that has clearly also been used to produce both Epstein's and Gill's sculptures. The two friends would not, however, have needed to depend entirely on photographs of such works. Prior to the First World War, the British Museum had on display two different *Tirthankara* images bearing many similarities to the works under discussion, one of which is given at Fig. 24. The standing meditation stance, known to Jains as the *kayotsarga*, or 'setting-free' posture, was intended to concentrate the mind partly through the sheer discomfort of its maintenance as the hours wear on; it also had the advantage of preventing the adept from accidentally falling asleep. Both Gill's and Epstein's sculptures show comparably stylized trunk, sex, and foot details, while altering the positions of the arms in both cases. The meditative expression of the Indian figures has

also been carried over, suggesting that the two friends worked from drawings made during museum visits and from their impressions of the Gwalior work. Another *Tirthankara* was to be found at the Indian Section of the V&A, which Gill and Epstein had visited just a few months before creating their own high-relief carvings. [24]

[24] Tirthankara (Parsvanatha) from southern India, stone, 1.55 m high, twelfth century CE, V&A (937 IS).

This incorporates a halo of geometrically rendered snakes emanating from behind the Jain saint's head, a feature that may well have inspired the radiating hair of the two more recent figures.

Though Epstein's technical approaches to sculpting were undergoing radical alterations as a result of his continued interest in Indian temple art, he was still reluctant to depart from a Greek motif when he turned his attention again to the Wilde tomb. The regrettable misconception that the final design for the sculpture, which Epstein named the 'flying demon angel', [25]

[25] Epstein, *Let there be Sculpture*, 65.

was based exclusively upon the colossal Assyrian *shedu* carvings at the British Museum has now unfortunately settled into unquestioned dogma in critical writing on Modernism. In fact, however, the sculptor's sketches of this motif from early 1911 suggest no Assyrian influences whatsoever. The diagonally ascending posture of Epstein's humanoid figure, hands curiously folded in what critic Simon Wilson describes as 'the conventional posture of death', [26]

[26] Simon Wilson, 'A Newly Discovered Sketch by Jacob Epstein for the Tomb of Oscar Wilde', *Burlingon Magazine* (Nov. 1975), 726–9, quoted in Michael Pennington, *An Angel for a Martyr: Jacob Epstein's Tomb for Oscar Wilde* (Reading, 1987), 34.

finds no correlate anywhere in the Assyrian galleries; especially not in the horizontal trunks and stocky, bovine legs of the *shedu*. Nor do the swanlike wings drawn on the sculptor's earliest treatments of the motif yet bear any resemblance to the ruled and squared-off

appendages that characterize these bull-sphinxes. A closer consideration of the sketches in comparison with other exhibits at the museum suggest that Epstein was in fact still attempting at this time to keep the project within the Hellenic parameters his patrons had outlined, albeit while considering the aesthetic possibilities held out by archaic rather than classical artworks. During his study of the Nereid figures during his work on the clay-modelled *Garden Statue* a year previously, the museum's other major acquisition from Lykia nearby would have held little interest for him. This was a blocky limestone monument decorated with directly carved marble panels in a rugged, late-archaic style that would have

contradicted the flowing naturalism of the Nereids in no uncertain terms. With the advent of Epstein's new enthusiasm for direct carving, however, such aesthetic qualities would suddenly have begun to appear in a positive new light. Known to this day as *The Harpy Tomb*, this second Lykian exhibit depicts winged female figures with an undeniable resemblance to the drawings in question (Fig. 25). Though these figures were misidentified upon the tomb's 1848 arrival at the museum as harpies—fearsome snatchers of objects in Greek mythology [27]

[27] Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (London, 1903), identified the unelided form of 'harpy' as the word *arepuia*, or 'snatcher', which the author discovered inscribed on a black-figured vase in Berlin (ibid., fig. 18).

—it had been realized by the end of the century that they actually represented benevolent entities whose mythological function had been to ferry the souls of the deceased to the hereafter. Their arms are folded in a way comparable to those of the figure in Epstein's drawings —not to indicate repose, however, but to support the soul being carried. Fascinatingly, when the later of Epstein's two sketches is looked at closely, it may be seen that an erasure has been made in the otherwise anomalous space between the figure's forearms and chest where a carried object or human form seems once to have been positioned. The 'flying demon angel', then, seems not to have been intended to represent Wilde himself—as is often assumed—but a supernatural courier of the poet's soul.

The idea of 'Assyrianizing' the demon angel motif does not seem to have occurred to Epstein until his visit to a Derbyshire quarry in late 1911. On his way to view and sketch the Lykian exhibits that had formed the basis for the *Garden Statue* and the initial demon angel drawings, Epstein would on each occasion have passed via the crossroads point represented by Room 25 of the British Museum (Plan 1). This gallery, which was named 'The Assyrian Transept', was home in those days, not only to the bull-bodied *shedu* from the palace of Sargon that had impressed Dante Gabriel Rossetti, but also to a pair of lion-bodied versions from the citadel of Ashurnasipal at Nimrud. It is this very transept that Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, whose connections with the museum via Epstein will be considered more fully below, was very clearly describing in the following paragraph written for *Blast* magazine three years later: 'From Sargon to Amir-nasi-pal men built man-headed bulls in horizontal flight-walk. Men flayed their captives alive and

Fig. 25. *The Harpy Tomb* (detail), 480–470 BCE. From Lykia, Asia Minor. Marble. 98 cm high. *(British Museum, London)*

erected howling lions: THE ELONGATED HORIZONTAL SPHERE BUTTRESSED ON FOUR COLUMNS, and their kingdoms disappeared. [28]

[28] Gaudier Brzeska, 'Vortex Gaudier Brzeska', *Blast* (London, 1914), 156.

Epstein's directly carved version of the *Maternity/Parvati* motif had merely imitated the outline of the sculptor's modelled figures in the round by the excision of large areas of stone. S*hedu* are, by contrast, carved in

relief into the four flat surfaces of a symmetrical block, deliberately preserving its original oblong dimensions in the finished outline. That the monumental effect achieved by this technique was largely due to the impression given by the base monolith itself was something that Epstein realized during his expedition to the Hopton Wood quarry to buy stone for further carving experiments. The sculptor had already been to look around the quarries at Portland—origin of the stone used for the BMA figures—with Eric Gill in September 1910. Hopton Wood was the other main source of high-density limestone for the façades of London's buildings. 'I saw an immense block which had just been quarried preparatory to cutting it into thin slabs for wall-facings,' Epstein recalled later, noting that the huge oblong of stone had resembled 'a monolith, weighing twenty tons'. The result of this encounter was that Epstein immediately bought the freshly cut block and transferred the demon angel design to it, straightening and squaring the wings to follow the edges of the slab, just as in the British Museum's *shedu* (Fig. 26; see also Fig. 17). The reshaped wings and the striking 'block aesthetic' of the Wilde tomb are, then, the only really Assyrian things about it, but these are the two features that make the demon angel a seminal rather than merely an interesting sculpture.

By switching the stylistic basis of the Wilde tomb eastwards of Greece, Epstein was risking the displeasure of his patrons, for Assyrian art was not traditionally highly regarded in London. We have already noted the perceived threat to the sculptural hierarchy of the British Museum presented by the arrival of Indian work in the 1870s and 1880s and its solution in the classification of these new exhibits as anthropological rather than artistic. Unsurprisingly, the Assyrian carvings sent back by Austen Henry Layard and others three decades earlier had put the trustees in a similarly tight spot. One of the most senior of these officials, William Hamilton, was sufficiently concerned about their effect on the existing gallery system to describe the new acquisitions as a 'parcel of rubbish', which should be exhibited only at

‘the bottom of the sea’.[29]

[29] Quoted in Edward Miller, *That Noble Cabinet: A History of the British Museum* (London, 1974), 192.

Richard Westmacott, creator of the *Progress of Civilisation* relief above the museum's entrance, agreed with him. ‘I think it impossible that any artist can look at the Nineveh Marbles as works for study, for such they certainly are not,’ he told a parliamentary committee the same year. ‘They are works of prescriptive art, like

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Fig. 26. *The Tomb of Oscar Wilde* (detail), by Jacob Epstein, 1912. Hopton Wood stone. Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris. *(Photograph courtesy of the Courtauld Institute, London)*

works of Egyptian art.’[30]

[30] Minutes of the Select Committee on the National Gallery, Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1852–3, vol. 31, para. 9053, quoted in Frederick N. Bohrer, ‘The Times and Spaces of History: Representation, Assyria and the British Museum’, in Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (eds.), *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (London, 1994), 221 n. 48.

Assyrian artworks seemed somewhat more naturalistic to most academicians than those of Egypt, and suggested to some the low-relief format of many archaic Greek pieces. A very narrow, corridor-like layer (Plan 1, Rooms 26, 29, and 30) was therefore created for them between the crowded Egyptian galleries and the rooms housing the ‘Harpy Tomb’ and other items from Lykia. As museum theorist

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Frederick Bohrer has pointed out, this careful sandwiching had a very specific effect on the way the Assyrian collection was perceived by visitors: ‘whether it was art or artefacts, could be decided either way.’[31]

[31] Bohrer, ‘The Times and Spaces of History’, 210.

As this observation and the remarks of Richard Westmacott suggest, the lowly position of Egyptian exhibits in Europe's museums had never been in question; they were to be examined in an archaeological context rather than one of art. Despite—or more likely in spite of—such attitudes, it was to Egypt that Epstein turned for assistance in finishing the ‘demon angel’.

The head of the Wilde sculpture acquired its final appearance after the completion of the wings and was not finished in detail until after its installation at Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, where Epstein continued to work on it *in situ* from a stepladder. There have been various guesses as to what may have inspired the figure's meditative facial expression and unusual headgear, including Evelyn Silber's intriguing

idea that the sculptor 'may well have examined Buddha figures with elaborately figurative headdresses'.[32]

[32] Evelyn Silber, 'The Tomb of Oscar Wilde', in Evelyn Silber (ed.), *Jacob Epstein, Sculpture and Drawings* (Leeds, 1989), 125. The *Fuku Kenjyaku Kuanon* is exhibited at the Todaiji temple in Nara, Japan.

She suggests the eighth-century *Fuku Kenjyaku Kuanon*, which is not actually a Buddha-image at all, but a representation of the bodhisattva Avalokitesevara. The figures positioned on the headdress of this particular *Kuanon* definitely resemble those decorating the crown of the demon angel, but the sculpture has never left Todaiji temple in Nara, Japan, and appeared in no illustrated publication until after the First World War; Epstein may not, therefore, have had access to it. Michael Pennington's interesting discussion of the demon angel falls in with Silber's idea that 'the mongolism of the East' is to be seen in the face of Epstein's figure, but also notes that it suggests 'a peculiar affinity to the face of the hieratic Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaton', otherwise known as the Eighteenth Dynasty Pharaoh Amenhotep IV.[33]

[33] Pennington, *An Angel for a Martyr* , 42 and 69 n. 66.

While this will turn out to have been a perceptive remark, Pennington's guess that the low-relief carvings on the British Museum's *Stela of Ptahmay* may have had something to do with such a resemblance is highly unconvincing, as this is a hieroglyphic tablet containing only sketchy, low-relief carvings of the Pharaoh that bear no discernible relationship to the face of the Wilde sculpture.[34]

[34] Accession Number BS.324.

However, the collections

Fig. 27. *Bust of Akhenaton (Amenhotep IV)* , fourteenth century BCE (Eighteenth Dynasty). From Amarna, Egypt. Limestone. 58 cm high. *(Author's photograph; sculpture is in the Louvre, Paris)*

of the Louvre are much richer than those of the British Museum when it comes to art from Amarna—the short-lived city constructed by Akenaton as the centre of his sun-centred cult—and we have already noted Epstein's admiration for a 'limestone bust of Akhenaton' examined there during his student years. This bust (Fig. 27), which is now located in Room 25 on the first floor of the Sully Wing, bears a striking resemblance to Epstein's carving.[35]

[35] Accession Number E 11076.

The art of Amarna is normally distinguished from other epochs of hieratic Egyptian art by its elaborate, almost mannerist portraiture as

opposed to the blocky solidity exemplified by the sculpture of other pre-Hellenistic Egyptian periods. The Akhenaton bust, while less elaborate than most other Amarna pieces in the Louvre, has precisely the heavy-lidded eyes, prominent chin, and slightly elongated features evident in the face of Epstein's figure for the Wilde tomb. Portrait sculptures of Akhenaton and other members of the royal family tend usually to feature 'stretched' foreheads along with narrow jaws—factors that have led some Egyptologists to speculate that the dynasty may have suffered from Marfan's syndrome or some other hereditary disorder. In the Louvre bust, the king's long forehead is concealed beneath a tall, mitre-like hat, and this garment finds itself carried over into Epstein's figure even to the extent of its circular frontal emblem, which appears in a marginally reworked form. The 'group of sun worshippers' sculpted in clay by Epstein during his Académie Julian years had clearly also appeared as a result of his interest in the Amarna period, but had not incorporated any of the technical approaches employed by Egyptian sculptors. It was clearly Epstein's new engagement for direct carving that caused him in 1912 to reassess this, one of the first extra-European works he had come across after arriving in Paris ten years previously.

By bringing the Wilde tomb from Classical Greece, through archaic Lykia, then Assyria and finally to Egypt, Epstein was reversing the aesthetic priorities of the British Museum's sculpture galleries in a way that would have profound implications for London's avant-garde. Eric Gill was not the only artist working in the capital to tour the museum's collections with Epstein. Even during the busy final stages of his work on the Wilde monument in 1912, the sculptor was still more than willing to discuss extra-European art with anyone who was interested. In the summer of that year the painter Mark Gertler wrote the following to his friend and sometime lover Dora Carrington:

> Before I came here Epstein took me to the British Museum and there revealed to me such wonders in works of art that my inspiration knew no bounds. I came to the conclusion that Egyptian art is *by far*, *by far*, the greatest of *all* art. Oh! Carrington it is, it is. We moderns are but ants in comparison. [36]

[36] Mark Gertler to Dora Carrington, July 1912, reproduced in *Mark Gertler: Selected Letters*, ed. Noel Carrington (London, 1965), 43 (emphasis in original).

Gertler's letter confirms that it was indeed Egyptian art that occupied the summit of Epstein's own sculptural hierarchy during the closing

stages of the Wilde project. It demonstrates, moreover, the emancipating effect that a tour of the British Museum with the sculptor could have on the mind of an artist accustomed to 'modern'—that is, academic— aesthetic norms and their assumed model of art history. Stephen Gardiner is puzzled by the fact that another visitor to Epstein's studio, the journalist Ashley Gibson, seems to have confused Epstein's 'demon-angel' design with one of the *shedu* at the British Museum. 'This was his monumental carving for Wilde's tomb in Père Lachaise,' Gibson's account of the visit runs; 'a colossal winged bull in Derbyshire marble'. [37]

[37] Ashley Gibson, *Postscript to Adventure* (London, 1930), 21, quoted in Gardiner, *Epstein*, 97.

The confusion is, however, probably the result of a similar lesson in sculptural history as Epstein had presented to Gertler, if not given actually on the museum premises, then certainly by the use of a photograph or an engraving of the Assyrian work.

Another artist who was profoundly affected by Epstein's reinterpretation of global art history was the young sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, who encountered the Wilde tomb at around the same time as Mark Gertler. Epstein's autobiography places his first meeting with Gaudier in 1911, but, as Gaudier's letters of this period mention neither him nor the Wilde tomb until the following summer, this is likely to be a miscalculation. 'The whole thing is large—you understand what I mean,' he wrote then to his friend Dr Uhlmayr in Nuremberg, before noting with great interest that 'the whole is cut from the stone without modelling'. [38]

[38] Gaudier-Brzeska, letter to Dr Uhlemayr, 18 June 1912, quoted in Roger Cole, *Gaudier Brzeska: Artist and Myth* (Bristol, 1995), 40.

Gaudier, who had previously sculpted only in clay, was soon converted to the technical approach now favoured by Epstein and Gill. 'I asked him if he carved direct,' Epstein remembered later; 'afraid to acknowledge that he hadn't, he hurried home and immediately started a carving'. [39]

[39] Epstein, *Let there be Sculpture*, 58.

Given the experiences of Gertler, Gill, and others in Epstein's company, it seems inevitable that Gaudier's introduction to the sculptural methods of the Assyrians and the Egyptians had at some point incorporated a museum visit. The essay for *Blast* that contains a concise description of the British Museum's Assyrian Transept with its *shedu* sculptures is used by Gaudier also to list other cultures represented at the British Museum, and doubtless represents an aesthetic tour of both the ground-floor and the upstairs galleries. Gaudier had been '

greatly influenced by all he saw',[40]

[40] Quoted in Haskell, *The Sculptor Speaks*, 67.

Epstein told Arnold Haskell some two decades later, and the young sculptor certainly seems to have taken immediately to the teacher–student relationship that his acquaintance with an older artist logically suggested, addressing Epstein as 'Cher Maître' in all his subsequent written correspondence.[41]

[41] Ibid. 59.

Despite the rather formal implication of this salutation, however, Gaudier considered their friendship to be relaxed and cordial. A letter to Sophie Brzeska describes another 1912 visit to Epstein in which Gaudier had arrived to find him 'dirty and dusty, covered with plaster, sitting on the sill of his window, cutting at marble'. 'We smoked together,' Gaudier remembered, 'talked of castings and marble, and I left'.[42]

[42] Gaudier to Sophie Brzeska, 25 Nov. 1912, reproduced in H. S. Ede, *A Life of Gaudier-Brzeska* (London, 1930), 143.

Gaudier's *Blast* essay is as interesting for what it denounces as for what it praises. The aesthetics of Indian, Assyrian, and Egyptian sculpture all receive favourable mention, while 'the fair Greek saw himself only. HE petrified his own semblance.' In a reference to the continuation of Greek forms into those of Rome, this paragraph ends with the observation that 'the absence of direct energy lasted for a thousand years'. A sketchbook of Gaudier's from 1909, which at the time of writing is held at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, demonstrates just how recently these sentiments had appeared. The 17-year-old future sculptor, whose original decision to study business had obliged him to travel from Bristol to Nuremberg that spring, must have dropped into the British Museum during a brief stopover in London. Gaudier evidently passed through the Assyrian transept and the Egyptian galleries with little or no interest in their contents, for the six full pages of drawings in the sketchbook that are unambiguously traceable to the museum all, without exception, depict exhibits from the Elgin Saloon—the space where the sculptures were displayed until the art dealer Joseph Duveen financed the construction of their current accommodation in 1939. So assiduously did the young Gaudier study Phidias' reliefs that he may be seen often to have copied the museum labels into the spaces next to the sketches. 'Head of horse in Selene's chariot descending below the horizon', reads the annotation to a sketched detail of the building's east pediment, which then occupied the slightly recessed western wall of the gallery—by implication the '

highest' position in the entire museum hierarchy. A second drawing on the same page shows a male torso taken from the battle of Lapiths and Centaurs illustrated on the building's south metopes, again annotated with reference to the exhibit label. If anything, as Paul O'Keefe has also observed in passing during the writing of his biography of the sculptor, Gaudier's treatment of this figure's musculature shows an even higher level of idealization than does the original itself.[43]

[43] Paul O'Keefe, *Gaudier Brzeska: An Absolute Case of Genius* (London, 2004), 30.

After relocating to Paris, Gaudier's visits to the Louvre throughout 1910 sought out similar material. Sophie Brzeska later wrote in her unpublished autobiographical writings of a visit where Gaudier went so far as to remove his hat in reverence as he stood in front of the Hellenistic figure known as the *Victory of Samothrace*.[44]

[44] Zofia (Sophie) Brzeska, unpublished manuscript for the autobiographical novel *Matka*, Musée des Beaux Arts, Orleans, cited in ibid. 69.

Like Epstein, Gaudier had also at one time admired the free modelling technique of Rodin. A drawing from 1909 shows the young artist kneeling in obeisance before *Le Penseur*, behind which, tellingly, a Greek colonnade has been sketched in as a backdrop.[45]

[45] Drawing now attached to the manuscript of Ede's *Life of Gaudier Brzeska* in Leeds City Art Gallery.

'We shall never see a greater sculptor than Rodin,' he wrote to Uhlemayr in 1910, 'who exhausted himself in efforts to outvie Phidias'.[46]

[46] Gaudier-Brzeska, letter to Uhlemayer, 1 Jan. 1910, reproduced in Ede, *A Life of Gaudier Brzeska*, 16.

Museum visits even during May 1911—a year before Gaudier's crucial first visit to Epstein's studio—were made not to examine extra-European art but to see the Michelangelo plastercasts and a bronze of Rodin's *St John the Baptist* that had been on display at the V&A since its purchase by a group of admirers in 1902 (further exhibits by Rodin would not appear at the museum until they were donated by the artist himself in 1914).[47]

[47] Letter from Gaudier to Sophie, 13 May 1911, Zophia [Sophie] Brzeska Archive, Essex University.

'In my opinion the St John is more beautiful than the Venus of Milo,' the young sculptor wrote to Sophie Brzeska on 19 May. 'I like it better than the others because I believe that Art should be seen in the present, looked for in the present, and not in the past.'[48]

[48] Letter from Gaudier to Sophie, 19 May 1911, reproduced in Ede, *A Life of Gaudier Brzeska* , 51.

This had all changed completely by November 1912, when Gaudier laid out a very different set of aesthetic priorities to the author and

publisher Frank Harris among the galleries of the British Museum. Harris bumped into the sculptor while randomly wandering among the exhibits, and was immediately ushered towards ‘the early Assyrian things’ that Gaudier now thought were ‘finer far than any of Greece’. Harris's account of the rest of the conversation is worth repeating in full:

> ‘Why do you run down the Greeks?’ I asked, ‘Rodin declares that they were the master artists of the world.’
> Gaudier pursed out his lips in contempt and shrugged his shoulders:
> ‘What do I care? Rodin is one man, I am another.’
> ‘I have always thought the Greeks very young,’ I continued, ‘satisfied with the sensuous appeal in the beautiful naked form of man and woman’.
> ‘That's it,’ he cried; ‘or part of it; they never expressed anything but sex, but here you've got my Assyrian who expresses spiritual qualities and characters with an extraordinary simplicity of means’. [49]

[49] Frank Harris, *Contemporary Portraits* (3 vols.; New York, 1920), iii. 152.

Though Epstein is unlikely to have taken issue with the Greeks on the grounds of a perceived obsession with sex, Gaudier's new-found interest in Assyrian work had undoubtedly resulted from a desire to learn the lessons of the Wilde tomb. Furthermore, his praise for the ‘simplicity of means’ evident in such works coupled with a sudden ‘contempt’ for Rodin show just how deeply Epstein's own rejection of traditional European sculptural techniques had affected him.

Despite Gaudier's esteem for the large-scale examples of direct carving in the Assyrian Transept, however, restricted access to adequate raw materials meant that he looked mainly towards smaller carved objects in the British Museum as models for his own work. Unlike Epstein, whose commissions for prestigious projects allowed him to buy 20-tonne blocks of limestone, Gaudier was usually reduced to pillaging small chunks of marble from masons' yards, or, as the author John Cournos remembers, begging them from the son of the commercial sculptor Aristide Fabbrucci, whose headstone business adjoined his studio. [50]

[50] John Cournos, *Autobiography* (London, 1935), 258. Fabbrucci died in 1903, but his son continued the monument business until 1914, when he emigrated to Canada.

Many of the smaller exhibits studied by Gaudier were from the Far East, and their selection probably had more to do with his growing friendship with Ezra Pound than with Epstein's preferences. Pound later recalled studying examples of Chinese and Japanese calligraphy with Gaudier at the museum, and the sculptor's article for *Blast* mentions the very ‘convex bronze vases’ from China that were seen in

Chapter 1 to have comprised part of the upper-floor anthropological display on ‘Buddhism’. More East Asian bronzes were to be found a short distance away in the Asiatic Saloon, which could be reached by walking through the Ethnographical Galleries of the East Wing. These galleries are precisely where Frank Harris claimed to have bumped into Gaudier in the account that has been quoted above. The sculptor had been walking in the opposite direction to Harris, and it is not inconceivable that he had been heading for the Asiatic Saloon. As the next chapter will illustrate, Pound would regularly have passed these exhibits on his way from the museum's Principal Staircase to the Prints and Drawings Students' Room, and would doubtless have pondered their connections with the Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints he was in the habit of studying there with the curator Laurence Binyon.

Fig. 28. *Netsuke with a Fox Design*, eighteenth or nineteenth century CE. From Japan. Ivory. 4.5 cm high. *(British Museum, London)*

In a large display case at the eastern end of the Asiatic Saloon was a 'remarkable series of Japanese Netsukes' marked as particularly worthy of note in the official guide to the museum.[51]

[51] *A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum (Bloomsbury)*, 90.

The *netsuke* had begun historically as a simple toggle for fastening the cord normally tied around the waist of a man's kimono, but had become by the eighteenth century a recognized genre of decorative wood, jade, and ivory sculpture in its own right. With regard to early Modernist developments in London, the most significant element of these works in wood, jade, and ivory is that the

Fig. 29. *Stags*, by Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, 1914. Red-veined alabaster. *(Photograph courtesy of the Courtauld Institute, London; the original sculpture is now in the Chicago Art Institute)*

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geometrical shape of the original toggle—whether this is spherical, cone-shaped, or cylindrical—is maintained as the general outline of the piece, just as is the case on a larger scale with the *shedu* carvings admired by Epstein. Carving operations in this style therefore represent modifications of an already existing geometrical form, the artist's objective being to incise a pleasing—if at times overly cute—composition within it, usually illustrating an animal motif (Fig. 28). Gaudier doubtless found in such works the same 'simplicity of means' he had admired in Assyrian work, but with a far greater economy of base material. His sculptures of living creatures in particular bear an inescapable resemblance to the British Museum's *netsuke* and those held at the V&A, which Gaudier was also in the regular habit of visiting (Fig. 29).[52]

[52] The British Museum in 1913 held an enormous number of *netsuke*, a situation that was due mainly to the donation of around 1,500 pieces by the curator and private collector Augustus Wollaston Franks late in the nineteenth century. For this reason it is quite impossible to guess reliably which of these were on display when Gaudier visited the upstairs galleries.

Pound noted with interest that directly carved works of Gaudier's such as the *Sleeping Fawn* of 1913 and the *Stags* of the same year 'have what one can only call a "snuggly", comfortable feeling, that might appeal to a child. A very young child would like them to play with, if they were not stone and too heavy.'[53]

[53] Pound, 'The Goupil Gallery', *Egoist*, 16 Mar. 1914.

end p.102

5 'Little Japanese Pictures'

Ezra Pound, Laurence Binyon, and the British Museum Print Room

Rupert Richard Arrowsmith

The Reading Room at the British Museum had not always held its *fin de siècle* status as London's premier networking hub for artists, poets, and philosophers. Despite Dante Gabriel Rossetti's pioneering efforts, entry to the library for most people at mid-century had been what one historian has described as 'a complex, inconvenient and intimidating procedure'. [1]

[1] Frederick N. Bohrer, 'The Times and Spaces of History: Representation, Assyria and the British Museum', in Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (eds.), *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (London, 1994), 201.

Such discouraging conditions actually formed part of a deliberate strategy to maintain social exclusivity. Henry Ellis, the Principal Librarian between 1827 and 1856, rebuffed all proposals to improve levels of attendance on the grounds that 'the more vulgar class would crowd into the Museum'. [2]

[2] Henry Ellis, quoted in Edward Miller, *That Noble Cabinet: A History of the British Museum* (London, 1979), 139.

Even as late as 1870, the residue of such attitudes ensured that the whole institution, including the exhibition galleries, was able to record only half a million footfalls a year. [3]

[3] The total number of visitors during 1870 was 545,791 (Annual Report for 1871, British Museum Central Archive).

Staffing policies contributed to the lack of user-friendliness at the museum, with curatorships often offered to older scholars and aristocratic dilettantes over trained professionals or recent graduates in the humanities. As Ellis himself admitted, it 'never entered into the contemplation of the trustees to select poets and historians' for such positions at the museum. The most significant revisions to such recruitment policies appeared after the appointment of the influential literary scholar Sidney Colvin as Keeper of the Department of Prints and Drawings

in 1888. Colvin, who subsequently became famous for entertaining his mistress in his chambers at the museum and for holding parties in the Prints and Drawings Students' Room, [4]

[4] See B. C. Johnson (ed.), *Olive and Stepniak: The Bloomsbury Diary of Olive Garnett 1893–95* (London, 1993), 93.

preferred to employ young Oxbridge alumni such as the art historian Campbell Dodgson, erstwhile tutor to Lord Alfred Douglas and an acquaintance of Oscar Wilde.

Another Colvin appointee, Laurence Binyon, could claim the titles both of poet and of historian. Binyon had pursued the four-year *Literae Humaniores* course at Oxford, during which he won the university's Newdigate Prize for undergraduate poetry—an honour that had been bestowed on Wilde himself twelve years previously. Several collections of Binyon's verse were published before the century had ended, including two volumes of *London Visions*—short symbolist pieces influenced by the *Nocturne* paintings of James Abbott McNeill Whistler. In 1895 he was made Assistant Keeper of Prints and Drawings after an initial stint as a librarian in the Reading Room. Though this position gave him responsibility for the Department's Asian collections in their entirety, Binyon's mind was often more occupied with poetry than with his duties. 'I pine to be out of the museum altogether, though I suppose I could only change it for another prison,' he remarked in a letter to Robert Ross. 'I have a big poem, on a grand scale in my mind—it has been brewing for years—am obsessed by the fear that I shall die before I get free to write it.' [5]

[5] Letter to Robert Ross, 25 July 1916, Binyon Loan Archive, British Library Manuscript Collection (hereafter referenced as BLA), vol. 9.

Curatorship was considered a professional rather than a Bohemian occupation, a fact that was emphasized by the museum's formal requirements for the dress and deportment of its staff. During the pre-war period, most employees were still asked to wear a 'silk hat, morning or frock coat, with the usual accessories of white shirts and stiff collars'. [6]

[6] W. C. Smith, *A Handelian's Notebook* (London, 1965), 16.

Rules for visitors, on the other hand, had loosened up immensely under the new generation of curators. Binyon in particular had bent them without hesitation during his tenure at the Reading Room, allowing younger poets such as Henry Newbolt to work there during holiday closures when it was officially off limits to the public. Newbolt was even allowed into the sacred precinct of the book stacks, and remembered Binyon 'taking me behind the scenes and along the vast honeycomb of shelves to pick out for myself the volumes which

would otherwise have taken half an hour to reach me in the ordinary routine'. [7]

[7] Henry Newbolt, *My World in my Time: Memoirs of Sir Henry Newbolt* (London, 1932), 209–10.

Such laissez-faire conditions undoubtedly contributed to the huge surge in the number of visitors to the institution that occurred during the *fin de siècle*: by the time of Ezra Pound's 1906 visit, the Reading Room alone was admitting around twenty thousand every month. [8]

[8] There is no recorded figure for 1906, but the number for 1904 was 226,323 (Annual Report for 1904, British Museum Central Archive).

The liberal new atmosphere also meant, as we noted in Chapter 3, that in 1909 Pound was allowed to sprawl undisturbed over two desks there while composing his verse. It was also in 1909 that Pound became acquainted with Binyon—by that time the museum's leading expert on art from Japan, China, and Korea—and began the gradual introduction to the visual cultures of those provinces that would begin to bear fruit in his verse a few years later.

Some interesting work on Pound's relationship with Binyon has been done in recent years by Zhaoming Qian, whose two volumes comparing aspects of Anglo-American Modernism with various tendencies in historical Chinese literature and art contain many conjectures on the possible role played by the curator in encouraging such connections. [9]

[9] Zhaoming Qian, *Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams* (Durham, NC, and London, 1995); and *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art* (Charlottesville, Va., and London, 2003).

Binyon maintained a small public exhibition of Chinese and Japanese paintings in the British Museum Prints and Drawings Gallery (Plan 2, Room 10), from the early summer of 1910 until the spring of 1912, and this represents the focus of Qian's chapters on Pound. His three main contentions are that the poet attended the exhibition not long after it opened; that it was his first significant encounter with East Asian art; and that it immediately and fundamentally affected his work. A famous Chinese handscroll known as *The Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies*, which at that time was thought to be the work of the fourth-century court painter Gu Kaizhi, inspired 'shock leading to disorientation' in Pound, Qian proposes, effectively opening the way for motifs and techniques from the region to appear in his poetry. [10]

[10] Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art* , 53.

Because the scroll depicts examples of Confucian moral virtue in action, it is said to have laid the foundations for Pound's future interest in the philosopher. Because one of the panels contains an image of the poetess

Ban Jieyu, it is seen to have governed Pound's much later decision to adapt one of her poems in H. A. Giles's *History of Chinese Literature* into his own *The Jewel Stairs Grievance*. Though the narrative laid out by Qian is compelling, it misses three crucial points. The first is that none of Pound's known letters or other personal papers contains any reference, direct or otherwise, to this particular exhibition. The second is that the timescale presented fits imperfectly with Pound's poetic output—he cannot be said to have produced anything directly indebted to East Asia until the *haiku*-inspired 'In a Station of the Metro', written more than six months after the exhibition had shut up shop. Perhaps more importantly, nothing showing specifically Chinese characteristics appears until the Giles adaptations an additional twelve months later, by which time at least two new exhibitions of Chinese material had opened to provide the poet with visual stimuli.

The key realization when considering Pound's possible exposure to East Asian art during the pre-war period is that the 1910–12 exhibition, which in fact was fairly low key, did not even begin to represent all that was available. Between the *fin de siècle* and the outbreak of the First World War, London's museums and other exhibition spaces were inundated with newly acquired prints, paintings, sculpture, ceramics, and textiles from the region. Laurence Binyon's professional status ensured that he was usually called in to curate shows of such material at locations as diverse as the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London's East End, and the Shepherd's Bush exposition site on the opposite side of the city. Until very recently it has been very difficult to say which of these venues might additionally have been visited by Pound, but fortunately new evidence from the archives of the British Museum and the British Library has shed fresh light, not only on his friendship with Binyon, but also on the beginnings, development, and overall nature of his interest in the material under the curator's supervision.

The venue both for Pound's earliest and for his most significant encounters with East Asian artworks was not the public Prints and Drawings Gallery at all, but a more exclusive area of the British Museum that normally required a membership ticket for admittance. The Prints and Drawings Students' Room was relocated in 1914 to the newly constructed White Wing on the north side of the building, but before that it had occupied the long space between the Prints and Drawings Gallery and the Asiatic Saloon where the museum's collection of *netsuke* was displayed (Plan 2, Room 11). The function of this Students' Room, known universally to its regulars as the 'Print

Room', was to allow suitably qualified individuals the opportunity to examine items from the department's growing collection in a comfortable, scholarly environment free from the bustle and interruptions of the public galleries. Binyon, whose role as Assistant Keeper of Prints and Drawings obliged him to work from a desk in the open-plan environment of this facility, would have been present on most days. Visitors to the Print Room were required to submit their credentials and sign an attendance register at the door. These attendance registers, which are now preserved at the museum's auxiliary archive in West London, read like a *Who's Who* of the city's cultural elite during the pre-war years. *Fin de siècle* artists such as Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Edmund Dulac, William Rothenstein, Paul Signac, Lucien Pissarro, and Walter Sickert rubbed shoulders with young soon-to-be Modernists such as Mark Gertler, Duncan Grant, Paul Nash, C. R. W. Nevinson, and David Bomberg. Art critics were particularly frequent visitors, with Ananda Coomaraswamy, Roger Fry, Clive Bell, and the Japanese art historian Hogitaro Inada among the names most frequently encountered in the registers prior to 1914. There were usually one or two members of the financial and social elite, with Prince Louis of Battenberg, Baron Walter Rothschild, and Lords Walsingham, Leicester, and Gainsborough all putting in appearances. Visits by poets were far less common, with the exception of the young Isaac Rosenberg, a habitual guest from 1912 to 1915, and W. B. Yeats, who became an enthusiastic attendee during the summer of 1913 for reasons that will be touched upon in Chapter 6. The most persistent literary visitor throughout this period by far, though, was Ezra Pound himself. One of Zhaoming Qian's books notes in passing that the poet had been to the Print Room, but says that he did not do so until late 1912. [11]

[11] Ibid. 17.

A search through all the visitors' registers from the date of Pound's arrival in London until his departure for Paris in 1920, however, shows that he had actually been in regular attendance as early as the beginning of 1909. Pound's signature may be found on the page for 9 February of that year, and there are four subsequent appearances during the spring and summer that followed. [12]

[12] The other dates are 12 Feb., 1 Mar., 4 May, and 16 June (Students' Room Visitors' Book for 1909, British Museum Prints and Drawings Archive at Blyth Road, Hammersmith).

It cannot be a coincidence that this first visit occurred only a few days

after Pound's introduction to Laurence Binyon by their mutual publisher Elkin Mathews. [13]

[13] See James G. Nelson, *Elkin Mathews: Publisher to Yeats, Joyce, Pound* (Madison, 1989), 139; Patricia Hutchins, *Ezra Pound's Kensington: An Exploration 1885–1913* (London, 1965), 59; James J. Wilhelm, *Ezra Pound in London and Paris, 1908–1925* (University Park, Pa., and London, 1990), 19.

Pound's initial visits to the Print Room must have been made as Binyon's guest, for he would not have been able to attend in any other capacity. Gaining admission to any of the museum's Students' Rooms was not a simple process. The institution's biographer David Wilson has remarked that admission tickets before the First World War were 'issued on the back of regulations similar in many respects to those of [the museum's] library departments'. [14]

[14] David M. Wilson, *The British Museum: A History* (London, 2002), 209.

The intractability of these regulations has already been noted in connection with Pound's access to the Reading Room, and the poet certainly would not have been allowed to enter the Print Room without a ticket if he had arrived unaccompanied. Issuance of Print Room membership even today takes anything up to a month, requiring the submission of references that must be checked and filed before a ticket can be granted. There simply was not enough time between Pound's introduction to Binyon and his initial Print Room visit for these procedures to have been completed. Henry Newbolt's activities in the Reading Room during holiday closures has already given us some indication of Binyon's willingness to bend museum rules to help fellow poets, however, and it is easy to imagine that the need for a ticket would have been waived for certain individuals when he was present.

Even during the summer of 1909, by which time Pound's Print Room membership would definitely have been approved, there is evidence to suggest that visits continued to be made in the curator's company. Binyon often signed family, friends, and important visitors into the Print Room in his own distinctive copperplate handwriting while showing them around. On 7 July 1909, for example, the curator's wife's name appears in the visitors' book alongside that of Newbolt—both written in Binyon's hand rather than entered by the visitors themselves. He also personally entered the name of the novelist Arthur Morrison into the register for the 28th of the same month, and that of Georgiana Burne-Jones, the wife of the Pre-Raphaelite painter, a week later on 7 July. The same courtesy was extended to Pound both on his third appearance at the Print Room and

on the final 1909 visit, which occurred on 20 June. On the latter occasion Pound seems not to have realized that Binyon had already

signed him in, for the younger poet's name appears again four lines lower down, this time in his own handwriting.

During the first fifteen years of the twentieth century, Prints and Drawings was definitely the most exciting division of the British Museum in terms of acquisitions. Binyon's skill as a negotiator and buyer for the museum belied his mild-mannered appearance, and in the years leading up to the First World War he more or less single-handedly transformed the department's East Asian holdings from a few representative pieces into a world-class collection. Not all of the acquisitions made during this period were planned, however, and political instability in China during the same period allowed for a certain amount of opportunism. Many future exhibits from that nation therefore came to the museum via fairly dubious channels. Their arrivals were greeted with surprised fascination by Binyon and his colleagues, none of whose knowledge of specifically Chinese artworks was anything other than superficial. Zhaoming Qian's favourite handscroll, *The Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies*, probably provides the clearest illustration of the above points. A soldier in the Bengal Lancers, Captain Clarence Johnson, brought it into the museum in 1902 in order to see whether the carved jade toggle that fastened it would be worth anything. He claimed it had been given to him when he was stationed in Beijing during the so-called Boxer Uprising of 1898–1901, in exchange for arranging safe passage for 'a lady of high birth'. As historian Shane McCausland has suggested, however, the fact that he had been based at the Summer Palace throughout the disturbances perhaps makes it more likely that the item had actually been swiped. [15]

[15] Shane McCausland, *First Masterpiece of Chinese Painting: The Admonitions Scroll* (London, 2003), 118–19.

Whatever the truth behind Johnson's acquisition of the scroll, a surprised Binyon and Colvin were able to put what they had in their pockets together and buy the priceless painting from him on the spot, toggle and all, for £25 cash-in-hand (not £1,250, as Qian suggests). [16]

[16] Qian's figure of £1,250 represents an enormous amount of money by 1902 standards, when entire collections of East Asian art were changing hands for sums not much larger. This amount would by no means have been available for 'walk-in' purchases, and would have had to have been raised from donors in a process lasting weeks. The Department of Prints and Drawings' annual meeting that year gives the amount paid as '£25.00'. The entry indicates that Sidney Colvin was responsible for the acquisition (British Museum Central Archive). Details of the transaction, including the amount of £25, have also been published by McCausland (ibid. 12).

With regard to *planned*

acquisitions, on the other hand, Binyon's priorities were unwavering. He wanted to improve the museum's collection of the colourful Japanese woodblock impressions known as *nishiki-e*, or 'brocade prints', most of which were associated with the *ukiyo-e* or 'floating-world' movement of metropolitan Edo (modern-day Tokyo).

These 'brocade prints' had originally been created by a species of shallow relief carving, with complex designs engraved onto blocks of cherry wood with the help of *hanshita-e*—traced versions of the artist's original ink drawing that were glued to the printing surfaces to provide guidelines for cutting. Because each one of the ten or so colours used in a particular design needed to be applied using a separate, individually carved block, and because textural techniques such as embossing were often applied to the paper as well, the printing process was extremely intricate, requiring skilled craftsmanship at every stage of the process. Eighteenth-century *ukiyo-e* artists such as Suzuki Haronobu and Torii Kiyonaga produced prints in relatively short runs, but by the mid-nineteenth century improved techniques of re-carving and block repair ensured that late masters such as Katsushika Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige were able, when necessary, to produce more than a thousand copies at a time of popular designs. It was these more recent printmakers whose works first exerted their influence over European art, determining many of the aesthetic features of Impressionist painting during the 1860s and 1870s, and of Art Nouveau and Jugendstil at the *fin de siècle*. Whistler was partly responsible for introducing an enthusiasm for Japanese prints into England, and the *Nocturnes* of the Thames emulated in verse by Binyon in his *London Visions* are heavily indebted to Hiroshige's various series of images depicting the Sumida River in Edo. Binyon was eager to complete the museum's sets of print series such as these, which had been far from complete when he was appointed Assistant Keeper; but he was also gripped by a new enthusiasm for amassing rarer and more abstract designs by earlier printmakers such as Harunobu.

Binyon approached the above tasks with the perseverance and bloody-mindedness of a compulsive stamp-collector. His involvement with *nishiki-e* existed, in the words of his biographer, 'at a deeper level than was necessary for his curatorial duties', [17]

[17] John Hatcher, *Laurence Binyon: Poet, Scholar of East and West* (Oxford, 1995), 70.

while Timothy Clark, the

current Keeper of the Museum's Japan Department has remarked that Binyon 'spent all his time on Japanese prints; you only have to look

at what he brought in.' [18]

[18] Timothy Clark, in conversation with RRA, 18 Mar. 2005.

Most of 'what he brought in' arrived at the museum during a vigorous campaign of acquisition between 1906 and 1909. In the first of those years, the popular novelist Arthur Morrison—a Print Room regular and a prodigious collector of Japanese prints—let his horde of more than a thousand *nishiki-e* go to the museum for well below the market rate. Binyon paid the equivalent of just over £4 per print, an extremely low price even by 1906 standards. Four more major collections were added in the following year, and in 1908 Binyon secured that of W. C. Alexander, a former British ambassador to Japan. This allowed him to complete the museum's set of Hokusai's *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, which had previously lacked several key designs. A comprehensive album of Kabuki actor prints by the mysterious portraitist Toshusai Sharaku became in 1909 the last of the museum's really large-scale woodblock print acquisitions. [19]

[19] Wilson, *The British Museum*, 230. See also Hatcher, *Laurence Binyon*, 77–8.

One of the reasons for Binyon's urgency in the above dealings was that interest in Japanese culture was growing globally, and the price of *nishiki-e* was beginning to inflate. After the First World War, growing demand from the United States and a positive revaluation of the art form in Japan itself combined to push such purchases increasingly beyond the museum's financial reach.

In the opportunity-rich environment of the 1900s, however, Binyon was so preoccupied with his negotiations that he could spare little time to organize the enormous numbers of new prints that were flooding into the Print Room. When things settled down after the Sharaku acquisition, it took him seven years to catalogue them all, a task that resulted in the publication of his influential *Catalogue of Japanese and Chinese Woodcuts* in 1916. [20]

[20] Laurence Binyon, *A Catalogue of Japanese and Chinese Woodcuts Preserved in the Sub-Department of Oriental Prints and Drawings in the British Museum* (London, 1916).

When Ezra Pound visited the Print Room early in 1909, then, it would have been flooded with literally thousands of *nishiki-e*, and Binyon, his assistants, and the small number of amateur authorities who frequented the museum would continually have been engaged in sorting and ordering them. It is inconceivable under such conditions that Pound was not shown some of the material by Binyon, but—just as in the case of the 1910–12 exhibition of Chinese and

Japanese paintings—no references to it are to be found in his correspondence or other writings of the time. It was simply too early for these images of an alternative civilization to strike Pound as relevant to his poetic concerns, and he doubtless examined them with detached interest rather than engaging purposefully with them. The poet may have initially been attracted to the Print Room to view quite different material, but he would not forget Binyon's horde of *nishiki-e*, and their relevance to the direction of avant-garde writing in London would suddenly be perceived three years later.

Binyon's renown as a scholar of Asian art tends to obscure the fact that he maintained a parallel fascination for *quattrocento* Italy throughout his life. Side by side with his work on the *Catalogue of Japanese and Chinese Woodcuts* , Binyon was working on an important study of Sandro Botticelli that would come out in 1913, the same year as his slim debut publication on East Asian art. [21]

[21] Laurence Binyon, *Painting in the Far East* (London, 1908). This was a fairly lightweight, generalist text that was evidently knocked out while the curator was at work on the more involved task of cataloguing the department's new acquisitions. John Hatcher records that Binyon had been fascinated by Botticelli since his undergraduate years, when a print of the *Primavera* had represented the sole decoration in his rooms at Oxford (*Laurence Binyon*, 20).

Given the relevance to such a project of Pound's academic background and interests as of 1909, it is more than likely that Binyon's initial invitation of the other poet to the Print Room featured the opportunity to view one of the acknowledged highlights of his department's European collection. This was a complex drawing in ink and chalk created by Botticelli during the period when he was working on the masterpieces *Primavera* and *The Birth of Venus* , and depicts a clear-eyed young woman who perhaps represents the season of Autumn. [22]

[22] J. Rowlands, *Master Drawings and Watercolours in the British Museum* (London, 1984), 21, no. 6.

It may indeed have been this work, examined at leisure in the Print Room more than twenty years earlier, that inspired Pound's speculation in Canto LXXX over 'what Sandro knew' about the depiction of feminine beauty. Binyon, however, was a consummate drawer of parallels between the aesthetic traditions of seemingly disparate civilizations, and would certainly have made connections between the style of drawing in the Early Renaissance work and that of the many *bijin-ga*—prints depicting beautiful women—that were scattered around the Print Room. Something about Binyon's talent for juxtaposition must have interested Pound, for the following month he went to the Albert Hall to

hear at least the first two—and probably all—of a series of lectures by the curator on analogies between European and Asian art. [23]

[23] Pound mentions attending the first lecture in a letter to his mother of 15 Mar. 1909 (Beinecke Collection No. 59.2659). The second talk is mentioned in a letter to his father written two days later (ibid.).

Uncertainty about the contents of Binyon's 1909 lectures has prompted various guesses from Pound critics over the years, but evidence has recently emerged that greatly clarifies the situation. Pound's earliest biographer, Noel Stock, was the first to identify the lectures as important, but could offer no indication as to their contents. [24]

[24] Noel Stock, *The Life of Ezra Pound* (London, 1970), 78.

Zhaoming Qian recognized in 2003 that a lack of evidence still made the subject matter of the lectures a total mystery, but this did not prevent him from asserting that they 'explored distinctive Chinese views of art, nature, and society'. [25]

[25] Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art* , 11.

Around this time, however, seventy-five boxes of Binyon's private papers suddenly became available via the manuscript room of the British Library, seven of which contain a mass of lecture manuscripts ranging from scattered, handwritten drafts of a very early date right up to the polished, typewritten notes used by Binyon for a series of talks given at Harvard in the mid-1930s. Binyon's practices as a lecturer make it extremely difficult to date the earliest papers, for he often interleaved older, handwritten sections with newer ink drafts and also with typed sheets, often scrubbing out or amending the folio numbers to reflect their new position. These older sections are often heavily annotated, with redundant passages crossed through or even removed with scissors, and unrecycled pages once attached to them are strewn throughout the archive as a whole. Internal evidence, however, shows that many such fragments date from before the First World War. One piece of handwritten text, for example, recommends E. B. Havell's *Indian Sculpture and Painting*— a 1908 volume that is described as 'a recent book'. [26]

[26] Fragment of Lecture 1, 'Sculpture and Religious Art', BLA, vol. 31.

A ragged slide list identifies one image as 'Amida descending Shepherd's Bush', a surreal phrase that describes a Shingon Buddhist work on temporary loan in 1910 to the Japan–British exhibition in the Shepherd's Bush area of London. [27]

[27] List of slides of Japanese artworks, folio labelled '4' in top-right corner, BLA, box 32.

Significantly, when slide lists of this age do appear, they are divided, not into the greatly expanded, seven-lecture format preferred by Binyon in the 1920s and

1930s, but into just four talks—precisely the number that was offered in 1909.

The contents of the above manuscripts agree with the titles and summaries given on a handbill printed to advertise the 1909 lectures (Fig. 30). All credit for the discovery of the handbill must go to John

Art & Thought in East & West:

Parallels and Contrasts.

SYLLABUS OF A COURSE OF FOUR LECTURES, illustrated with Lantern Slides, to be given in the Small Theatre of the ALBERT HALL, KENSINGTON, at 5.30 on WEDNESDAY AFTERNOONS, MARCH 10th, 17th, 24th, and 31st,

By LAURENCE BINYON.

I. SCULPTURE AND RELIGIOUS ART.

Alexander in India. Contact of Greek and Indian art. Two ideals. Common ground. Transforming power of the religious idea in Europe and in Asia. Mediæval sculpture compared with the sculpture of India, China, and Japan. Recent discoveries in Central Asia. The "grotesque" in East and West. The classic tradition in Europe. Primitive painting in the two continents.

II. THE RENAISSANCE IN EUROPE AND IN JAPAN.

Coincidence in time. Similar inspiration of both movements; contrast in mode of expression. Splendour and austerity. Great patrons of art: Lorenzo de'Medici; Maximilian; the Ashikaga Shoguns. Difference in temperament and conditions of life. Contrasted conceptions of personality. Portraiture in East and West. Spirit of the early Reformation, and that of Zen Buddhism. Ideal of intellectual freedom. Gaiety. A change of mood. Materialism. Academic tradition.

III. LANDSCAPE AND THE FEELING FOR NATURE.

Gradual growth of landscape art in Europe. The nineteenth century. Deep feeling for nature in early Chinese poetry and painting. Dualism; the Tiger and the Dragon. Elemental qualities in landscape of Asia. Treatment of the sea; Korin and Turner. Perspective in East and West. Drawings by Claude, and Chinese monochromes. Passion for flowers and birds. Pisanello and Oriental art.

IV. POPULAR ART AND REALISM.

Painting of daily life in Venice, the Netherlands, France, and England. Comparison with Japanese colour-prints. Peculiar conditions under which these were produced. Harunobu. Watteau. New treatments of old subjects. Utamaro. Manet. Different conceptions of realism. European art of the present day. Conclusion.

TICKETS for the Course may be obtained from MR. J. STEPNEY, 24, BURY STREET, ST. JAMES', S.W. *Price,* ONE GUINEA.
Admission to single Lectures (pay at the door), 6/-.

Good, Ltd., Burleigh St., Strand, W.C.

Fig. 30. Flyer Advertising Laurence Binyon's Albert Hall lectures, 1909. ***(Houghton Library, Harvard)***

Hatcher, who found it in the archives of the Houghton Library at Harvard and included a copy in his 1995 biography of Binyon.[28]

[28] Hatcher, *Laurence Binyon*, 195.

What is immediately obvious from this is that the lectures did not focus specifically on China, nor even entirely on East Asia. The series carried the general title *Art and Thought in East and West: Parallels and Contrasts*, and offered as many reflections on European culture as it did on Asia. The first talk was on 'Sculpture and Religious Art' and contrasted Greek and Indian work in a similar way to Coomaraswamy's Copenhagen speech a year previously. It also compared medieval European sculpture with that of India, China, and Japan, and finished with some remarks on 'primitive painting on the two continents'. The second lecture was more focused. Titled 'The Renaissance in Europe and in Japan', it compared this period in Italian history with the cultural golden age that occurred during roughly the same period under the Ashikaga shogunate in Kyoto. Binyon concluded this lecture by suggesting that the close of the era in both cultures was characterized by increasing materialism and a fall into academicism. In a passage from his lecture notes that certainly would have struck a chord with Pound, the curator was ready to connect this tendency to the moribund state of contemporary culture in the West. 'The frequent failure of our art (as of our civilization!) to-day', the curator observed, 'is that the purpose and the idea have been so largely lost, and only the grasp at material appearances remains'.[29]

[29] Fragment of Lecture 2, 'The Renaissance in Europe and in Japan', BLA, box 31.

The third lecture concentrated on 'Landscape and the Feeling for Nature', and covered nineteenth-century Europe, early Chinese poetry and art, general remarks on landscape painting in Asia, and a comparison between J. M. W. Turner and the Japanese Rinpa school painter Ogata Korin. The final instalment of the series was on 'Popular Art and Realism' and allowed Binyon to show slides of his favourite *nishiki-e*, which he contrasted with genre painting in Venice, France, England, and the Netherlands. When a letter from Pound to his mother describes the lectures as 'intensely interesting', then, it is likely that these juxtapositions of various cultures and time periods interested him as much as the material on East Asian art itself, for he would eventually use a comparable system of 'subject rhymes' to

structure the eclectic cultural sweep of *The Cantos*. It was still too early, however, for any immediate use to be found for the specifically East Asian material he had encountered, and, exactly as has been observed with regard to the

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1910–12 exhibition and the early visits to the Print Room, nothing of Pound's stated interest in the lectures filters through into his verse of the same period.

What is most fascinating for a researcher examining the Print Room visitors' books, however, is that, after an absence of three years, Pound's signature suddenly comes back with a vengeance. It reappears on the page for 27 September 1912, and its occurrence from then until the official closure of the Print Room a year later is as regular as can be expected, considering his lengthy absences from London during the same period. [30]

[30] Pound was 'in Burnham beeches or some such...with Ford [Madox Hueffer]' for the first week of 1913 (Pound to Dorothy Shakespear, 28 Dec. 1912, reproduced in *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear: Their Letters 1909–1914* , ed. Omar Pound and A. Walton Litz (London, 1985), 170). After that he spent April in Paris on a poetry fact-finding mission. From Paris he went directly to Sirmione, then Venice, returning to London in June (Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (London and Boston, 1988), 202–5).

Dorothy Shakespear began to visit the Print Room not long after Pound's return, with her first visit occurring on 18 February 1913. That she had become a member by that time is confirmed in a letter to him written four days later. 'I have obtained an admission to the Print Room,' she says, her rather formal phrasing underlining the complexity of the membership process. [31]

[31] Letter to Pound, 22 Feb. 1913, reproduced in *Letters*, ed. Pound and Litz (eds.), 190.

After the initial visit, Dorothy's name begins to appear in the register more regularly even than Pound's—sometimes as frequently as three times in the same week. [32]

[32] Dorothy's name appears three days running on 21, 22, and 23 Mar. 1913 (Students' Room Visitors' Book for 1912, British Museum Prints and Drawings Archive at Blyth Road, Hammersmith).

Pound's own visits had by this time taken on a completely different character from those of 1909, and references to the Print Room and specifically to Japanese artworks begin suddenly to permeate his written output—both literary and personal. Before looking at these references in detail, however, one question demands consideration: why did East Asian art suddenly become so important to Pound after three years of complete indifference?

The answer is to be found in Pound's efforts during 1912 to find a new, forward-looking idiom for his poetry after the possibilities held out by Provençal verse had been exhausted. *Canzoni*, which was Pound's last thoroughgoing attempt at adapting Troubadour conventions and motifs into English, appeared in 1911 and was served soon

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afterwards with a friendly brickbat by the poet's self-appointed modernity consultant Ford Madox Ford (who at that time was still surnamed Hueffer). Ford, whom Pound would later remember as 'the critical LIGHT during the years immediately pre-war in London', [33]

[33] Pound, 'This Hulme Business', *Townsman*, 2/5 (Jan. 1939), 15. In spring 1913, Hueffer was very much on Pound's mind. On 9 May of that year, Pound wrote to Dorothy recalling with gratitude the novelist's famous attack on his poetry: 'Verily the more people I meet the more respect I have for F.M.H.—When I think of how he struggled with me in germany [*sic*]' (reproduced in *Letters*, ed. Pound and Litz, 226).

described *Canzoni* as a 'jejune provincial effort' redolent of Victorian medievalism. After famously rolling on the ground in mock—or perhaps actual—aesthetic torment, he said he thought Pound was 'fly-papered, gummed, and strapped down' by such outdated approaches, and advised the younger man to work towards a more contemporary style of writing. [34]

[34] Brita Lindberg-Seyersted (ed.), *Pound/Ford: The Story of a Literary Friendship* (New York and London, 1985), 172.

Pound seems to have taken this advice to heart, and the following year was spent in a struggle for innovation. 'Nineteen twelve was a bad year,' he remembered a short time later; 'we all ran about with tin cans tied to our tails'. [35]

[35] Ezra Pound, 'Webster Ford', *Egoist*, 2/1, 1 Jan. 1915, p. 12.

It was also the year that he delivered an unexpected tribute to T. E. Hulme by publishing the young philosopher's poems at the end of his *Ripostes* volume, and it is the dependence of these brief pieces on Japanese poetic conventions that best explains Pound's sudden surge of interest in the Print Room. Meetings of Hulme's poetry group took place regularly throughout 1909, and Hulme's collaborator F. S. Flint would recall later that the main product of these had been 'dozens' of attempts to imitate what he refers to as '*tanka* and *haikai*'. Pound had found out about these experiments in April, two months after his initial Print Room visit, but, like the contents of that facility itself, did

not at that time find them applicable to his own development as a poet. Flint later remembered that he had 'added nothing to the discussion', and had instead been 'very full of his troubadours'. [36]

[36] F. S. Flint, 'The History of Imagism', *Egoist*, 2/5, 1 May 1915, p. 71.

It had initially been Flint's idea to work with Japanese-style verse forms, and it was probably his continued insistence on the interdependence between that culture's poetry and its visual art that started Pound thinking about *nishiki-e* again three and a half years later. Flint's most interesting comments on Japanese verse are to be found in his 1908

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review of a publication put out by the Tokyo publisher Hasegawa Takejiro titled *Sword and Blossom Poems* . This offered English translations of *tanka*—traditional, thirty-one-syllable poems—accompanied by full-page reproductions of recent *nishiki-e* by artists such as Shoda Koho and Suzuki Kason. The poetry is 'completed and explained by the exquisite images on each page', says Flint, implying that one cannot be understood fully without the other. Though Flint mentioned that *tanka* experiments had taken place at Hulme's subsequent poetry-club meetings, he instead offers two shorter poems to exemplify Japanese literary aesthetics, one of which is given as follows:

A fallen petal
Flies back to its branch:
Ah! A Butterfly! [37]

[37] F. S. Flint, 'Book of the Week: Recent Verse', *New Age*, 722, 11 July 1908, p. 212.

This poem does not appear at all in the Hasegawa volume, and actually represents the *hokku*, or 'starting verse', from a longer piece by the sixteenth-century poet Arakida Moritake, rendered into English (as critic J. B. Harmer has shown) word for word from an earlier French translation by Paul-Louis Clouchard that Flint owned. [38]

[38] J. B. Harmer, *Victory in Limbo: A History of Imagism 1908–1917* (New York, 1975), 181. The French translation is in Paul-Louis Clouchard, 'Haikai: Les Epigrammes poetique du Japon', *Les Lettres* (Apr. 1906), 189–98.

Kita Yoshiko, a Japanese commentator on Imagist poetry, suggests very plausibly that Flint deliberately ignored the more traditional thirty-one-syllable arrangement because its length makes a 'plot' possible within the poem, whereas the *hokku* 'starting verse' and the later standalone *haiku* format, both consisting of seventeen syllables, are only long enough to present the dynamic juxtaposition of two visual images that the above piece exemplifies perfectly. [39]

[39] Kita Yoshiko, 'Ezra Pound and Haiku: Why did Imagists Hardly Mention Basho?', *Paideuma*, 29/1–2 (Spring and Fall 2000), 184.

Flint's comment about Japanese poetry completing and being completed by actual visual images shows a better understanding of the culture's creative processes than is normally assumed by his critics. Japanese poets often produce a *haiga*—a drawn or painted equivalent of the poem's central motif or a related concept—and then compose the poem around it, or, less frequently, add the *haiga* as an illustration after the poem has been written. It is likely that Flint knew this, for the second of his example poems is an eighteenth-century *hokku* by Yosa

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Buson, the quality of whose *haiga* painted prior to verse composition eventually made him more famous as a visual artist than as a poet. Much traditional Japanese poetry, then, may be seen to begin with direct literary *ekphrases* of visual images, whether these are merely imagined or actually set down by the poet in a concrete form. Further evidence that Flint understood the above aspect of Japanese poetics may be seen in his description of Hulme's short verses as 'little Japanese pictures', [40]

[40] Flint, Review of Pound's *Ripostes, Poetry and Drama* (Mar. 1913), 62, reproduced in Eric Homberger (ed.), *Ezra Pound: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1972), 98.

a statement that blurs the distinction between image and text in a way quite alien to European practices. In Japan, by contrast, such conflations of text and visual images were to be found widely in popular as well as in elite art forms, with *nishiki-e* more often than not produced to illustrate or to comment ironically upon poems from well-known verse anthologies, which were subsequently inscribed on the print itself. Pound's inclusion of exactly these 'little Japanese pictures' by Hulme in his own 1912 publication suggests that Pound no

longer saw such literary adaptations from East Asia as a passing fad, but as a possible future for Western poetry.

A print showing many of the above features that had arrived at the Print Room shortly before Pound's first visit may well have influenced his own first attempt at imitating Japanese verse conventions. Hokusai's *Poem by Ono no Komachi (IX)* had originally been designed as part of a series illustrating poems chosen from the most famous Japanese poetry anthology of all—the thirteenth-century *Ogura hyakunin isshu*, or 'One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets', with the 'IX' in the title of the print signifying the position of Komachi's contribution near the beginning of the collection (Fig. 31). Binyon certainly had a soft spot for Komachi, who was renowned as a great beauty of the ninth-century Imperial court, and described her in his fourth Albert Hall lecture as 'the most famous of all the poetesses of Japan'. [41]

[41] Unpublished manuscript for Binyon's 4th Albert Hall Lecture, 'Popular Art', fo. 12, BLA, vol. 30.

Probably for this reason, he had a translation of the poem on the Hokusai print made, which later became one of the small number of such translations included in his 1916 catalogue. Critic David Ewick, in his useful web resource *Japonisme, Orientalism, Modernism*, suggests that Binyon must have done the translation himself, since the far more capable scholar of East Asian languages Arthur Waley was not officially employed by the Department

Fig. 31. *Poem by Ono no Komachi* (from the *Hyakunin isshu* series), by Katsushika Hokusai, nineteenth century CE. Woodblock print. *(British Museum, London)*

of Prints and Drawings until 1913. [42]

[42] David Ewick, *Japonisme, Orientalism, Modernism: A Bibliography of Japan in English-Language Verse of the Early 20th Century*, http://themargins.net/bib/B/BB/bb08.html (accessed 3 Sept. 2006).

Again, however, new evidence from the archives of the British Museum tells quite a different story about these early renditions into English and their importance for the evolution of Modernism.

A ticket for the Hokusai print that used to form part of the obsolete, manual card index at the Print Room credits the translation to one 'Arthur Schloss'. This was in fact Waley's name before, like Ford Madox Hueffer, he changed it because of growing anti-German sentiment in London during the lead-up to the First World War. Because the Print Room registers the name of the individual officially 'on duty' in the facility every day, we can figure out when this happened to within a few days. On 6 October 1913, the Print Room attendant was 'Mr Schloss'; on 9 October it was 'Mr Waley'. The name change must have been finalized on Tuesday or Wednesday of the second week of October 1913. Given that the Komachi translation on the index card is credited

to Schloss and not to Waley, the translation must pre-date this, and it is most likely to have been completed even before his formal employment by the Museum. Before he began work at the Print Room, Waley's signature (as Schloss) may be observed with very conspicuous regularity in the register, beginning from late 1911. The aptitude for East Asian languages that he doubtless displayed during these visits was probably what allowed him to switch from visitor to employee, but even Waley's translation skills would at this early stage have been little better than rudimentary. Fortunately, however, he would have been able to call upon an accredited expert to help him. W.

B. Yeats, in his September 1912 introduction to Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* volume, records that Binyon had once pointed out 'a little dark-skinned man' during one of his own Print Room visits. 'That is the hereditary connoisseur of the Mikado,' Binyon told Yeats; 'he is the fourteenth of his family to have held the post'. [43]

[43] W. B. Yeats, Introduction to *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore (London, 1912), p. xi.

This mysterious authority could have been no other than Inada Hogitaro, whose continual appearances in the visitors' books even during the facility's official closure make him the most dedicated Print Room attendee of the first half of the twentieth century. In 1925, Inada would assist Edward Strange—holder of Binyon's equivalent position at the Victoria and Albert Museum—by translating a complex series of handwritten diary entries by the nineteenth-century printmaker Utagawa Hiroshige. [44]

[44] Edward F. Strange, *The Colour-Prints of Hiroshige* (London, 1925), ch. VIII.

A single *tanka* by Ono no Komachi would, therefore, have presented no difficulties at all. Given that the flyleaf of Binyon's 1916 *Catalogue of Japanese and Chinese Prints* expresses particular gratitude to Inada in particular for assisting with the project, it might be guessed that a great deal of the credit for the translations contained in that volume should go to him. The Waley/Inada translation of the Komachi poem, then, which incidentally does not attempt to replicate the structural elements of the original, is given as follows:

> While I have been sauntering through
> the world, looking upon its vanities, lo!
> My flower has faded and the time of the long rains come. [45]

[45] Translation on index card for Hokusai's 'Poem by Ono no Komachi', British Museum Japan Department Students' Room print index; Binyon uses the same translation, this time credited to Waley rather than Schloss, in his *Catalogue of Japanese and Chinese Woodcuts* , print number 192, p. 348. Incidentally, Donald Keene has more recently offered a translation of the same poem that attempts to find an equivalent for the *tanka* structure, though it somewhat alters the sense of the original: 'The flowers withered | Their colour faded away | While meaninglessly | I spent my days in the world | And the long rains were falling' (*Anthology of Japanese Literature from the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York 1955), 81).

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The ephemeral nature of flowers—and particularly of cherry blossoms—as a metaphor for the impermanence of life is a ubiquitous feature of Japanese poetry and visual art. The cherry-blossom season is traditionally regarded in Japan as the highlight of the year's social calendar, as the mild weather of early April allows al fresco *hanami*—'cherry-blossom viewing parties'—to be organized. This balmy, outdoor season is abruptly terminated, usually about a week into June, by the onset of heavy rains known as *tsuyu*, or 'plum rains', because of their coincidence with the plum harvests. It is to these 'long rains' that Komachi refers in her poem, seeing in the close of the *hanami* season an analogy for the brevity of youth and the inevitability of middle age. In Hokusai's illustration, the *tsuyu* have just begun, dashing the delicate petals from the tree branches onto the ground, where an old man clears them away with a broom. Pound's own short poem 'In a Station of the Metro' offers in its closing line an image strikingly similar to this contrast between the pale, fallen *hanami* petals and rain-wet cherry wood:

> The apparition of these faces in a crowd,
> Petals on a wet, black bough.

It is hardly surprising that the content of the above evokes Japan just as surely as its deliberately '*hokku*-like' form, for it was written just after Pound's return to the Print Room in September 1912. [46]

[46] Ezra Pound, 'Vorticism', *Fortnightly Review* , 1 Sept. 1914, reproduced in *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts* , ed. Zinnes (New York, 1980), 204.

Though the poem did not receive its initial publication in *Poetry* until April of the following year, Pound's covering letter to Harriet Monroe shows clearly that the original manuscript of the *Contemporania* sequence, of which 'In a Station' initially formed a part, had been completed and sent off by 13 October 1912. [47]

[47] Pound encouraged Monroe to delay publication of 'the ultra-modern, ultra-effete tenuity of Contemporania' until she had first 'used "H.D." and Aldington' (Pound to Harriet Monroe, 13 Oct. 1912 (*The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907–1941* , ed. D. D. Paige (London, 1951), 45–6.

Komachi's musings on the ephemerality of youth appear to have remained with Pound beyond his initial encounters with her at Binyon's lectures and the Print Room. Working from Ernest Fenollosa's manuscripts on East Asian literature and art a year later, [48]

[48] Fenollosa was an American Economics professor who emigrated to Japan and became a self-styled expert on Far Eastern culture; he accumulated large quantities of notes on East Asian art and literature during his stay. Fenollosa's posthumously published volume *Epochs in Chinese and Japanese Art* will be discussed fully in Chapter 9. The notes that were not used for the book—which consisted mainly in material on *Noh* and on Chinese poetry—were given to Pound by Fenollosa's widow in the autumn of 1913 (Carpenter, *A Serious Character*, 220, and Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (London, 1971), 222).

Pound chose to begin his book of Japanese *Noh* adaptations with two plays based on her life—namely, the *Sotoba Komachi* and the *Kayoi Komachi*. The Japanese critic Tsukui Nobuko finds it difficult to understand why, in the first of these pieces, Pound has effectively altered the entire basis of the narrative by cutting more than half the matter of the original and modifying what lines were left, replacing in the process the work's redemptive Buddhist focus with a far more general statement about the transient nature of physical beauty. [49]

[49] Tsukui, Nobuko *Ezra Pound and Japanese Noh Plays* (Washington, 1983), 33–9.

If it is assumed that Pound was already aware of the historical Komachi's poetic preoccupations, however, his inspiration for this rather drastic editing becomes much clearer.

There are good reasons why artworks examined in the secluded environment of the Print Room tended to impress themselves on visitors' memories far more indelibly than those hung on the walls of a busy public gallery. The only known photograph of the facility from the early twentieth century was unfortunately taken in 1914—just after its relocation to larger premises in the museum's new White Wing—but still gives valuable insights into the conditions Pound would have experienced (Fig. 32). A visitor is shown seated at a table where a print is positioned in front of him on a small wooden stand. We may appreciate from this that merely to glance—as one might at an exhibition—is not possible. The print is at eye level, and, depending on the activities of the assistants and curators in the room, it might stay there for ten minutes or more. Even at today's equivalent of the Print Room, visitors are not allowed to get up and search out items for themselves, but must request specific items from the curators and assistants on hand. This is why even Binyon worked from a desk in the midst of the facility, and the photograph shows both him and Waley attending to clerical

Fig. 32. The British Museum Print Room in 1914. ***(British Museum, London)***

duties at opposite ends of the room. Because visitors to the facility would often not have known exactly which prints to request, one of Binyon's tasks would have been to assess their interests and then make suggestions, almost in the manner of a sommelier. Then, as still today, the curator normally stays a while with the visitor after bringing the print in order to point out details or answer questions about it. Pound's viewing of prints, therefore, would not always have taken place in silence. There would often have been a running commentary from Binyon, and it is through his many lecture notes and publications on *nishiki-e* that we may get a good idea both of the prints he would have suggested and the remarks he is likely to have made on them. [50]

[50] Description of procedure based on the author's own experience of viewing prints at the Museum's Japan Department. The system for viewing prints 'unlike

most other things at the Museum...hasn't changed much since the nineteenth century', according to Timothy Clark, head of the Japan department at the time of writing (conversation with RRA, 18 Mar. 2005).

The new enthusiasm among Edwardian collectors for early *nishiki-e* means that prints by Suzuki Harunobu, the eighteenth-century inventor of the polychrome printing technique, would certainly have been

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shown to Pound. Harunobu's flat, schematic approach to the depiction of buildings, along with his preference for geometric, decorative detail rather than illusionism in the rendering of clothing, had earned him the label 'primitive' from a previous generation of Western collectors. Binyon, however, considered him 'one of the most seductive artists of Japan', and took every opportunity to introduce his works to others. [51]

[51] Laurence Binyon and J. J. O'Brien Sexton, *Japanese Colour Prints* (London, 1923), 248.

The printmaker's name is listed individually on Binyon's handbill for the 1909 lectures as one of the topics for the fourth session on 'Popular Art', and the fragmented manuscripts for these events at the British Library allow us to know what the curator said and which slides he presented. Significantly, one of the Harunobu prints used—an allegorical depiction of a woman carrying a bucket—was produced to illustrate another poem by Ono no Komachi. [52]

[52] Suzuki Harunobu, *The Poetess Ono no Komachi*, British Museum Catalogue Number 1906.12-20.39.

Binyon had again obtained a translation of this, which was included in his manuscript for the lecture. 'The verse inscribed above reads thus,' his notes say. '"In the despair of my loneliness I cry, O that the roots of this water-weed, life, were cut, and I swept away by the compelling stream."' [53]

[53] Unpublished, unnumbered manuscript for Binyon's 4th Albert Hall Lecture, 'Popular Art', BLA, vol. 30.The poem is also reproduced in Binyon's *Flight of the Dragon* (London, 1911), 18.

To this manuscript, a third Komachi translation has been added later in pencil: 'It is because we are in paradise that all things in this world hurt us. When we go out from paradise, nothing hurts, for nothing matters.' This second paraphrase was published by Binyon in his little 1911 volume *Flight of the Dragon*, so the pencil addition is likely to have been added before this date. Because the rest of the manuscript obviously pre-dates the modification, this detail supports the idea that these were indeed the manuscripts used for the Albert Hall lectures two years previously. Other pencil alterations show that the draft had been modified in order for the lecture to be given later at the museum itself. A second note next to the part about Harunobu's Komachi print, for example, reminds the curator to apologize to the audience about the poor colour reproduction in the lantern slide he is using. 'But,' it adds, 'in the gallery upstairs there is a small series of [Harunobu's] works which shows what a brilliant colourist he was.' Binyon, then, actively encouraged people at his lectures to follow them up by seeking out the original artworks, which

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may explain what Pound was doing at the Print Room during his visits just after the Albert Hall events.

Interestingly, the 'small series' of Harunobu works available via the Print Room includes further images that connect powerfully with the aesthetics of Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro'. One of Harunobu's favourite techniques is to place brightly lit human faces and white blossoms against a deep black ground of Chinese ink to suggest a nocturnal environment (Fig. 33). Binyon's remarks on one such piece

Fig. 33. ***Lovers Hunting for Insects at Night*** **, by Suzuki Harunobu, 1767–8. Woodblock print.** ***(British Museum, London)***

held at the Print Room chime uncannily with Pound's pseudo-*haiku* even down to the provocative appearance of the word ‘apparition’:

> against the black sky he loves to set the white blossoms of the cherry, perhaps illuminated from below by a lantern...the blossoms appearing so in isolation as a miracle of fugitive and motionless beauty, each perfect in its white shape...but we should not feel as we do, were not those young human forms intimately related to that apparition of beauty in the design. [54]

[54] Binyon and Sexton, *Japanese Colour Prints*, 55.

Binyon's descriptive volume *Japanese Colour Prints* , which contains the above lines, was not published until 1923. His biographer, however, argues convincingly that the book represents ‘a definitive expression’ of ideas Binyon had developed much earlier, but had been unable to express in the 1916 catalogue because of word-limit considerations. Given that the museum had acquired all but a few of the works discussed in *Japanese Colour Prints* before 1912, Binyon's remarks on any Harunobu images he may have shown Pound in that year would not have been substantially different.

Standing next to Pound as he looked at prints on the wooden stand in front of him, Binyon must have been ideally positioned to inspect the unusual jewellery the younger poet had recently begun wearing. Three months into Pound's renewed presence at the Print Room, he finished a letter to Robert Ross with the amused question, ‘have you seen Ezra Pound's turquoise ear-rings?’ [55]

[55] Letter to Robert Ross, 28 Dec. 1909, BLA, vol. 75.

Pound, for his own part, was clearly seeking something very specific during his time there. ‘Have spent the day in searches,’ he wrote to Dorothy during the first week of 1913. ‘I contemplated mediaeval Japanese prints at the B.M. and feel ages older and wiser. The Paradisal calm & *aura dolce*.’ [56]

[56] Reproduced in *Letters*, ed. Pound and Litz, 177.

Evidently Binyon's carefully assembled collection had begun to fulfil Pound's requirements.

Aldington, Ford, Pound, Fletcher, and Lowell

Rupert Richard Arrowsmith

The surge of interest in Japan among the London avant-garde a decade into the twentieth century happened amid a growing international recognition of that nation's increasing political influence. The great art historian Okakura Kakuzo often expressed his irritation around this time that it had been Japan's development of a powerful, technologically advanced military rather than its cultural achievements that had finally earned the respect of the West. ‘The average Westerner’, he wrote in 1906, ‘was wont to regard Japan as barbarous while she indulged in the gentle arts of peace: he calls her civilized since she began to commit wholesale slaughter on Manchurian battlefields’. [1]

[1] Okakura Kakuzo, *The Book of Tea* (New York, 1906), 7.

Japanese involvement in Manchuria had begun in 1894, when war had broken out with Qing China over de facto control of the Korean peninsula. The Qing regime had already been severely weakened because of the two wars waged by Britain during the mid-nineteenth century for the right to flood the Chinese market with illegal opium. Deepening societal problems related to the resultant increase in cases of opiate addiction, various other depredations by marauding European powers, and endemic corruption in local government all contributed to further declines in China's economic and military capabilities during the latter part of the century. By the 1890s, the nation was in no position to take on Japan's well-equipped naval and land forces, which soon overran the Korean border and took the Manchurian port of Lushun, known to the Western press as Port Arthur; this was ceded to Japan as part of the peace treaty with China that followed.

Fearing a threat to its own budding ambitions in the region, Russia enlisted French and German assistance in forcing a Japanese withdrawal from Manchuria in 1895, and immediately arm-twisted the beleaguered Qing government into allowing it to occupy the region instead. The year 1897 saw the Russians fortify the port at Lushun, equip it with a fleet of warships, and take steps towards including Manchuria in the vast military supply line represented by the Trans-Siberian Railway system, while encroachments onto Korean territory became increasingly common. Such overt strategic manoeuvring certainly spurred the cause of militarism in Japan; and the first years of the new century witnessed the manufacture of the country's first home-built destroyers as well as the commissioning of several larger vessels from British shipyards. These included the Vickers pre-dreadnought *Mikasa*, which in 1902 was the most advanced battleship ever built. Crucially, a mutual defence treaty was signed with Britain that same year, which effectively prevented interference from other European states when Japan finally declared war on Russia in February 1904.

The outcome of the two-year conflict that followed was a genuine eye-opener to Western powers accustomed to unquestioned military hegemony in Asia. The poet Richard Aldington remembered later that he had ‘prayed for a Japanese victory’ on hearing of the outbreak of hostilities as a schoolboy, but the majority of observers predicted that the larger-scale and greater experience of Russia's armed forces would prevail. [2]

[2] Letter to Megata Morikami, 16 May 1959, reproduced in A. Kershaw and Frédéric-Jacques Temple (eds.), *Richard Aldington, an Intimate Portrait* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Ill., 1965), 74.

By January 1905, however, Japan had reoccupied Lushun having sunk the Russian ships stationed there, and was preparing for the arrival of the Baltic Fleet, which had been obliged to sail almost 20,000 miles around Africa and South East Asia to commence hostilities. This larger squadron was conclusively dealt with by what remained of the Japanese Navy at the Battle of Tsushima, prompting the impressed British to present a lock of Lord Nelson's hair to their allies in recognition of the perceived parallels with Trafalgar.

Aldington's own response to the victory would seem to confirm Okakura Kakuzo's fear that Western recognition of a given civilization's military and cultural importance tended to occur in that order. ‘Soon after,’ he remembered, ‘I began reading Lafcadio Hearn’. [3]

[3] Ibid. 74.

Hearn, an

author who had lived in Japan from 1890 until his death in 1904, would have acquainted the young Aldington with Japanese verse types and their affinities with visual art. His most widely read publication, the 1899 essay collection *In Ghostly Japan*, notes that the

> common art principle [of Japanese poetry] is identical with the common principle of Japanese pictorial illustration. By the use of a few chosen words the composer of a short poem endeavours to do exactly what the painter endeavours to do with a few strokes

of the brush—to evoke an image or a mood—to revive a sensation or emotion. And the accomplishment of this purpose—by poet or by picturemaker—depends altogether upon capacity to suggest, and only to suggest. [4]

[4] Lafcadio Hearn, 'Bits of Poetry', in *In Ghostly Japan* (London, 1899), 313.

When in late 1912 these same concepts began to seem relevant to avant-garde practice in London, the ideal place for Aldington to have explored them would have been the Print Room at the British Museum. Interestingly, he did exactly that on 24 September, before returning for a string of three visits on the 24th, 25th, and 26th. [5]

[5] Students' Room Visitors' Book for 1912 (British Museum Prints and Drawings Archive at Blyth Road, Hammersmith).

It cannot possibly be a coincidence that Pound's reappearance at the same facility after an absence of three years occurred the following day, on the 27th. Something Aldington reported seeing—or doing—at the Print Room on those three days must have caught Pound's attention; but what?

The answer is to be found in Aldington's correspondence during the 1950s with the American poetry critic Earl Miner. In one letter, the poet says one of his earliest Imagist experiments, which was later included in the anthology *Des Imagistes* under the title 'The River', had been 'written in the B.M. Print Room on a couple of Japanese colour prints'. [6]

[6] Miner unfortunately does not give dates for any of his quoted correspondence with Aldington (Earl Miner, *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature* (Princeton 1958), 159).

Aldington provides no details on when this happened, but his signature does not appear in the Print Room register again until after the poem's initial publication in the January 1914 edition of *Poetry*; it must, therefore, have been written during one of the 1912 visits. [7]

[7] Aldington's next appearance in the Print Room did not occur until 17 Sept. 1914 (Students' Room Visitors' Book for 1914, British Museum Prints and Drawings Archive at Blyth Road, Hammersmith).

The text appeared in *Poetry* as follows:

I have drifted along this river
Until I moored my boat
By these crossed trunks.
Here the mist moves
Over fragile leaves and rushes,
Colourless waters and brown, fading hills.
You have come from beneath the trees
And move within the mist,
A floating leaf.
O blue flower of the evening,
You have touched my face
With your leaves of silver.
Love me, for I must depart. [8]

[8] *Poetry*, 3/4 (Jan. 1914), 133. The version published in *Des Imagistes* under the title 'The River' has a few small changes. It substitutes 'drifted' for 'have drifted', and 'she has come' for 'you have come'; it also splits the poem more clearly into two sections and omits all the commas from the original.

The same letter to Earl Miner also allows us to know which printmakers' works had inspired the poem. 'The landscape was certainly Hokusai's,' Aldington remembered. 'The second one I don't remember, obviously a girl, perhaps an Outamaro [Utamaro], perhaps a Toyokuni.' [9]

[9] Undated letter to Earl Miner, quoted in Miner, *The Japanese Tradition*, 159.

If—as is likely—Aldington's browsing of *nishiki-e* was undertaken in consultation with Laurence Binyon, then it is not surprising that

Katsushika Hokusai and Kitagawa Utamaro were included, for the curator thought the work of these two printmakers represented the zenith of *ukiyo-e* school achievement. 'It is in Utamaro and in Hokusai that Ukiyo-ye finds its summits,' he wrote in the conclusion to *Japanese Colour Prints*, adding that the two allowed viewers of their work to 'rise at times into an imaginative world where life is more deeply felt and its mystery more deeply apprehended'. [10]

[10] Laurence Binyon and J. J. O'Brien Sexton, *Japanese Colour Prints* (London, 1923), 190.

Aldington's landscape is easily discovered among the British Museum's collection in the form of Hokusai's *Fuji from Lake Suwa*, part of the *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* series that Binyon had been so eager to complete in 1908 (Fig. 34). [11]

[11] An alternative candidate for Aldington's first print may be found among the British Museum's edition of Hokusai's *Shokoku Meikio Kiran*, or 'Rare Views of Famous Bridges' series; in his catalogue Binyon gives the name of the individual print as *Togetsukio Bridge, the Bridge of the Reflected Moon* . The print shows a boatman drifting through a misty riverine landscape with two crossed trees growing on the near bank, but in general shows fewer correspondences with Aldington's text than the piece discussed above (Laurence Binyon, *A Catalogue of Japanese and Chinese Woodcuts Preserved in the Sub-Department of Oriental Prints and Drawings in the British Museum* (London, 1916), 154).

The composition has a pair of crossed trees on a headland in

Fig. 34. *Fuji from Lake Suwa* (from the *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* series), by Katsushika Hokusai, 1823–9. Woodblock print. *(British Museum, London)*

the middle, with a boat to one side on a still expanse of water. It also highlights an interesting bit of *ekphrasis* in Aldington's poem. The British Museum's copy of the print is quite faded, and the lake is coloured blue only around the edges, with the majority of the water surface represented by white, uninked paper. Aldington's line about 'colourless waters' is, then, an amusingly literal description of the artwork's physical state. Such fading and colour alteration in *nishiki-e* is usually the result of exposure to excessive light and moisture. The early twentieth-century wave of interest in Japan meant that the British Museum's prints were in greater demand than ever before, increasing the chances of such damage occurring to them. Binyon addressed his concerns over this to the director of the museum in the same month that

Aldington and Pound began to explore the collection in earnest. 'The mounting of the Japanese prints has been entirely neglected for over two years,' wrote Binyon in an official memorandum. 'Yet they are asked for every day by the students.' [12]

[12] Binyon, memo to Frederic Kenyon, Sept. 1912, Binyon Loan Archive, British Library Manuscript Collection (BLA), vol. 9.

The Print Room was home in 1912 to many *bijinga*, or 'images of beautiful women', but the collection of colours, forms, and inferences in the last part of Aldington's poem suggests that he may have examined some of the more risqué items under Binyon's care. During his long career, Utamaro created a number of examples of *shunga*, meaning 'spring pictures'—a well-known euphemism in Japan for erotic images. The first of these, a printed book known as the *Utamakura*, or 'Pillow Poem', was published in 1788. Despite the extremely high quality of this volume, Binyon preferred not to include the British Museum's copy in his 1916 catalogue, almost certainly on the grounds

that its frank treatment of sexual motifs would have contravened Edwardian mores. The most famous of these illustrations shows a man making love with a woman wearing a midnight blue kimono patterned with stylized autumn leaves in silver and bronze, while the actual leaves of a houseplant provide background detail (Fig. 35). 'You have touched my face | With your leaves of silver,' Aldington says in 'The River', and in Utamaro's composition the woman reaches up to hold her lover's visage between her small hands. This print, like all *shunga* and the majority of *bijinga* in general, probably depicts a courtesan from the Yoshiwara pleasure district of Edo with one of her regular clients. The furtive nature of sexual intercourse under such circumstances is hinted at by the suggestive poem that Utamaro has used to adorn the lover's fan. 'Its beak caught firmly | In the clam shell,' the verse reads. 'The snipe cannot | Fly away | Of an autumn evening.' [13]

[13] *Hamaguri ni | Hashi o shika to | Hasamarete | Shigi tachikanuru | Aki no yugure* (translation from L. Smith, V. Harris, and T. Clark, *Japanese Art: Masterpieces in the British Museum* (London, 1990), 230, no. 227).

Aldington's closing demand—to 'love me, for I must depart'—communicates a comparable atmosphere of sexual urgency.

Another reason for the increased awareness in London of Japan as a cultural and industrial power was the enormous publicity event organized in the city by the Japanese government in 1910. This was the Japan–British Exhibition, which occupied the entire White City

Fig. 35. *Lovers in an Upstairs Room* (from the *Utamakura* series), by Kitagawa Utamaro, 1788. Woodblock print. *(British Museum, London)*

show ground in Shepherd's Bush from May to October of that year. 'The space occupied by the exhibits will be 242,700 square feet [22,547.5 square metres],' noted *The Times*, while the *Daily Express* observed dryly that 'the Japanese Government plans an exhibition in the same painstaking, conscientious manner that it plans a war'. [14]

[14] 'From our Tokio Correspondent'. *The Times*, 30 Oct. 1909. Percival Philips, 'First Day at the Bushido', *Daily Express*, 16 May 1910. The *Pall Mall Gazette* also made use of military metaphors in its interesting description of the exhibition's construction: 'Towering ramparts of crates and packing cases, bearing the outward and visible signs of their Far Eastern land of origin, and rendered more and more formidable by continual reinforcements from the docks, in the shape of serried row upon row of skeleton show cases ('Japan in London', 8 Mar. 1910).

The grounds of the site were rapidly altered to resemble a Japanese landscape of the type familiar to fans of *nishiki-e*, even incorporating a turbine-powered waterfall and an artificial lake with two islands. The gardens were arranged by the renowned Eida landscapists, Tassa and Minoru, who 'spent days selecting plants of the right shades of green and placing them with the same care that a painter chooses his colours'. [15]

[15] Percival Phillips in the *Daily Express*, 16 May 1910. Phillips actually gives the gardener's name as Subiro Eida, but this is almost certainly a mistake. Eida Tassa and his son Minoru were in Ireland from 1906 to early 1910 designing the large Japanese garden at Tully in County Kildare. It is likely that the pair collaborated on the Japan–Britain Exhibition after the completion of the Tully project. The Eidas had been brought in from Japan by the millionaire racehorse-owner Col. William Hall-Walker (later Lord Wavetree), whose whimsical desire for a Japanese garden in Kildare led to the draining of a large bog so that one could be constructed complete with a teak geisha-house.

A near

life-size model of the great gate at Nishi Honganji Buddhist temple in Kyoto was also built, along with two tall pagodas, a functioning tea-house, and several other large replicas of traditional Japanese architecture from various periods.

Rather than borrowing artworks from museums in Europe, the organizers of the exhibition shipped a world-class selection of paintings, sculpture, and prints all the way from Japan, and it was this part of the exhibition that drew the attention of London's intelligentsia. 'The exhibition of Japanese pictures now to be seen at Shepherd's Bush may possibly have a greater effect upon English painting than any exhibition that has been held in the memory of man,' an impressed journalist for *The Times* remarked. [16]

[16] Anon., 'Japanese Pictures at the Japan–British Exhibition', *The Times*, 16 May 1910.

As the city's leading specialist in East Asian art, Laurence Binyon was placed in charge of the display arrangements for the exhibition, and must have spent a great deal of time at White City during early 1910. In April, the American industrialist and art collector Charles Lang Freer wrote to Binyon expressing concern that he might find himself overworked in dealing with 'the very important group to be shown at Shepherd's Bush' [17]

[17] Letter from Charles Freer, 10 Apr. 1910, BLA, vol. 4.

on top of his regular duties at the Print Room. Despite the work pressure, however, Binyon found time to write an article for the *Saturday Review* encouraging everyone to attend the Japan–British Exhibition. 'I wonder if the English public appreciates the extraordinary compliment which Japan has paid it?' it says. 'How many English collectors are there who would be willing to send their very choicest Reynoldses and Gainsboroughs and Turners to Japan? Yet Japanese collectors have sent us treasures quite beyond price.' The article mentions in passing that other exhibitions of East Asian artworks were also due to open their doors that summer, including—significantly—the 1910–12 show of Chinese and Japanese paintings at the British Museum. 'None of these', Binyon advises, 'can have the unique interest of the Exhibition at Shepherd's Bush'. [18]

[18] Laurence Binyon, 'Japanese Masterpieces in London', *Saturday Review* , 28 May 1910.

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Ford Madox Ford agreed with Binyon's assessment of the Japan–British Exhibition to the extent that he visited it several times. He must have been looking forward to it, because he even went to the grand opening on 14 May, but he did not find an opportunity to write about it until three years later. By that time Pound's articles on Imagism, with their references to the 'very old, very quiet civilization' of Japan, [19]

[19] Ezra Pound, 'How I Began', *T.P.'s Weekly* (London), 6 June 1917, p. 707.

had been appearing all summer, and in the autumn Ford decided to publish his own thoughts on the creation of 'a picture in verse'. [20]

[20] Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford Madox Ford), 'The Poet's Eye', *New Freewoman* , 1/6, Monday, 1 Sept. 1913, p. 109.

Pound normally gave his own 'In a Station of the Metro' as an illustration of Imagist aesthetics, and it is fascinating to see how closely Ford's own example chimes with it:

> [I] came out in a great square of white buildings all outlined in white light. There were crowds and crowds of people—or no, there was spread out beneath the lights, an infinitely moving mass of black, with white faces lifted up to the light, moving slowly, quickly, not moving at all, being obscured, reappearing... [21]
>
> [21] Ibid. 108.

The scene described, as the article makes clear, is that of the 1910 Japan–British Exhibition on a spring evening. Pound's articles had already suggested that an emotional element should be present in the 'complex' of a successful Imagist piece, and Ford says here, 'to put a personal confession on record', that the exhibition had given him 'the very strongest emotion—at any rate of this class—that I have ever had'. In Ford's 'picture', just as in Pound's, there is a crowd of white faces against a black background, the implication of an urban context, and a decidedly Japanese context. Percival Philips, a journalist with the *Daily Express*, was also present on the exhibition's opening night. His more conventional description helps to clarify what had produced the ambience that Ford had tried to capture:

> When countless electric lamps were lit at dusk, and the White City became a fairy city, open spaces as well as pavilions were full...the visitor who wanders about after nightfall among three-hundred-year-old trees, and up and down rocky paths dimly lighted by lanterns, might well imagine himself in the heart of Japan...The gardens are symphonies in light and shadow. [22]
>
> [22] Percival Philips, *Daily Express*, 16 May 1910. The *Official Guide* to the exhibition offers a similar picture: 'The Japanese Gardens and Tea Houses are aglow, making an enchanting spectacle—a fairyland of sparkle and colour...the buildings all around are outlined with electric lamps...by the whole

the imagination is stirred with wonder and admiration...The Japanese gardens are, if anything, more poetical than ever, under the spell of their quaint and fanciful lanterns. There is a glamour about Japan at night that cannot be explained' (*Japan–British Exhibition, Shepherd's Bush, London, 1910 —Official Guide* (London, 1910), 104–5).

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Pound's departure for Italy on 22 March meant that he missed the opening of the Japan–British as well as that of the smaller exhibition of Chinese and Japanese paintings at the British Museum. He did, however, return to London for a period before embarking for New York in June, and might—just perhaps—have gone along to this White City event that had so impressed both Ford and Binyon. Even if he had not listened to the recommendations of these two friends, he would have received countless reminders of the show's presence near his lodgings via the extensive publicity campaign that had been launched to promote it.

Advertising posters for the Japan–British Exhibition were a very common sight around London during 1910, and their particularly dense concentration in Tube stations and carriages may provide an additional clue to the way 'In a Station of the Metro' was conceived. The distance of Pound's rooms at Church Walk in Kensington from the Reading Room of the British Museum means that, on days when time was limited or the weather was bad, he undoubtedly would have used the train instead of walking. He was certainly doing so by August 1912, when he gleefully reported to the pianist Margaret Cravens that the strike action then disrupting the network had 'carefully avoided the lines I wished to use'. [23]

[23] Pound to Cravens, 22 Aug. 1912, *Ezra Pound and Margaret Cravens: A Tragic Friendship* , ed. Omar Pound and Robert Spoo (Durham, NC, and London, 1985), 85.

It is often forgotten that, between 1900 and 1933, the British Museum had its own underground station on the Central Line, which would have brought the poet within a few yards of the gates. By changing trains at Notting Hill, Pound could have travelled to the museum straight from High Street Kensington station, just a few minutes' walk from his home. Unfortunately, however, as Tube historian Clive Feather has kindly pointed out, the Central Line was at that time the property of a rival company to the District Railway, which incorporated the station at South Kensington. This would have meant two things for Pound. In the first place, he would have had to pay twice, as there was no combined ticket that covered both lines. Secondly, he would have had to go up to street level at Notting Hill, cross the road, and then access the Central Line station from the opposite side because no tunnel existed between the two separate stations. These factors

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make it very likely that he would have cut out the District altogether and walked up to Notting Hill, about a ten-minute stroll from Church Walk, from where he could have ridden the Central Line directly to the museum. [24]

[24] Clive Feather, letter to RRA, 3 Aug. 2006. Alternatively—as Feather indicates—Pound could have taken the District Railway in the other direction to South Kensington, changing there by connecting tunnel to the new Piccadilly Railway (inaugurated in 1908); this line was owned by the same company as the District and thus the journey would have required only one ticket purchase from the poet. The Piccadilly Railway would have brought him to Holborn, just a short walk from the museum.

If he had boarded a train headed in the opposite direction instead, he would have reached the White City exhibition ground in three stops —a journey of less than ten minutes. Fig. 36 shows one of the advertising posters designed to be pasted onto the walls of Central Line train carriages. It features an interesting hybrid rendition of a *ukiyo-e* scene done by an artist trained in the European academic style, which even features a somewhat Baroque-looking Mount Fuji in the background. The device, familiar by now from Hokusai and Hiroshige, of framing the scene with cherry blossoms, is also translated into a Western idiom. The instruction, written underneath, to 'book to Wood Lane' is a reminder that the exhibition was accessed via an enclosed, windowless walkway leading directly from that station's platform. [25]

[25] Wood Lane station was closed in 1947 because of a decline in the use of White City as an exhibition ground.

Bays at the sides of this featured costumed Japanese actors acting out significant historical episodes, effectively eliminating the distinction between exhibition space and railway tunnel.

The popularity of the Japan–British Exhibition, and the fact that it attracted a large complement of London's avant-garde, ensured that Japan remained extremely fashionable in its aftermath. Records of ticket sales show that it attracted almost eight and a half million visitors over its lifespan, making it the largest event of its kind ever held in London—even Prince Albert's famous Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 had pulled in only six million. Aside from the main objective of promoting Japan's image as a cultural and industrial centre as well as an emerging colonial power, the exhibition needed to make money, and many of the visitors had come to enjoy fairground-style attractions rather than fine art. Early mechanized rides such as the 'Flip-flap' and the 'Wiggle-woggle', both originally constructed for the Franco-British show two years previously, were dusted off to charm money out of less discriminating visitors. [26]

[26] *Japan–British Exhibition, Shepherd's Bush, London, 1910—Official Guide* , 19, 44.

Sales

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Fig. 36. Poster advertising the 1910 Japan–British Exhibition. ***(Private collection, London)***

of Japanese clothing and handicrafts accounted for a larger section of the takings, and *The Times* noted that £60,000 in sales of such items had been recorded by the end of the season.[27]

[27] 'Exhibition's Value for Trade', *The Times*, 2 Nov. 1910.

One effect of this was that the kimono became a hot item of high fashion in London, with the Japanese government's chief official at the exhibition reporting that orders for

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authentic examples had 'increased enormously' in the wake of the exhibition.[28]

[28] Wada Hikojiro, Commissioner General of the Imperial Japanese Government to the Exhibition, quoted in 'Exhibition's Value for Trade', *The Times*, 2 Nov. 1910.

One of these was bought by the author Katherine Mansfield, the future model for Gudrun Brangwen in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* and one of the most stylish women in the capital, who afterwards became prone to dressing up her characters in such garments. 'I wore a blue kimono embroidered with white birds and my hair was still wet,' the 'Mansfield character' Mouse tells us in the 1918 short story 'Je Ne Parle Pas Français'; 'it lay on my forehead, wet and gleaming.' Such factors ensured that Japanese aesthetics remained on the cutting edge of culture in London during a crucial period in the formation of Western Modernism, and opened the way for the capital's poets and artists to approach the colossal heritage of the culture that stood behind them—China.

John Gould Fletcher, an often overlooked figure associated with the Imagist movement, was another poet who began to use Far Eastern visuals for their modish qualities around 1912. 'Oriental art', he says in his autobiography, had been used 'to furnish subjects and to

govern treatment, for all my poems, without exception, since my writing of *Irradiations*'.[29]

[29] John Gould Fletcher, *Life is my Song: The Autobiography of John Gould Fletcher* (New York and Toronto, 1937), 124.

This was the title of Fletcher's first volume of poetry, a Symbolist-influenced collection completed in 1912 not long before his first meeting with Pound in a Paris café. It is difficult to perceive references to particular exhibits or even to identifiable styles of East Asian art in these early poems, however; Fletcher instead uses vague, generic imagery such as peonies and jade furnishings to enrich their texture without specifying a clear context for such inclusions. His first poem to incorporate a coherent landscape of unequivocally East Asian character appears in the 'Symphony in Blue', which was the result of a full day's writing on 31 January 1914:

On the left hand there is a temple
And a palace on the right-hand side.
Foot-passengers in scarlet
Pass over the glittering tide.
Under the bridge
The old river flows
Low and monotonous
Day after day.

The musical-sounding title, Fletcher tells us, was added after he returned that same evening from a performance of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*—a 'Song Symphony' based on a German translation of poetry by Li Bai, probably the greatest poet of China's T'ang Dynasty.[30]

[30] Fletcher describes Mahler's piece as 'settings of Chinese lyrics for chorus, soloists and orchestra' (*Life is my Song*, 127–8). The composition date given by Fletcher is corroborated by a typed final draft of the poem in the archives of Harvard College. The manuscript carries the date 31 Jan. 1914 (Amy Lowell Collection of Manuscripts, Houghton Library (Call No. MS Lowell 20, Container No. 45)).

Symphony in Blue and Pink is also the title of a painting by Whistler that was inspired by kimono-wearing women in the prints of Utamaro, however, and Fletcher's urban motif of figures crossing a footbridge is more reminiscent of simple compositions by Hokusai and Hiroshige than it is of the great Daoist poet's complex and allusive imagery.

Fletcher certainly used the prints of Hiroshige for his 'Symphony in White'—again also the title of a Whistler painting—which was composed a few months later. He remembered later that the winter landscape at the centre of this new poem 'came by contemplation of some snow scene prints by Hiroshige'.[31]

[31] Fletcher, *Life is my Song*, 145. Fletcher also mentions that he bought some snow prints at some point to decorate the room of his mistress.

Given that Fletcher 'saw a great deal of' Ezra Pound throughout 1913, it would be tempting to think that his initial contact with such works had occurred at the British Museum on the recommendation of the other poet, but unfortunately this would have been impossible. As Pound himself complained to Dorothy Shakepear on 17 September 1913, 'the Print Room B.M. is closed forever'.[32]

[32] Letter to Dorothy, 17 Sept. 1913, reproduced in *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear: Their Letters 1909–1914*, ed. Omar Pound and A. Walton Litz (London, 1985), 256.

Sure enough, a note in the register for 6 September confirms that the facility had shut its doors on that date 'owing to the department having transferred to new quarters'.[33]

[33] Handwritten, unsigned note dated 6 Sept. 1913, Students' Room Visitors' Book for 1913 (British Museum Prints and Drawings Archive at Blyth Road, Hammersmith).

As a result mainly of Binyon's proclivity for hoarding *nishiki-e*, the existing students' room had become too small, and its collections were being shifted to a larger space in the museum's newly completed White Wing.[34]

[34] David M. Wilson, *The British Museum: A History* (London, 2002), 232.

'That print-room is closed INDEFINITELY—while they move into the new wing of the museo—which means, I should think, six months,' Pound reiterated

to Dorothy five days after his original announcement. [35]

[35] Letter to Dorothy, 23 Sept.1913, reproduced in *Letters*, ed. Pound and Walton Litz, 259.

Though access to the facility had officially been suspended, however, the Print Room continued to be attended by small groups of four or five privileged individuals a day. These usually included Inada Hogitaro, Arthur Morrison, and the illustrator Edmund Dulac, all of whom were members of an older generation and long-term Print Room regulars. Pound's estimate of a six-month closure turned out to have been optimistic, and the Print Room did not open again until the following May. Back in September, the poet had not wasted any time in looking for a new place to view *nishiki-e*, however, and had written straight back to Dorothy asking, 'is there anything at the S. Kensington?' [36]

[36] Letter to Dorothy, 17 Sept. 1913, reproduced in ibid. 256.

As if on cue, the Victoria and Albert Museum was beginning that very autumn to prepare for 'an important loan exhibition of Japanese Colour-Prints'. [37]

[37] Cecil H. Smith (Director and Secretary of the Victoria and Albert Museum), *Board of Education Report for the Year 1913 on The Victoria and Albert Museum and the Bethnal Green Museum* (London, 1914), 4.

'The contents of rooms 71–73 were withdrawn in order to make space for the exhibition of Japanese Colour Prints lent by Mr R. Leicester Harmsworth, MP,' wrote Sir Cecil Smith, the museum's director in his annual report to the Board of Education. [38]

[38] Ibid. 15.

The show was originally supposed to open in November 1913, but problems in freeing up enough gallery space meant it was delayed until the beginning of December. [39]

[39] The Official Guide to the exhibition is printed with the chronology 'November 1913 to March 1914' on the cover and flyleaf (*Japanese Colour-Prints Lent by R. Leicester Harmsworth, Esq., MP* (London, 1913). The revised opening date is recorded in Cecil H. Smith (Director and Secretary of the Victoria and Albert Museum), *Board of Education Report for the Year 1914 on The Victoria and Albert Museum and the Bethnal Green Museum* (London, 1914), 15.

In selecting 354 prints from Harmsworth's collection, Edward F. Strange—Laurence Binyon's equivalent at the V—was under instruction from the museum's trustees to include only 'rare or exceptionally fine impressions' rather than the better-known images that would doubtless already be familiar to most *nishiki-e* enthusiasts in London. [40]

[40] Introductory note by Sir Cecil Smith, *Japanese Colour-Prints*, 3.

A note in the exhibition guide from the museum's director strongly encouraged attendees to extend their visit by going into the V&A's own Print Room to see the permanent

collection. Items from this could 'be seen on application in the Students' Room...at any time when the Museum is open, except on Sundays.' The show was actually arranged so that the sequence of galleries ended at the door of this facility, which was far easier to enter than its equivalent at the British Museum—you could get in without membership or references just by signing the register at the door. Probably the only negative effect of the V&A's more laissez-faire attitude towards students' room visitors, however, has been that the registers have not survived, making it impossible to know exactly who went to the facility and when. [41]

[41] Kiri Ross-Jones (V&A Central Archive), letter to RRA, 21 Aug. 2006.

There can be no doubt that Pound visited the museum from time to time and approved of its exhibits, though he detested its architecture. 'The utter condemnation of British society', he ranted in a magazine article after the war, 'might be found in the fact that uncountable excellent things are housed in a horror like the Victoria and Albert'. [42]

[42] 'The Curse', in *Apple (of Beauty and Discord)*, Jan. 1920, p. 22, reprinted in *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts*, ed. Harriet Zinnes (New York, 1980), 158.

In late 1913, Dorothy must have looked into the possibility of replacing the British Museum Print Room with the one at the V&A, for she wrote to him about the Harmsworth exhibition three days before its opening. 'There is said to be a marvellous collection of Jap. prints at S. Kensington Museum now,' her letter says; 'a Loan Exh: & worth seeing'. [43]

[43] Letter to Pound, 3 Dec. 1913, reproduced in *Letters*, ed. Pound and Walton Litz, 286.

That looking at *nishiki-e* had begun to be an activity the couple enjoyed together rather than individually was just beginning to be acknowledged by Pound. On 7 January, in a letter suggesting an afternoon rendezvous, their presence on the itinerary is conspicuous: 'we could go out (?) to lunch & some prints or something afterward.' [44]

[44] Letter to Dorothy, 7 Jan. 1914, reproduced in ibid. 297.

With the British Museum Print Room in full swing again by the summer of 1915, Pound's signature may be found next to Dorothy's in the register on 28 July, quite far down the list of arrivals: clearly on that day lunch had again taken precedence over art. [45]

[45] Entry for 28 July, Students' Room Visitors' Book for 1915 (British Museum Prints and Drawings Archive at Blyth Road, Hammersmith).

Richard Aldington, now married to HD, was another poet who had begun viewing prints as a family affair. His name may be found together with that of one ‘Hilda Aldington’ in the registers for the previous

autumn. [46]

[46] Entry for 17 Sept., ibid.

In 1913 and early 1914, however, with the Print Room at the British Museum still out of bounds, the only place where such viewings could have taken place was the V&A. It seems that John Gould Fletcher had also reached this conclusion.

Back, then, to Fletcher's ‘White Symphony’, which seems to have received its initial inspiration from the walls of the Harmsworth exhibition. An outstanding selection of exactly the snow scenes by Hiroshige that have been mentioned in connection with this poem were displayed together in the final gallery of the show near the door to the students' room. The seven exhibits included one of the printmaker's acknowledged masterworks, the rare triptych *Kisoji no yamakawa*, or ‘Mountain Streams of the Kiso Road’. [47]

[47] Number 322 in the Exhibition Guide (*Japanese Colour-Prints*, 41).

This striking image of cobalt melt-water running through glacial hills fits nicely with Fletcher's lines ‘Through thin blue crevasses, | Trickles an icy stream’. Two other works also seem to be relevant: the fairly well-known *Kambara in Snow*, [48]

[48] Number 326 in the Exhibition Guide. There is an additional copy of the Kambara print in the V&A's permanent collection, which would have been available via the students' room (V&A Catalogue No. E.3724-1886).

which depicts snowbound houses (Fig. 37); and a seldom-seen work from the *Wakan roeishu* (a series illustrating another one of the standard Japanese anthologies of poetry) showing grey dwellings in a frozen valley. [49]

[49] Number 324 in the Exhibition Guide.

A combination of these two, perhaps, gives Fletcher ‘Under their heaped snow eaves, | Leaden houses shiver’; while ‘Icicle-like trees fret | Faintly rose-touched sky’ fits well with the rare *Benten Shrine in a Snowstorm* from Hokusai's *Settsu gekka*, or ‘Snow, Moon and Flowers Series—an image of the rising sun glowing behind frost-covered trees. [50]

[50] Number 327 in the Exhibition Guide.

One of the most interesting things about the ‘White Symphony’, though, is Fletcher's rather corny attempt at an Aldington-style reference to the physical characteristics of these prints. ‘O that the white scroll of heaven might be rolled up,’ it says, reminding the reader that *nishiki-e* were originally intended to imitate traditional hanging scrolls that could be rolled into a hollow tube for storage. Regrettably Fletcher was not the last poet associated with Imagism to attempt this style of reflexive joke; we shall be obliged to put up with one more example from Amy Lowell below.

Fig. 37. *Kambara in Snow* (from the *Fifty-Three Stations on the Tokaido Road* series), by Utagawa Hiroshige, 1833–4. *(British Museum, London)*

Fletcher soon became so dependent on *nishiki-e* to provide imagery for his poetry that he even gave the title *Japanese Prints* to a subsequent collection of short, *tanka*-like poems that he called 'epigrams'. Although he was unable to publish this until 1916, most of the verses had been written during a single week in February of the previous year. Fletcher, back in his native USA, had been to the Chicago Art Institute for an important exhibition of prints formerly owned by Clarence Buckingham, a trustee of the gallery who had recently died. [51]

[51] *Catalogue of a Memorial Exhibition of Japanese Color Prints from the Collection of the Late Clarence Buckingham with Notes and an Introduction by William Gookin* (Chicago, 1913), introduction (pages not numbered).

He 'wrote no less than fifty epigrams' during a series of visits to the show, working directly from the images on display. 'I concentrated exclusively on the earlier specimens of ukiyoye art,' he noted later. 'I left out of my survey the later masterpieces of both Hokusai and Hiroshige.' [52]

[52] Fletcher, *Life is my Song*, 203.

Fletcher had clearly realized that *nishiki-e* aficionados now considered the so-called primitive work of the eighteenth century to be the most fashionable, and possibly regretted his earlier reliance on exactly the two printmakers

he now sought to ignore. When the poet finally put together his *Japanese Prints* volume, however, he added 'sixteen earlier epigrams dating from bygone years, extracted from my notebooks' to the fifty pieces drafted in Chicago. [53]

[53] Fletcher, *Life is my Song*, 203.

Given that his time between leaving London and attending the Chicago exhibition had mainly been spent in his native Arkansas—a region not greatly renowned for its gallery culture—these 'epigrams dating from bygone years' could only have been written during Fletcher's time in London.

One poem that is unlikely to have been composed as late as 1915 for reasons of imagery is 'Disappointment'. 'Rain rattles on the pavement, | Puddles stand on the bluish stones' runs the verse, which is addressed to an imaginary lost love in the Yoshiwara pleasure district; 'Alas the torn lantern of my hope | Trembles and sputters in the rain.' Rainfall was not a popular motif in eighteenth-century *ukiyo-e* printmaking, and in fact did not find an adequate method of representation until Hiroshige's straight-ruled and occasionally crosshatched lines began to feature in some of the nineteenth-century street scenes favoured by the artist. Since Fletcher was deliberately staying away from such 'later masterpieces' at the Chicago exhibition, 'Disappointment' must have been written at an earlier date when his fascination for Hiroshige still held sway. There were a few rain prints on display at the V&A's Harmsworth exhibition, but one offering a visual equivalent for 'Disappointment' does not appear until the collection available via the students' room is sifted through. In 1911, the museum had acquired an extremely rare print called 'Night Rain on the Sumida River', which had been issued by Hiroshige only in *uchiwa-e* format, meaning it was printed onto a fan-shaped page. It shows the artist's trademark linear rainfall battering down onto a guttering paper lantern held by a maid awaiting her mistress—a courtesan who approaches from a nearby building, tying her sash as she walks. Underfoot, Fletcher's 'bluish stones' are clearly visible. As no other impression of 'Night Rain on the Sumida River' was available in the West at the time, Fletcher must have examined this in the students' room at the V&A after he had finished looking at the snow prints hanging in the gallery outside.

Amy Lowell was the next figure associated with Imagism to climb onto the *nishiki-e* bandwagon. Lowell first came to London from her native New England in June 1913, and quickly formed an alliance with

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Fletcher that she would call upon when she squabbled with Ezra Pound over leadership of the Imagist movement a year later. Fletcher was initially very pleased to have made a positive impression on the wealthy and influential Lowell, who would soon arrange publication for many of his poetry collections including *Japanese Prints*. He soon began to suspect, however, that the new style she had developed while in London was based rather too closely upon his own, especially with regard to the use of nebulous Far Eastern details woven into the fabric of metropolitan scenes that were in all other respects entirely Western in character. 'Flights of rose, layers of vermillion,' Lowell had recited to him, 'The spotted gold of tiger-lily petals, | The loud pink of bursting hydrangeas.' Fletcher considered these lines to be uncomfortably similar to his own 'In the garden of my soul | The crimson peonies explode' and, 'Amid the vermillion pavilions, against the jade balustrades'. [54]

[54] Ibid. 106.

Perhaps justifiably, Pound had already dismissed the latter line as 'obvious, and therefore cheap', but this did not prevent Fletcher from feeling somewhat plagiarized by his more recent American acquaintance. [55]

[55] Ibid. 75.

By the time she went back over the Atlantic, Lowell had evidently become aware of the intimate connections between Japanese prints and Imagist poetry. The first references to *nishiki-e* appear in the collection *Sword Blades and Poppy Seeds* , which was published by Houghton and Mifflin shortly before her second visit to London in July 1914. [56]

[56] Ibid. 215. The visit lasted from 3 July 1914 (p. 228) to the end of August 1914 (p. 251).

'Old lichened halls' runs a poem ostensibly on the subject of medieval tapestries; 'sun-shaded by huge cedar trees | The layered branches horizontal stretched, like Japanese | Dark-banded prints...'. Critic Earl Miner, in his general study of the Japanese influence on Western literature, suggests that the phrase 'dark banded prints' refers to the border strips sometimes added to the edges of such works to make them look like expensive, hand-painted *kakemono* (hanging scrolls). This is an inventive interpretation of an obscure line, but it falls short of making sense. For one thing, such borders are often made of silk or patterned paper that is lighter in tone than the print itself. For another, the oblong frame of a standard print can hardly be said to match Lowell's correlate image of a cedar with 'layered branches horizontal stretched'. If the work Lowell was referring to was not a standard print but one in *uchiwa-e* format such as Hiroshige's *Night Rain on the*

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Sumida River, however, her simile suddenly begins to seem very appropriate. *Uchiwa-e* were designed actually to be made into fans for use during Japan's humid summer, and were glued to frames of split bamboo for that purpose. [57]

[57] Technically, two fan-print formats existed in *ukiyo-e* printmaking. The *uchiwa* is a flat, simple fan with a fixed, paddle design; its manufacture requires prints of this format to be almost square, but with a bite-shaped space at the bottom. A second format, still rarer than *uchiwa-e*, was designed rather to be made into the more complex *ogi*, or folding fan; this requires a longer, crescent-shaped work from the printmaker. In terms of the fans themselves, the *uchiwa* was used widely until the fifteenth century, after which the *ogi* became fashionable. In the nineteenth century, however, the *uchiwa* made a comeback, which explains the comparative scarcity of *ogi* illustrated by later *ukiyo-e* printmakers such as Hiroshige.

Many of the fan-prints acquired by Western museums had already been mounted in this way, and the wooden framework had to be removed before they could be exhibited as artworks. This left on them a pattern of straight shadow lines that connects well with Lowell's image of a branching tree. The fact that *uchiwa-e* were intended for daily use meant that most were thrown away after they had become damaged or soiled, and so far fewer prints in this format survived into the twentieth century. Before the First World War, no collection could boast a significant number of them except the V&A. 'It is pleasant to be able to record', Edward Strange noted in his 1925 book on Hiroshige, 'that no fewer than 130 [*uchiwa-e*] have been acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum, so that visitors to London have there, at all events, an opportunity of studying a representative collection of a phase of Hiroshige's work which merits far more attention than it has yet received'. [58]

[58] Edward F. Strange, *The Colour-Prints of Hiroshige* (London, 1925), Chapter IX.

Amy Lowell appears to have done exactly that in 1913, almost certainly in the company of John Gould Fletcher.

Following the pattern already set by Fletcher, Lowell's subsequent poetry went from generic uses of East Asian imagery such as the ones

described above, to direct and unambiguous descriptions of particular *nishiki-e*. Unlike her friend, however, Lowell would always remain loyal to Utagawa Hiroshige as her artist of choice. Her 1916 poem 'Afternoon Rain in State Street' strongly suggests the printmaker's trademark style of depicting rainfall:

Cross hatchings of rain against gray walls
Slant lines of black rain
In front of the up and down, wet stone sides of buildings.

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Although Lowell had probably first come across examples of this technique in London, she would have been able to see more at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. By 1915 this was home to several of Hiroshige's rain prints including the mass-produced *Night Rain at Karasaki*, and the equally well-known *Shono: Driving Rain*. Aside from the one stylistic feature, though, 'Afternoon Rain in State Street' contains no further references to such works, and Lowell's use of the ruled lines seems intended merely to add texture to an otherwise local scene. The year after the publication of Fletcher's *Japanese Prints*, she submitted a collection entitled *Lacquer Prints* to *Poetry* magazine.[59]

[59] *Poetry*, 9 (Mar. 1917), 302–7.

Like the 'epigrams' produced by Fletcher at the Chicago Art Institute, these new pieces are systematic ekphrases of prints in the MFA collection that are extremely easy to track down. Take 'Road to the Yoshiwara', for example:

Coming to you along the Nihon Embankment
Suddenly the road was darkened
By a flock of wild geese
Crossing the moon.

Critic David Ewick has said that the visual details of this 'are perfectly selected to remind of *hokku*', but it is actually an economically written description of Hiroshige's *Nihon Embankment, Yoshiwara*—the final image in his *Hundred Views of Edo* series.[60]

[60] David Ewick, *Japonisme, Orientalism, Modernism: A Bibliography of Japan in English-Language Verse of the Early 20th Century*, http://themargins.net/bib/B/BI/bi08.html (22 Aug. 2006).

The title is a huge clue in itself, and the print contains all the requisite elements—an embankment, darkness, geese against the moon. Lowell's 'Ox Street, Takanawa' provides an even clearer example:

What is a rainbow
Have I not seen the colours and shape
Duplicated in the melon slices
Lying beside an empty cart?

Hiroshige's own *Ox Street in the Takanawa District* in the MFA collection includes every one of the above visual elements, even down to the central conceit of comparing a rainbow with a piece of melon (Fig. 38).

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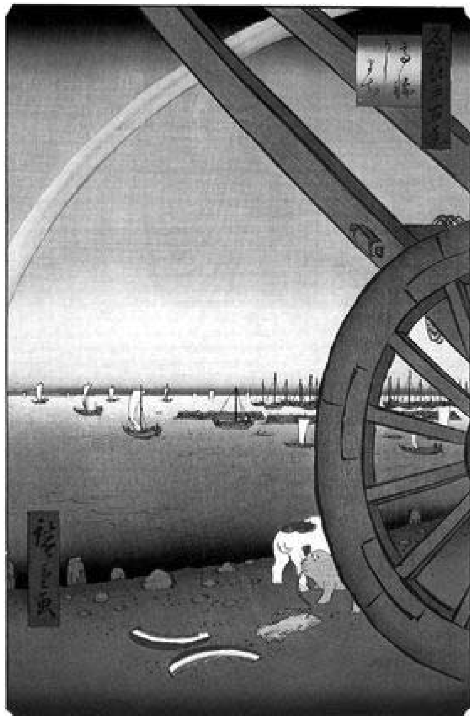

Fig. 38. *Ox Street in the Takanawa District* (from the *One Hundred Views of Edo*), by Utagawa Hiroshige, 1856–8. Woodblock print. *(British Museum, London)*

The only difference is that Hiroshige shows rinds only—the good part of the melon has already been eaten and sucked dry.

Perhaps feeling that the same thing had happened to the idea of adapting *ukiyo-e* images to contemporary poetry, by the autumn of 1913 Ezra Pound had begun to turn his attention away from Japan and towards China. Japan, with its ability to mount large-scale international art expositions and to impress Western nations with its expanding industrial and military capabilities, was very much perceived in Edwardian London as a centre of modernity. China, on the other hand, seemed a nation with a uniquely magnificent past and no future. Increasingly at the mercy of colonial piracy by Britain and France, and—more recently—by Russia and by Japan itself, it appeared during these years as though China could look forward only to the piecemeal annexation of

its territories into the empires that surrounded it, the pilfer of its natural resources, and the gradual depletion of its art treasures by foreign collectors and museums. The parallel with Greece, rocked by the fractious politics of the Balkans throughout the later nineteenth century, was one that Europeans were able to understand; for this reason it was often used by Laurence Binyon as a way of explaining the Chinese predicament. 'The Japanese look to China as we look to Italy or Greece,' he wrote in 1908; 'for them it is the classic land'. [61]

[61] Lawrence Binyon, *Painting in the Far East* (London, 1908), 6.

The imaginary museum of classical Greece was at that time most effectively accessed via English and German scholarship; and for information about classical China Binyon had no choice but to turn to Japan. Even as late as 1933, Binyon did not mind admitting that all his information on British Museum's famous handscroll *The Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies* had come via 'the Japanese scholars who have given it the longest and the closest study'. [62]

[62] Typescript for the first of Binyon's Charles Eliot Norton Lectures to be given at Harvard in 1933–4, fo. 18, BLA, vol. 30.

Back in 1913, the collector Charles Lang Freer was inclined to take issue with this approach, but could offer nothing more satisfactory. 'Your statement regarding the views of the Japanese connoisseurs on the [Gu Khazhi scroll], is most interesting,' he told Binyon in the summer of that year, 'but the more I hear of Japanese scholarship concerning Chinese art, the less I value it'. [63]

[63] Unpublished letter to Binyon from Charles Freer, 30 June 1913, BLA, vol. 4.

The 'classic land' of China, then, was not only remote in time and space, but was often only visible at all in the West via the filter of a secondary culture province.

The above factors meant that Western conceptions of China, to a greater extent than those of any other major civilization, tended to be heavily constructed rather than based on information that was in any way objective. A good example of this is the author and publisher Allan Upward's sequence of prose poems *Scented Leaves from a Chinese Jar* . Upward had been inspired by some free translations of

Chinese poetry by Herbert Allen Giles, a former British diplomat who had spent most of his career in the Chinese province of Taiwan and at the regional mainland trading port of Ningbo. [64]

[64] H. A. Giles, *Gems of Chinese Literature* (London, 1880).

He was also familiar with the still freer paraphrases published by his partner at the Orient Press Launcelot Cranmer Byng under the title *A Lute of Jade* in 1909. Upward's own

collection, however, does not represent translations or even interpretations of existing Chinese poetry. Rather, according to Pound, he had 'made it up out of his own head, using a certain amount of Chinese reminiscence'. [65]

[65] Letter to Harriet Monroe, 23 Sept. 1913, reproduced in *The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907–1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (London, 1951), 59.

The following is an example of the results:

> My mother taught me that every night a procession of junks carrying lanterns moves silently across the sky, and the water sprinkled from their paddles falls to the earth in the form of dew. I no longer believe that the stars are junks carrying lanterns, no longer that the dew is shaken from their oars.

The above is particularly amusing for Chinese readers, because the Junk, or *chuán* in pinyin transliteration from Mandarin, is a high-decked vessel driven by sail and not by oars at all. Though Upward's name appeared on the cover of other works on China, including *The Odes of Confucius* and *Sayings of K'ung the Master*, both published in 1904, he admitted later that his knowledge of China was strictly limited and that 'the entire credit for the series' was due to Byng. The Confucius translations in particular were 'a task too difficult for me', he adds, but one that Byng 'undertook with supreme felicity'. [66]

[66] Allen Upward, *Some Personalities* (London, 1921), 212.

Despite these issues, Pound found *Scented Leaves* interesting enough to arrange its publication in *Poetry* and the *New Freewoman*, and subsequently also included it in the 1914 *Des Imagistes* anthology along with his own 'Ts'ai Chi'eh'. [67]

[67] *Poetry*, 2 (Sept. 1913), 191; *New Freewoman*, 1/9, 15 Oct. 1913, pp. 172–3.

This last is another entirely constructed text that Pound presented alongside adaptations from Giles's translations such as 'Liu Che' and 'Fan-piece for her Imperial Lord', as though the difference in origin was not to be considered significant. Pound was quite open about the fact that the older poet had prompted him to explore the possibilities held out by China, telling his parents that 'Upward has sort of started me off in that direction' not long after the initial publication of *Scented Leaves*. [68]

[68] Letter to Homer and Isabel, Sept. 1913, quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (London, 1988), 218.

Pound's progress 'in that direction' gathered immediate momentum, and by the middle of the following week he was able to report three very different sets of China-related research to Dorothy: 'Have done shows chinesques...[and] been taken to a new curious and excellent restaurant chinois...Dined on Monday with [the Bengali poet] Sarojini

Naidu and Mrs Fenolosa [*sic*], relict of the writer on Chinese art, selector of a lot of [Charles Lang] Freer's stuff, etc. [69]

[69] Letter to Dorothy, 2 Oct. 1913, reproduced in *Letters*, ed. Pound and Walton Litz, 264.

A search through the annual reports of London's museums and galleries reveals that two 'shows chinesques' were available during October 1913; given that Pound is speaking here in the plural, it seems reasonable to assume that he attended both of them. The first show, held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, was an assembly of important new loan exhibits arranged beneath the glass dome of the museum's large Octagon Court. Primary among these were R. H. Benson's 'important collection of early Chinese pottery of the T'ang, Sung and Ming dynasties' and a group of celadon and purple-glazed ceramics lent by W. H. Alexander, whose donations of Japanese art to the British Museum have been noted above. [70]

[70] *The Victoria and Albert Museum: General Guide to the Collections 1913–14* (London, 1913), 90.

The V&A used this event to publicize the opening of a series of newly refurbished display halls on the floor above the loan exhibits. These had been designed to house an even larger collection of Chinese porcelain, bronzes, textiles, and furniture bequeathed by the prodigious collector George Salting three years previously, and led directly into the Long Galleries containing the museum's existing Chinese collections. [71]

[71] Ibid. 74. The 1913 guide states that Salting's Far Eastern bronzes, lacquerware, and furniture in particular are 'displayed here for the first time'.

It was in one of these corridor-like rooms that Pound, doubtless eager after his discussions with Allen Upward to begin applying Chinese aesthetics to his own work—must have stumbled upon the perfect metaphor for what he was about to do. Room 114, home to the V&A's collection of Chinese embroidery, had in pride of place amid its 1913 display an impressive dragon-emblazoned imperial robe. 'It is of pale green satin,' notes a contemporary account, with the dragon emblems 'worked with satin stitch in coloured silks and laid, stitched-down gold thread'. [72]

[72] Stephen W. Bushell, *Chinese Art: The Victoria and Albert Museum* (London, 1909; rev. 1919), ii. 98.

A month after his visits to the 'shows chinesques', Pound published in *Poetry* a debate with his own 'songs' in which he tells them, 'Lest they say we are lacking in taste', that 'I will get you a green coat out of China | With dragons worked upon it'. [73]

[73] 'Further Instructions' in 'Poems', *Poetry*, 3/2 (Nov. 1913). The poem was reprinted in the *New Freewoman*, 1 Dec. 1913, and in Pound's *Lustra* volume in 1916.

Writing still some time in advance of receiving Ernest Fenollosa's detailed notes on

Chinese poetry from his widow Mary, Pound was announcing verses that are intuitively 'Chinese' in appearance rather than possessing any integral connection with the culture, much as Allen Upward had. There is no doubt that he would have attempted to do more even at this early stage, but, as has been suggested above, reliable information on China was hard to come by. As late as mid-November 1913, Pound was still able to describe Chinese visual artists only as 'the painters whom I scarcely know, possibly of T'ang and Sung—though I daresay I've got the wrong labels'. [74]

[74] Pound, 'The Serious Artist', part IV, in *New Freewoman*, 15 Nov. 1913, p. 214.

The second of the 'shows chinesques' was taking place on the other side of London at the Whitechapel Gallery. 'Whitechapel', the *Athenaeum* observed dryly at the beginning of November 1913, 'at first seems an incongruous setting for the pre-eminently aristocratic art of China'. [75]

[75] *Athenaeum*, 1 Nov. 1913.

The gallery had been established just twelve years earlier in what was a poor, solidly working-class area. Despite these unlikely surroundings, its first major exhibition in 1901 had also been on 'Chinese Art and Life', and had managed to attract 137,000 visitors from all over the capital—a far more impressive result than the gallery's director Charles Aitken had anticipated. [76]

[76] Handbill advertising the 1913 exhibition 'Chinese Art', Whitechapel Gallery Archive.

He consequently planned 'Chinese Art'—the sequel event in 1913—on a much grander scale, even laying on a series of five accompanying London University Extension Lectures on Chinese history, painting, pottery, and metalwork. 'The exhibition at Whitechapel art gallery is probably the best of its kind yet held in London,' noted the *Evening Standard* on 22 October; adding two weeks later that 'it would be worth going a lot further than Whitechapel to see this'. [77]

[77] 'Chinese Art', 22 Oct. 1913; 'Blake and the Chinese', 4 Nov. 1913.

Although Pound lived a long way from Whitechapel, getting there would have been surprisingly easy. We have already had reason to note that Pound's quickest route to the British Museum would have been a short walk to Notting Hill and then the Central Line eastwards. The final stop on that line in 1913 was Liverpool Street, which was about ten minutes' walk from the gallery on Whitechapel High Street. The fact that no changes of line were necessary would also have meant that the total cost of visiting the exhibition would have been exactly 4*d*., the price of a

return ticket, as admission to the institution itself was free. 'Chinese Art' did not officially open until Friday, 17 October, but advance viewings of the exhibition had been going on since the beginning of the month. Pound's ability to attend one of these would have been guaranteed by one important fact: the chairman of the Exhibition Committee was none other than Laurence Binyon. Throughout 1912, Binyon had helped Mary Fenollosa organize, edit, and illustrate her husband's notes on East Asian sculpture and painting so that they could be published the same year as the posthumous *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*. As the widow's key contact in London, it was almost certainly Binyon who set up the meeting between her and Pound on 6 October 1913 to arrange the transfer of the remaining notes on poetry and theatre to him. [78]

[78] 'I dined last night with...Mrs Fenollosa—good food—café Royal—mild memories of Whistler', letter from Pound to Dorothy, 7 Oct. 1913, reproduced in *Letters*, ed. Pound and Walton Litz, 267.

Binyon may well have suggested the exhibition as a way of preparing for the meeting, which would have provided an excellent reason for Pound to attend the exhibition before its official opening.

In similar fashion to Allen Upward's 'Chinese' environments, the arrangement of the Whitehall exhibition was not determined by a knowledge of Chinese cultural history, nor was it designed to illustrate particular periods of Chinese art in a way that would be comprehensible even to an informed observer. Rather, as a journalist for *The Times* remarked, it was intended to evoke 'a very delightful state of being'. [79]

[79] 'Chinese Art', *The Times*, 17 Oct. 1913.

There was very little flat art or sculpture; instead what greeted the visitor was essentially a mélange of rich colours and textures, as a random selection of exhibits from the catalogue demonstrates: '[a] coat of rose-red thick satin, woven with large dragons and ho-ho birds...[a] peach-blossom vase (K'ang Hsi period)...[an] imperial robe of yellow silk embroidered with coloured silks...Yang T'zu painted enamels on copper.' This was one thing that the exhibition had in common with the new ceramic displays at the V&A, which were equally high on chromatic range: 'red glazes derived from copper...celadon, turquoise, blue, apple green, coral red, imperial yellow, claire de lune. ' [80]

[80] *The Victoria and Albert Museum: General Guide to the Collections 1913–14*, 82.

It is hardly surprising, then, that Pound published the following *hokku*-like sentence in *Poetry* a few weeks later:

Rest me with Chinese colours

For I think the glass is evil. [81]

[81] This piece, eventually named 'A Song of the Degrees I' in Pound's *Lustra* volume, was originally published as 'Xenia III' in *Poetry*, 3/2 (Nov. 1913). It was reprinted as a section of 'Convictions', *New Freewoman*, 1 Dec. 1913, before the final name-change was applied in 1916.

The anomalous second line, which has never been satisfactorily interpreted, probably originates from another set of exhibits at Whitechapel. This is described by the art correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, who had also gone along to one of Binyon's advance viewings: 'In the smaller apartment which opens off the further end of the gallery are shown a set of early magical mirrors.' [82]

[82] 'Chinese Art', *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Oct. 1913. This article was published four days before the official opening of the exhibition.

According to the exhibition catalogue, these included an 'ancient Korean mirror depicting a marine monster with archaic characters' and a 'Han mirror with black patina showing astronomical signs in very distinct outline'. [83]

[83] Catalogue for the Whitechapel Gallery's Autumn Exhibition for 1913, 'Chinese Art', Whitechapel Gallery Archive.

A similar set of magical-looking glasses were on display at the other one of the 'shows chinesques' at the V&A: 'the magic mirror makes hidden spirits visible and hints at the secrets of futurity...some of them have the curious property of reflecting from their faces in the sunlight on a wall, more or less distinctly, the raised decoration on their backs.' [84]

[84] Bushell, *Chinese Art*, i. 86.

Pound's keen sense of the numinous seems to have found itself disturbed by these rather sinister exhibits at both museums.

The limited selection of quality Chinese flat art in London added to the widespread ignorance of its chronology and aesthetics—not to mention of Chinese civilization generally—and forced Pound back on the far more accessible milieu of Japanese woodblock prints when he attempted to visualize East Asian scenes. These had affected the poet's consciousness to the extent that he had begun to transfer the impression they had left onto his London surroundings. 'I got real japanese [*sic*] prints—I don't mean on paper,' he told Dorothy on 2 October; 'at Cedar Lawn ('Ampstead of all places)'. Cedar Lawn was the house of Harriet Shaw Weaver, the main shareholder of the *New Freewoman*, a publication to which Pound had been contributing for a while as Literary Editor and would soon rename the *Egoist*. The place seems to have reminded Pound of Japanese prints initially because of the appearance

of its gardens, which sadly were not to survive the house's demolition in 1922. [85]

[85] Cedar Lawn was purchased by Willaim H. Lever (later Viscount Leverhulme), the soap manufacturer, who had it demolished in 1922. The house had been used as a hospital during the First Word War (T. F. T. Baker (ed.), ‘North End, Littleworth and Spaniard's End’, in *A History of the County of Middlesex* (Oxford, 1976), ix. 71).

Even forty years after his visit, Pound retained clear memories of sitting on that ‘perfect lawn,’ then dominated by the mature cedar trees that had inspired the house's name. [86]

[86] Letter from Ezra Pound to Jane Lidderdale, 12 July 1962, parts of which are reproduced in J. Lidderdale and M. Nicholson, *Dear Miss Weaver: Harriet Shaw Weaver 1876–1961* (London, 1970), 27. Lidderdale and Nicholson describe Cedar Lawn as follows: ‘Cedar Lawn...stood at the summit of the hill just beyond the Whitestone Pond. It had grounds of more than two acres giving onto the west heath, and had a splendid view over to the Harrow Ridge and Berkshire and Buckinghamshire Hills. It was a long, straggling house, partly Georgian, partly Victorian, largely covered with Virginia creeper and of no architectural pretentions. Its glory was its garden with its great cedars’ (ibid. 27).

It must have been this last feature that made him think of *nishiki-e* in 1913, for large cedars are often designated *shinboku*—‘sacred trees’—and are invariably found near shrines and temples. If Pound had any particular print in mind when he made his comparison, it was probably Hiroshige's *Evening Bell at Mii Temple* , which Binyon had acquired in 1907 as part of the Samuel Tuke collection (Fig. 39). Though the temple is more famous today for its cherry trees, the print shows a serene landscape of cedars leading up to the temple entrance. Pound even thought the garden at Cedar Lawn might be able to replace scenes derived from the Print Room as a motif for Dorothy's own East Asia inspired artworks, but in the end conceded that ‘as I've just met [the Weavers] I don't see how you can be sent up there to paint it’. [87]

[87] Letter to Dorothy, 2 Oct. 1913, reproduced in *Letters*, ed. Pound and Walton Litz, 264.

As well as a visual connection between Cedar Lawn and East Asian art, there was also one of atmosphere. Even forty years later, Pound was able to recall ‘the stillness of the first encounter’ with Weaver in the garden, where her pet collie ‘languidly consented to gather a languidly-thrown ball’. This stillness was ‘not like silence, come gradually’, he added, ‘but like a sudden stopping of all noise’, and clearly had something to do with the ‘Paradisal calm and *aura dolce*’ he had experienced looking at woodblock prints in the company of Binyon. [88]

[88] Letter from Ezra Pound to Jane Lidderdale, 12 July 1962, parts of which are reproduced in Lidderdale and Nicholson, *Dear Miss Weaver* , 74.

Mii Temple is one of the four largest Buddhist complexes in Japan, and occupies a mountainside north of Kyoto near Lake Biwa in the

end p.157

Fig. 39. *Evening Bell at Mii Temple* (from the *Omi hakkei no uchi* series), by Utagawa Hiroshige, 1834. Woodblock print. *(British Museum, London)*

province of Omi. This last point of topography is crucial, as it means the site features in one of the most enduring sets of motifs in Japanese art—the *Omi hakkei* , or ‘Eight Views of Omi’, which centres on the environs of the lake. Like many key motifs in Japanese art, this had been derived originally from China, where artists had been painting the *Xiaoxiang bajing*—‘Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers’—since the Song dynasty of the tenth to the thirteenth centuries CE. This derivation from the ‘classic land’ ensured that Hiroshige's *Omi hakkei* , of which the ‘Evening Bell at Mii Temple’ forms a part, was composed in a far more sober and reverential style than his

frenetic scenes of urban life in modern Edo. At Binyon's Albert Hall lectures, Pound would have heard works such as these described as 'attached as if by fine threads to all the classic tradition, to the cherished poetry and philosophy of the past'. [89]

[89] Unpublished manuscript for Binyon's 4th Albert Hall Lecture, 'Popular Art', fo. 13, BLA vol. 30.

'One has a momentary vision of what all that wondrous inheritance from the Asian continent must have meant to this youthful and susceptible nation destined to be the ultimate recipient of it,' the curator adds in an another note. 'All the art, and thought, and ceremony and

legend, the rich Chinese tissue with threads woven into it from Greece and the Mediterranean as well as from India and Iran. That they should not have been overwhelmed by these riches, but could adapt and absorb and finally recreate in a new style.' [90]

[90] Early, handwritten draft of a untitled, undated lecture, BLA, vol. 30.

It is sentiments such as the above, and not the throwaway value judgement that is sometimes assumed, that led Pound to say in 1917 that 'China is fundamental, Japan is not'. [91]

[91] Letter to John Quinn, 10 Jan. 1917, reproduced in *The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907–1941* , ed. Paige, 155.

Hiroshige's *Omi hakkei* is essentially a work that looks at China through Japanese binoculars, a strategy we have already noted that Binyon was obliged to follow when doing his own research into Chinese art. A third user of such binoculars was Erenest Fenollosa, whose notes on Chinese poetry would form the basis of Pound's *Cathay* in 1914. Fenollosa's research into China had been conducted entirely in Japan, and his understanding of Chinese verse was wholly dependent on what Pound referred to as 'the decipherings of the Professors Mori and Ariga' at Tokyo Imperial University. Pound certainly did not mind harvesting 'fundamental' material from 'classic' cultures by referring to the interpretations of more recently founded civilizations that had recreated such 'riches'—to use Binyon's phrase—'in a new style'. In the same year as his writing of *Cathay*, he also made the translation of the *Nekuia*—or 'land of the dead' episode from Homer's *Odyssey* that would eventually become the first of *The Cantos*. Though Pound claimed to have chosen this particular section of the epic because 'it shouts aloud that it is older than the rest', to complete it Pound went not to an early Greek source but to Andreas Divus's Renaissance Latin version, published in 1538. [92]

[92] Letter to W. H. D. Rouse, 23 May 1935, reproduced in ibid. 74.

He then deliberately removed the narrative a step further from the original by introducing a metre based not on Greek or even on Italian, but on Anglo-Saxon conventions. Pound must have been aware of the similarities between this project and his *Cathay* interpretations, for —as his letters show—he originally intended to publish both works together in the same volume. [93]

[93] Letter to Thomas Bird Mosher, 3 Dec. 1914, Houghton Library Archive, Harvard University.

The final surge of enthusiasm for East Asian art to occur in London before the outbreak of war was inspired by the Japanese *Rinpa* school of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Though the intriguingly

abstract formal qualities of this movement would make it a powerful influence on Vorticist flat art, it was W. B. Yeats who first developed an enthusiasm for it. Yeats and Pound spent the winter of 1913 together in the secluded environment of Stone Cottage in Sussex, where they began the engagement with Fenollosa's notes on Japanese *Noh* theatre that would lead to the publication of *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* three years later, and also to Yeats's adaptations of *Noh* conventions to an Irish context. [94]

[94] *Certain Noble Plays of Japan: From the Manuscripts of Ernest Fenollosa, Chosen and Finished by Ezra Pound with an Introduction by William Butler Yeats* (London, 1916).

To assist in these projects, the two poets spent some of their time researching aristocratic Japanese behaviour with the help of Colonel Francis Brinkley's *Japan: Its History, Arts and Literature* , as James Longenbach's interesting study *Stone Cottage* has shown. [95]

[95] James Longenbach, *Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats and Modernism* (New York and Oxford, 1988). The Brinkley work is *Japan: Its History, Arts and Literature* (London and Edinburgh, 1903), vol. iii, which contains a long section on *Noh* as well as some photographs of Japanese buildings that would have interested Pound.

Pound must have spoken to the older poet about Far Eastern art some time before this, however, for Yeats made an unprecedented series of visits to the Print Room at the British Museum during the months preceding his departure for Sussex. His signature—which is always made with his own, broad-nibbed fountain pen, making it stand out from the other names—first appears on 15 June 1913. After

that there is a hiatus of five weeks, but late July and August were full of visits, with nine occurring up to 27 August. [96]

[96] Yeats's signature appears on 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26 July, and on 1, 2, 12, and 27 Aug. It appears once more on 22 Oct. 1914, after which he appears to have stopped visiting the Print Room altogether.

There is an interesting correlation with Laurence Binyon's private papers from around this date, in that most of the dinner invitations among them from Yeats were issued during the same period: the poet's visits must have been made in consultation with the curator, just as Pound's had been. [97]

[97] Yeats's handwriting is almost impossible to decipher, but the short notes from him definitely represent dinner invitations (BLA, vol. 11).

Yeats was interested enough in *nishiki-e* eventually to acquire his own collection. ‘About twenty’ of these were seen on permanent display in the hallway of his home by Oshima Shotaro, a scholar from Waseda University who visited in 1938. [98]

[98] Oshima Shotaro, *W. B. Yeats and Japan* (Tokyo, 1965), 102. Oshima also notes that several Japanese festival dolls (*dairibina*) ornamented Yeats's mantelpiece.

In 1913, however, the poet's interest was grabbed by something else. In the introduction to Pound's

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Noh translations, Yeats writes admiringly of ‘that screen painted by Korin...shown lately at the B.M., where the same form is echoing in wave and in cloud and in rock’. [99]

[99] *Certain Noble Plays of Japan: From the Manuscripts of Ernest Fenollosa, Chosen and Finished by Ezra Pound with an Introduction by William Butler Yeats* (London, 1916), introduction.

Korin was the most important exponent of *Rinpa*, whose gold leaf backgrounds and aristocratic character differentiated it decisively from the simple designs of the *Ukiyo-e* school with its popular and inexpensive prints. [100]

[100] The name *Rinpa* was derived in eighteenth-century Japan from the second syllable of Korin's name, but the painter's predecessors Sotatsu and Koyetsu are often included in definitions of the school.

The description given by Yeats convincingly matches the iconic screen by Korin, which is known in the West as *Waves at Matsushima*. This had been purchased in 1880 by Fenollosa himself, and then sold in 1911 to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Earl Miner's study claims that it was this screen that Yeats saw on display at the British Museum, [101]

[101] Miner, *The Japanese Tradition*, 176.

but enquiries at both institutions show that it did not leave the United States during the pre-war period and was most definitely not in London at the time in question. [102]

[102] Angie Simonds (Curatorial Project Manager at the Boston MFA), letter to RRA, 14 Sept. 2006.

The mystery of the screen has fortunately been solved by Timothy Clark, the current curator of the British Museum's Japan Department. From late 1913, he reveals, the museum had its own Korin screen—or at least it thought it had one. [103]

[103] Timothy Clark, letter to RRA, 13 Sept. 2006.

The British Museum's *Rinpa* piece *The Wave Beaten Rock* has fallen into obscurity and is now seldom exhibited, but it was the artwork that inspired Yeats's eulogies, and also a few by Pound (Fig. 40). The reason the work has not been correctly identified before is that its attribution to Korin was revised to ‘Workshop of Korin’ not long after the First World War, and its title changed to *Pine Island*; it was subsequently consigned to storage and forgotten. [104]

[104] British Museum catalogue number JA 1265.

It had belonged originally to Arthur Morrison, who decided in 1913 that the ideal fate of the six hundred Japanese artworks that remained in his possession would be to join his former collection of *nishiki-e* at the British Museum. Morrison did not want the collection to be broken up, which is what would have happened if it had been sold on the open market, so he allowed a benefactor of the museum, Sir William Gwynne-Evans, to purchase the

Fig. 40. *The Wave Beaten Rock* , now called *Pine Island* ; workshop of Ogata Korin, eighteenth century CE (Rinpa). Ink colour and gold on two-panel folding paper screen. 146 × 131 cm. *(British Museum, London)*

artworks *en bloc* for far less than their combined individual worth on the understanding that they would then be donated to the museum. The important thing about the above decision was that Binyon, excited by this tremendous windfall, hastily arranged an exhibition of Morrison's star pieces in the Prints and Drawings public gallery next to the Print Room. This remained open throughout 1914 despite the outbreak of war and the fact that the Print Room itself was still closed. Four display

cases dominated the exhibition space, two of them containing items assumed to be by Korin, with a further pair holding individual works by the decorative painter's renowned predecessors Koyetsu and Sotatsu. [105]

[105] Laurence Binyon, *Guide to an Exhibition of Japanese and Chinese Paintings Principally from the Arthur Morrison Collection* (London, 1914), 12–13.

It is the names of these three painters that find themselves—albeit in the slightly mangled form of 'Koyetzu | Rotatzu | Korin'—right at the top of the laudatory 'Bless' list in the 1915 edition of *Blast* magazine. [106]

[106] *Blast*, 2 (July 1915), 93.

We may be sure that these inclusions were suggested by Pound, for the poet used his review of Binyon's textbook *Flight of the Dragon* in the same issue of the magazine to praise Korin a second time. Though he did not entirely approve of Binyon's book on the grounds that the curator had 'not sufficiently rebelled' and was guilty of 'restraining his inventiveness', Pound's review quotes as a valuable exception the following passage: 'You may say that the waves of Korin's famous screen are not like real waves, but they move, they have form and volume.' [107]

[107] Laurence Binyon, *Flight of the Dragon* (London, 1911), 21, quoted in Ezra Pound's 'Chronicles', *Blast*, 2 (July 1915), 86.

It is hardly surprising that during the moment of Vorticism, when the abstractions of Wyndham Lewis and Edward Wadsworth seemed the last word in contemporary aesthetics, the angular, regularized forms of Korin's eighteenth-century waterscapes should attract the fascinated attention of London's avant-garde. As we have seen, John Gould Fletcher was good at detecting new trends among his contemporaries, and seems also to have responded to the 'form and volume' of Korin's ripples in his poem *Stream*, published in the *Egoist* the following year:

Foam;

Mobile crests leaping, sinking:

Thin fingers grasping around cold rocks.

Small blue waves straining to meet,

Never touching, always elusive:

Mocking, half-virginal lips. [108]

[108] *Egoist*, 3/11 (Nov. 1916), 169.

7 'The More Serious Art that One Likes'

T. E. Hulme, Jacob Epstein, and the Making of a Global Classicism

Rupert Richard Arrowsmith

If the sight of Jacob Epstein's carving for Oscar Wilde's tomb resulted in fundamental alterations to the way Henri Gaudier-Brzeska thought about sculpture, its impact on the philosopher T. E. Hulme was nothing short of life-changing. Hulme's simultaneous engagement with both the sculpture of modern London and that of ancient Asian civilizations provided a crucial keystone for his emerging *Weltanschauung* and inspired what would prove, in the shape of his mature philosophy, to be one of the most important statements of early Modernist thought to come out of London.

Hulme's writings—which were published during his lifetime in magazines such as the *Egoist* and the *New Age*—have appeared a bit contradictory and unsystematic to many of his critics. Karen Csengeri understood back in 1994 that this was partly due to Herbert Read's misleading arrangement of his essays for the popular 1924 selection *Speculations*, but large inconsistencies continue to be visible even when that is taken into account. [1]

[1] Karen Csengeri, introduction to *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme* , ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford, 1994).

The most significant of these is the sweeping change in tone between the essays written before the end of 1911, and those composed from the autumn of that year onwards. Michael Levenson's 1986 chapter on Hulme was the first essay properly to debunk the idea that all the philosopher's insights are traceable to the ideas of his erstwhile mentor Henri Bergson, demonstrating in the process that the character of Hulme's later work is entirely at odds

with recognizably Bergsonian assumptions. [2]

[2] Levenson observes that both Frank Kermode and Donald Davie identify 'Bergsonian assumptions' even in Hulme's later essays (Michael H. Levenson, 'Parsing T. E. Hulme', in *A Genealogy of Modernism* (Cambridge, 1986), 80).

Levenson is certainly correct in recognizing that getting rid of Bergsonism was essential in order for coherence to be attained in Hulme's thought, but his conclusion that such coherence appeared purely because of the philosopher's interest in the French right-wing group *Action Française* is a bit too prescriptive. The analysis to follow will agree that the ideas of the *Action Française*—especially those of Charles Maurras and Pierre Laserre—were extremely important to Hulme; but it will also show that the primary stimulus for his move away from Bergsonism was actually an aesthetic one, onto which Maurrasian political implications were subsequently grafted. The aesthetic stimulus itself appeared unexpectedly, and had an effect on Hulme that he described as 'a species of religious conversion'. The venue for this crucial event was Epstein's Cheyne Walk studio, in the shadow of the 'demon angel' being carved by the sculptor for Oscar Wilde's tomb.

Hulme's first published work, a series of four articles that appeared in the *New Age* throughout the second half of 1909, all work to explain Bergson and Bergsonian concepts to as wide an audience as possible. Logical thinking, he writes in one of them, tends to break up the flow of time into 'a series of static things, none of which expresses movement'—a situation that inevitably leads to an abstract conception of reality that is 'unable to deal with life'. According to Bergson, by contrast, 'our intelligence must follow the reverse method. It can install itself in the flux of reality by means of that intellectual sympathy one calls intuition.' Temporal flow itself, then, is to be seen as a driver for 'creative evolution' in art, as in life. Clearly, an aesthetic based on the monumental stasis of Egyptian or Assyrian sculpture—or indeed of Epstein's Wilde memorial—would never be able to find accommodation within such a world view: the deliberately 'timeless' geometry of such works would not accurately reflect Bergson's intuitive flow of *durée reel*. 'You cannot hold water in a wire cage,' Hulme is quick to say, 'however minute the mesh'. [3]

[3] From Hulme's first published article, 'The New Philosophy', *New Age* , 1 July 1909, pp. 198–9, reproduced in *Collected Writings* , ed. Csengeri, 86.

In terms of formal styles of art, Impressionism, with its implication of ephemeral images snatched from the stream of time, connects rather more obviously with this emphasis on the implacable mutability of existence.

The Italian Futurists, among whom Giacomo Balla and Umberto Boccioni in particular fully acknowledged the application of Bergson's ideas in their own work, also regularly attempted to depict events as part of a linear flow rather than by means of the frozen moments more familiar to academic painters. Balla's 1913 studies of swifts flitting beneath the eaves of his Milan apartment blend the bodies of the small birds into the stream of their remembered and projected trajectories, producing a liquid diagram of movement. Boccioni's ubiquitous

sculpture *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* was also created in 1913, using traditional academic techniques of clay modelling. A Hellenistic legged torso whose physicality finds itself half-dissolved into the Bergsonian flux, the sculpture's dynamic rippling contrasts interestingly with the solidity and integrity of surface represented both by Epstein's Wilde carving and by Gaudier's *netsuke*-inspired pieces. It is the common emphasis on temporal flow—hinted at in Impressionism and made explicit in Futurism—that caused Pound to construct a line of descent from the French movement to the Italian, dismissing the aesthetic of the latter school as 'an accelerated impressionism'. There were also political ramifications to Bergson's temporal theories. Despite the tendency of the Italian Futurists to identify with right-wing interests, we will soon have cause to note that the *Action Française* perceived the philosopher's ideas to be far more useful to their opponents in the socialist camp. That Bergson could be enlisted in an attack on political conservatism had not by this date occurred to Hulme, who was always very open about being 'a Tory by disposition'. [4]

[4] T. E. Hulme, 'Bergson Lecturing', *New Age*, 2 Nov. 1911, p. 15, reproduced in *Collected Writings*, ed. Csengeri, 55.

Hulme's natural conservatism was certainly intensified by his attraction to the *Action Française*, but his attempts to square the reactionary ideas of its leader Charles Maurras with Bergson's vision of 'creative evolution' produce an awkward tension that extends throughout the early writings. Though Hulme's most significant borrowing from Maurras is the idea of 'the romantic' and 'the classical' as two opposing paradigms that contend with one another throughout history, his initial attempts to universalize the Frenchman's highly prejudiced, nationalistic agenda lack coherence. Despite his aversion to commenting directly upon aesthetics, Maurras follows the orthodox academic position in positing the existence of a 'civilisation véritable' beginning in fifth-century Athens. The 'magnifique développement' of this civilization is traced through the Roman state

into the institutions of pre-revolutionary France, which Maurras sees as the most recent manifestation of a 'classical' attitude. [5]

[5] Charles Maurras, *Œuvres capitales: Essais politiques* (Paris, 1954), 179–80.

Rather than casting the medieval period and the post-revolutionary onset of Romanticism as phases of decadence, Maurras, a radical nationalist, prefers to classify them as symptoms of cultural intrusion from 'civilisations barbares' external to the classical tradition. Because Maurras is also a monarchist, the year 1789 is lamented as representing the most recent of these 'interruptions'. Because Catholicism was the religion of *l'Ancien Régime*, a belief in Catholic doctrine including that of original sin features strongly in his writing. The European Renaissance is regarded as a reappearance of the classical attitude; the Reformation bemoaned as another attack on 'true' civilization by Northern barbarians.

Hulme's own 1911 essay 'Romanticism and Classicism', which focuses mainly upon English literature, incorporates most of Maurras's arguments despite their highly questionable relevance in an Anglo-Saxon context. Because the Renaissance forms part of Maurras's 'civilisation veritable', [6]

[6] Ibid. 179–80.

Hulme tentatively applies the 'classical' label to 'most of the Elizabethans', adding that, 'if you call Shakespeare romantic, you are using a different definition to the one I give'. Exactly what definition Hulme does give is far from easy to determine, and he eventually decides altogether to 'shirk the difficulty of saying exactly what I mean by romantic and classical in verse'. [7]

[7] T. E. Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism' (n.d., but probably 1911), reproduced in *Collected Writings*, ed. Csengeri, 62.

Like Maurras's remarks on Romanticism, Hulme's continually invoke the year 1789 and the French Revolution as their key point of historical reference. Furthermore, the classical finds itself linked—again as in Maurras—with Catholicism. 'The Church has always taken the classical view since the defeat of the Pelagian heresy,' Hulme writes, his reference to heresy highlighting that it is the Catholic Church that is being discussed. The significance of the Vatican's position with regard to Pelagius was finally, in Hulme's analysis, 'the adoption of the sane dogma of original sin'.

Paradoxically, it is in the definition of original sin that Hulme's discourse begins to break away from the narrow nationalistic and religious agenda proposed by Maurras. During the essay, the concept becomes detached from its Christian moorings, and is presented instead

as characteristic of a more general conservative *Weltanschauung*. For Hulme, what is 'classical' about the doctrine of original sin is that it views humanity as 'intrinsically limited, but disciplined by order and tradition into something fairly decent'. This is placed in opposition to the perceived 'romantic' view, which views mankind as 'an infinite reservoir of possibilities' that are stunted and curtailed by any attempt to impose social institutions. From what has already been said during the current discussion of Bergson's 'creative evolution', it should be clear that the philosopher's ethics fits more comfortably with Hulme's definition of the romantic than it would with a system emphasizing

discipline, order, and tradition. In spite of this paradox, Hulme's essay concludes with an attempt to bring in Bergson to support exactly the conservative view of classicism that has emerged from his musings on original sin. Clearly, then, more than a reading of Maurras would be required in order for Hulme's philosophy to acquire coherence.

A meeting in Paris the following year with Maurras's *Action Française* colleague Pierre Lasserre is often identified as marking the beginning of Hulme's conscious withdrawal of support from Bergson. New evidence suggests, however, that Hulme's general outlook in fact remained largely unaltered in the immediate aftermath of his visit to the French capital. In the spring of 1911, Hulme journeyed to Bologna for the four-yearly International Philosophical Congress, mainly with the objective of hearing Bergson lecture. Karen Csengeri's essay on Hulme suggests that the meeting with Lasserre took place after this event, during the Englishman's journey back from Italy to London. [8]

[8] Csengeri, introduction, in *Collected Writings* , ed. Csengeri, p. xix.

Hulme's own account of the meeting, however, states very firmly that he met Lasserre in April. [9]

[9] 'When I was in Paris, then, last April I went to see Lasserre and talk to him' (T. E. Hulme, 'Mr Balfour, Bergson and Politics', *New Age* , 9 Nov. 1911, p. 39, reproduced in *Collected Writings* , ed. Csengeri, 164).

Since Hulme stayed on in Italy after leaving Bologna and travelled around Tuscany until at least mid-May, the meeting could only have occurred on his way out to the conference—a trip that had also included a visit to the philosopher Jules de Gaultier in Dieppe.

It was Lasserre who finally alerted Hulme to the 'real danger' represented by Bergson's ideas from a conservative point of view. 'We believe', Lasserre explained to Hulme, 'in existence of laws which express what we know of the necessary and permanent characteristics of any social and political order, which laws can be drawn by induction

from the experiences of history'. Lasserre considered this position to have been intellectually unassailable before the appearance of Bergson's writings. Now, however, the 'progressives' had begun to use the theory of creative evolution to suggest that the societal institutions valued by the *Action Française* did not and should not determine in any way the course of present and future reality, the course of which was—according to their interpretation of the Bergson—entirely independent from past events. 'If we point out that history does or does not show us any prosperous, strong, and conquering nation, which was at the same time a democracy,' Lasserre added by way of an illustration, 'they retort, history would not be history if it were not change itself and perpetual novelty'. The core intention of Lasserre's speech, Hulme conjectured, had been 'to prove to me that Bergsonism was nothing but the last disguise of Romanticism'. Csengeri and Levenson broadly agree with one another that the objections to Bergson heard in Paris represented the moment when Hulme began consciously to turn away from the philosopher. [10]

[10] Although Levenson concedes that 'Hulme did not abandon his attachment to Bergson at once', he suggests that the conversation with Lasserre took time to sink in ('Parsing T. E. Hulme', 86). Csengeri says the meeting with Lasserre 'was probably the main intellectual factor that helped to change Hulme's mind about Bergson' (introduction, p. xix).

Hulme's own analysis of the meeting, however, suggests that his reaction to Lasserre's rhetoric—at least initially—was in fact rather sceptical. 'If I thought this was true,' he wrote, 'I should be compelled to change my view considerably'. [11]

[11] Hulme, 'Mr Balfour, Bergson and Politics', 39, reproduced in *Collected Writings* , ed. Csengeri, 165.

At the end of the essay Hulme opts not to change his view at all, instead deciding to 'find a compromise' that 'preserves most of the essentials' of Bergson.

Despite the reservations of Lasserre regarding Bergson's theories of creative evolution, Hulme continued to imagine art history as most valuable when it represented progression rather than stasis. Travelling through Tuscany in early May, he decided to stop off in Assisi to look at the renowned Giotto frescoes on the walls of the city's basilica. The cycle of twenty-eight frescoes—which together narrate the life of Saint Francis—is a late-thirteenth-century work featuring an attention to naturalistic mass and volume quite alien to contemporary mediaeval norms of representation. A postcard from Assisi now preserved in the collection of the University of Texas at Austin shows that Hulme found Giotto's paintings valuable only as an indicator of future Renaissance

innovation. 'It doesn't look much,' Hulme writes, referring to the reproduction of one of the frescoes on the front of his postcard, 'but when you see the kind of thing that came before it you realise how wonderful it was'. [12]

[12] Hulme Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin.

Hulme is here referring disparagingly to pre-Renaissance art of the type he had seen on a day trip from Bologna to Ravenna. He would very soon find cause to refer to the city's Byzantine mosaics in far more laudatory terms, but in May 1911 they were seen merely as 'conventional patterns which had done for Christ and the Saints for about 10 centuries'. The term 'conventional patterns' reveals that it is their tendency towards geometrical stylization that Hulme finds uninspiring. In a later essay, he would specifically mention having examined the mosaic of the Empress Theodora to be found in the apse of the Basilica of San Vitale, a work whose lack of volumetric shading and compression of pictorial space makes it far closer stylistically to early Modernist work than to that of the Renaissance. It was still too early for Hulme to appreciate such strategies of representation, however, and his comparison between the mosaics and Giotto's frescoes serves to highlight a very clear preference for flat art that would develop, via a Bergsonian process of creative evolution, into the full-blown humanism of the Renaissance.

The final part of Hulme's remark on the Ravenna mosaics—that they 'had done for Christ and the Saints for about 10 centuries'—is crucial. It raises the problem that his objection to the static aesthetics of the artworks might be extendable to the all-powerful religious and imperial framework that had held them in place for so long. Church and monarchy were precisely the institutions considered worthy of preservation by Lasserre—a man with whom Hulme found himself 'very much in sympathy' in terms of political ideology. Hulme's failure to realize this contradiction demonstrates clearly that in May 1911 he had not begun even vaguely to connect his aesthetic observations with his own innate conservatism. Exactly such a connection is what defines his mature writing, and so Hulme's meeting with Lasserre cannot possibly have represented the watershed moment when his rejection of Bergson became inevitable. The meeting merely witnessed the sowing of some ideological seeds that would require fertilizer of another kind in order to put out shoots.

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The realization that actually led to such dramatic and far-reaching changes in Hulme's world view must have occurred between his return from Italy and Friday, 20 October 1911. On that day, Henri Bergson began a series of lectures at University College London, the last of which was scheduled to take place on the following Saturday. [13]

[13] Karen Csengeri, prefatory note to Hulme's 'Bergson Lecturing', in *Collected Writings* , ed. Csengeri, 154.

Four days after the completion of the series, the *New Age* carried a negative review authored by one Thomas Gratton, who described himself as an erstwhile 'disciple' of the philosopher. Sitting in the audience for the first of Bergson's lectures, however, this commentator had experienced 'a most profound feeling of depression...a most remarkable fit of the profoundest and blackest scepticism—a scepticism that cut right down to the root of every belief I had hitherto fancied I held as certain and fixed...I was immediately repulsed by what before had attracted me'. These strong and unexpected feelings had led Gratton towards a resolution regarding his 'discipleship'. 'Something inside me determined', he remembered, 'that it would set about to prove that Bergson was not the "truth", but a bubble soon to be burst'. [14]

[14] 'Bergson Lecturing', *New Age* , 2 Nov. 1911, 15–16, reproduced in ibid. 155–6.

Regular readers of the *New Age* must have expected some kind of riposte to Thomas Gratton's article from Hulme, who had come out to defend Bergson against a similar attack in its pages by Ernest Bax just two months before. [15]

[15] T. E. Hulme, 'Bax on Bergson', *New Age* , 3 Aug. 1911, 328–31, reproduced in ibid. 116–24.

Nothing, however, appeared. The fact was that Thomas E. Hulme, whose ancestral home was Gratton Hall in Endon, had penned the review of the UCL lectures himself under a pseudonym. [16]

[16] It is hardly surprising that Hulme published the article under a pseudonym. Alun Jones makes the point that 'in 1911 what [Hulme] had to offer was Bergson' (*The Life and Opinions of T. E. Hulme* (London, 1960), 116), and it is certainly true that Bergson accounts for most of Hulme's income during that year in the form of lectures, translations, and articles. Hulme was also by this time intent on applying for readmission to Cambridge in 1912 (he had been 'sent down' in 1904), and was planning to ask Bergson himself for a letter of reference.

The piece goes on to describe his rejection of Bergson as 'a crisis' that he 'can only compare to the descriptions given by James of the preliminary state to the phenomena of religious conversion in the "Varieties of Religious Experience"'. [17]

[17] 'Bergson Lecturing', 15–16, reproduced in *Collected Writings* , ed. Csengeri, 154.

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William James's lectures on religion, which had been published in book form in 1902, were probably read by Hulme while he was still an undergraduate at Cambridge. [18]

[18] A review of James's later volume *The Pluralistic Universe* had provided the opportunity for Hulme's first Bergson-influenced article in the *New Age* during

1908 ('The New Philosophy', *New Age*, 1 July 1908, pp. 198–9, reproduced in *Collected Writings*, ed. Csengeri, 85–8).

In them, the author visualizes the mind of the individual as containing several 'groups of ideas', each of which represents a different paradigm of reality. The attention of the individual is free to wander among these separate paradigms, but one of them, which James terms 'the habitual centre of personal energy', always maintains dominance over the others. [19]

[19] William James, 'Lecture 9: Conversion', in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London and New York, 1902), 196.

Conversion is what happens, he explains, when one of the subordinate bundles of ideas suddenly rises up and replaces the old 'habitual centre' as a result of specific events in the individual's life. Hulme had clearly entertained doubts about Bergson since his conversation with Lasserre in April, but his subsequent remarks about Italian art and his assiduous defence of the philosopher against Bax three months later suggest that something must have happened more recently to work these issues up into a full-blown psychological crisis. When, then—to bring in a bit of Jamesian terminology—had a subordinate 'group of ideas' finally taken the place of Bergson's theories as Hulme's 'habitual centre', and what exactly were those ideas?

By the spring of 1912, just ten months after complaining about the 'conventional patterns' that had determined the aesthetics of Byzantine art for '10 centuries', Hulme was singing quite a different tune with regard to the relative values of stasis and of progressive development in human institutions and in art. He was now conscious that 'nervousness and horror of the idea of constancy' represented the most serious problem in contemporary European ethics.

> If you can only release yourself from this obsession, [the article continues] you will find that there is nothing absurd or repugnant in the notion of a constant world, in which there is no progress. An extraordinary solidity is given to one's beliefs. There is great consolation in the idea that the same struggles have taken place in each generation, and that men have always thought as we think now. [20]

[20] T. E. Hulme, 'A Tory Philosophy', *Commentator* (Apr.–May 1912). The article was broken into five instalments for publication throughout spring 1912: 3 Apr. (pp. 294–5), 10 Apr. (p. 310), 1 May (p. 326), 8 May (p. 380), and 15 May (pp. 388–9). Reproduced in *Collected Writings*, ed. Csengeri, 244–5.

This sounds very like a vague recasting of Maurras's 'romantic versus classical' debate as an opposition between the general desire for evolution in society and the need for stability and continuity. Hulme's next step, however, was to complicate matters by expanding 'the romantic' to include 'all philosophy since the Renaissance'. 'There is a certain general state of mind which has lasted from the Renaissance until now, with what is, in reality, very little variation,' he wrote in 1913. 'It has in its degeneracy taken the form of a belief in "Progress" '. [21]

[21] T. E. Hulme, 'Mr Epstein and the Critics', *New Age*, 25 Dec. 1913, p. 22, reproduced in *Collected Writings*, ed. Csengeri, 257.

With this new variation on his favourite ethical hobby horse, Hulme's shifting priorities had broken not only with Bergson but with the *Action Française* as well. The Renaissance, seen by Charles Maurras—and also by the Hulme of mid-1911—as a historical bastion of classicism is now perceived as having produced the romantic 'state of slush in which we have the misfortune to live'. [22]

[22] Hulme, 'Modern Art and its Philosophy', lecture delivered to the Quest Society of London on 22 Jan. 1914, reproduced in ibid. 271.

In contrast to the insecurities of the *Action Française* with regard to the predicted future dominance of progressive ideologies, Hulme sees such conceptions of society as drawing towards obsolescence, their place to be occupied instead by a conservative world order based on strong societal institutions. 'It may seem paradoxical in view of the extraordinary emphasis laid on life by philosophy at the present day to assert that this Renaissance attitude is coming to an end,' he continues in a direct attack on Bergson. 'But I think this efflorescence is its last effort.' [23]

[23] Ibid. 271.

The most interesting thing about Hulme's new perspective is that it appeared—according to his own analysis—out of an observation of contemporary trends in art. 'The fact that this change comes first in art, before it comes in thought, is easily understandable,' he explained in 1914. 'So thoroughly are we soaked in the spirit of the period we live in, so strong is its influence over us, that we can only escape from it in an unexpected way, as it were, a side direction like art.' [24]

[24] Ibid. 269–70.

Of course Hulme tried in 1914 to present a substantially revised account of his early reactions to Byzantine art. This has misled some critics into perceiving such work as the basis for his linked approach to aesthetics and ethics, while others have overemphasized the

importance of the art historians Alois Riegl and Wilhelm Worringer to his

thinking on such matters. 'About the time I arrived at this kind of conviction,' Hulme writes, referring to his statements on the demise of 'the Renaissance attitude', 'I saw Byzantine mosaics for the first time'.

> This led me a step further towards the conviction I have expressed in this thesis. I had got myself away from the contemporary view, and...I was inclined to hold a view not very different from that of that [Byzantine] period. At that time, then, I was impressed by these mosaics, not as by something exotic, but as expressing quite directly an attitude that I agreed with. Owing to this accident, I was able to see a geometrical art, as it were, from the inside. [25]

[25] Hulme, 'Modern Art and its Philosophy', lecture delivered to the Quest Society of London on 22 Jan. 1914, reproduced in *Collected Writings* , ed. Csengeri, 271.

We have already seen, however, how Hulme had *really* reacted to the mosaics. Very far from having been impressed, he had perceived them merely as a foil to the 'wonderful' Renaissance-announcing offerings of Giotto. His reason for reassessing them in 1914 would certainly have been that he had by that time read Riegl's positive assessment of Byzantine art as 'crystalline' and immobile; as balanced against Greek sculpture, which the art historian describes as 'organic'. [26]

[26] Riegl's differentiation between 'crystalline' and 'organic' modes of expression in art probably represents his most significant contribution to Hulme's thought. This differentiates between an art of 'live, organic motifs' and another of 'inanimate, dead, inorganic motifs' (*Jarbuch des Allerhochsten Kaiserhauses* (Berlin 1902), 247). Classical Greek sculpture is considered 'organic', whereas Egyptian and Byzantine art fall into the immobile, 'crystalline' category. The theory was considered controversial in that it made no value distinction between the two types of art described.

He had also definitely looked at Worringer's writings about abstraction, which contained their own references to Byzantine art, and in 1913 even made the effort to track him down personally at a conference in Germany. [27]

[27] The conference was the Kongres für Asthetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft, 7–10 Oct. 1913. Worringer gave a paper entitled 'Entstehung und Gestaltungsprinzipien in der Ornamentik' about the development of ornamental elements in art.

Despite these facts, though, there are still enormously important differences between Hulme's approach to what he calls 'geometrical art' and Worringer's. Whereas Worringer is interested primarily in the cultural and psychological factors governing whether or not such 'non-vital' forms are produced in different societies at early stages of their histories, Hulme's objective is to understand why these forms appear to be emerging in the sculpture of twentieth-century London. His reasons for beginning to investigate what is perceived as

a 'complete breaking away from tradition' with reference to European norms are stated unequivocally. [28]

[28] Hulme, 'Modern Art and its Philosophy', reproduced in *Collected Writings* , ed. Csengeri, 277.

'I am thinking', he put in the same 1914 lecture manuscript, 'of certain pieces of sculpture I saw some years ago, of Mr Epstein's'. [29]

[29] Ibid. 271.

Alan Munton has recently suggested a very late date for this aesthetic epiphany of Hulme's by saying he may have accidentally written 'years' instead of 'months'. Such speculation is meaningless, however, especially when we know that an aesthetic 'conversion' radical enough to alienate Hulme from Bergson had happened at some point during the autumn of 1911. Since Hulme's first meeting with Epstein had occurred at precisely that time, is it not more likely that something he had seen on that visit of 'some years ago' had been what prompted both his break with Bergson and his new interest in 'geometrical art'?

Epstein himself remembered his first conversation with Hulme as particularly significant. I recall dozens of little personal things characteristic of the man,' he wrote in 1924; 'but particularly our first meeting'. Epstein specifically recalled that, when Hulme had appeared at his studio, he had been 'at work on the Wilde monument'; the other man had been captivated at once by the huge carving. Hulme had 'immediately put his own construction on my work', Epstein says in his biography, adding that this had come across as some kind of 'theory of projectiles'. [30]

[30] Epstein, foreword to Herbert Read (ed.), *Speculations* (London, 1924), pp. vii–viii.

The idea of objects flying through the air immediately recalls Futurism, and Hulme had doubtless initially attempted to interpret the work according to Bergson. Again, it was not long before such flux-based interpretations of artworks gave way to an emphasis on stability and lack of movement. 'In monumental art,' he wrote in 1914; 'the abstract and inorganic is always used to make the organic seem durable and

eternal'. He even added to this that such artistic impulses sprang from a positive 'desire to make what is most obviously flexible and impermanent look fixed'—an analysis that undercuts Bergson in a way that could hardly be more explicit. [31]

[31] Hulme, 'Modern Art and its Philosophy', reproduced in *Collected Writings*, ed. Csengeri, 277.

In the year following this initial meeting, Epstein became closer to Hulme even than Henri Gaudier-Brzeska or Mark Gertler. Epstein has

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put it on record that 1912 was when he 'got to know T. E. Hulme very well', [32]

[32] Jacob Epstein, *Let there be Sculpture: An Autobiography* (London, 1940), 74.

while a marginalized Wyndham Lewis developed the idea that 'Hulme is Epstein, Epstein is Hulme'. [33]

[33] Photocopy of a manuscript entitled 'Wyndham Lewis in 1912' describing an interview granted to Victor M. Cassidy by Kate Lechmere (n.d.). Photocopy in the keeping of Paul O'Keefe; whereabouts of original unknown. Cited in Paul O'Keefe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis* (London, 2001), 148, 649 (nn. 147–8).

This was the very period during which Epstein had explained his reversed conception of the British Museum's sculpture hierarchy to Gertler, who, as we have seen, developed from it the 'conclusion that Egyptian art is *by far, by far*, the greatest of *all* art'. We have also noted that Gaudier, Eric Gill, and Ashley Gibson had experienced similar tutorials on alternative art history around this time. It is inconceivable, then, that Hulme, whose engagement with Epstein's work was deeper than any of theirs, would not also have toured the museum in his company. Hulme's own list of favourite cultures for sculpture matches Epstein's with uncanny exactitude. 'The more serious kind of art that one likes,' he wrote in a review of the sculptor's work in 1913, 'sprang out of organic societies like the Indian, Egyptian and Byzantine'. [34]

[34] Hulme, 'Mr Epstein and the Critics', 251–3, reproduced in *Collected Writings*, ed. Csengeri, 260.

The following year, he dismissed Greek sculpture to join that of the Renaissance, forming a category of art in which 'the superhuman abstract of the divine has been expressed by banal representation'. [35]

[35] Hulme, 'Modern Art and its Philosophy', reproduced in ibid. 277.

For his own part, Epstein thought Hulme's 1913 review was 'the sanest article ever written about me', [36]

[36] Epstein had the article reprinted in its entirety in both his autobiographical volumes, initially as an appendix to Arnold L. Haskell, *The Sculptor Speaks: Jacob Epstein to Arnold L. Haskell—a Series of Conversations on Art* (London, 1931), 151–64), and then at the end of the seventh chapter of *Let there be Sculpture*, 78–84.

noting elsewhere that 'with artists he was always humble and willing to learn'. [37]

[37] Epstein, *Let there be Sculpture*, 74.

When Epstein wrote the foreword to Herbert Read's *Speculations* arrangement of Hulme's writings in 1924, he made the additional observation that 'my sculpture only served to start the train of his thought'. The destination of that train of thought would be a full-scale redefinition of the word 'classical'. [38]

[38] Epstein, foreword to Read (ed.), *Speculations*, p. viii.

It was Epstein's reordering of aesthetic merit in art that finally allowed Hulme to free the 'classical versus romantic' debate from the narrow nationalistic agenda offered by the *Action Française*, and to

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propose instead a universalized conservative ethics for the emerging twentieth century. Back in 1911, Hulme had gone along with Maurras in identifying the artefacts and spirit of Greek and Roman antiquity as 'classical'. His reason for replacing these in 1913 with hieratic art from various parts of Asia was that such artworks 'put man into some geometrical shape which lifts him out of the transience of the organic'; [39]

[39] Hulme, 'Modern Art and its Philosophy', reproduced in *Collected Writings*, ed. Csengeri, 283.

this in contrast to Greek art, which is merely 'soft and real'. [40]

[40] Ibid. 271.

For Hulme, the nature of society and the nature of art in all these cultures is mutually reinforcing, so that hieratic civilizations naturally

produce forms of art ‘where everything tends to be angular’. Far from limiting the creativity of the artist, he finds that the ‘imposition of definite forms’ by Egyptian portraitists (for example) ‘rather has the effect of intensifying the individuality of his work’. [41]

[41] Hulme, ‘Mr Epstein and the Critics’, 251–3, reproduced in ibid. 260.

It is this last realization—that conventions in art are not necessarily constrictive but in fact challenge the artist to work within them—that Hulme's aesthetic are finally brought into agreement with the conservative ethics that had found expression as early as his ‘Tory Philosophy’ essay of early 1912. ‘The root of classicism is this,’ he had written there; ‘if the rules are of no value without genius, then yet there is in them more genius than there is in any great genius himself...man is by nature bad, turned into something good by a certain order and discipline’. [42]

[42] Hulme, ‘A Tory Philosophy’, *Commentator*, reproduced in ibid. 235.

As well as assisting him in refuting Bergson, then, Hulme's positive reassessment of ‘angular’ styles in the art of various periods allowed him to see the approach of a new era of ‘classicism’ in contemporary London. This new development had appeared as the result of Hulme's thoughts on the relationship between Epstein's Wilde monument and the extra-European artworks that had inspired it. Such connections had encouraged certain journalists to speak of ‘deliberate imitation’ by Epstein of works on show at the British Museum, Hulme noted in 1913, but the use of seemingly alien solutions to sculptural problems need not be taken as signifying a lack of sincerity in the artist. The new Modernist approach was easily discernible from mere Orientalism in that ‘the formula used must be a natural expression of the feeling you are getting and not a mere imitation of an exotic or a romantic past’. Such

an approach, then, should not induce a feeling of remoteness in the viewer but actually one of recognition and empathy. ‘In the peculiar conditions in which we find ourselves, which are really the breaking up of an era,’ he adds, ‘it has again become quite possible for people here and there to *have* the attitude expressed by such formulae’. [43]

[43] Hulme, ‘Mr Epstein and the Critics’, 251-3, reproduced in *Collected Writings* , ed. Csengeri, 257–8.

The aesthetics of Epstein's sculpture, then, is finally to be understood as prefiguring the establishment in Europe of a monolithic, ‘classical’ approach to the organization of society, the relationship of which with contemporary art and culture would mirror that of the hieratic civilizations of antiquity—at least as they were imagined by Hulme.

The Art of Africa and the Pacific Islands in Pre-War London

Rupert Richard Arrowsmith

Meanwhile, at the British Museum, Epstein's attention had shifted away from the great hieratic civilizations that fascinated Hulme, and had turned instead towards the elegant wooden and brass sculptures of the Pacific islands and sub-Saharan Africa. As with his use of Indian iconography and aesthetics for the BMA building, Epstein's exploration of African forms, techniques, and general approaches to sculpture have been much misunderstood by his critics. Many are eager to ascribe an early date to such influences in his work, and the word 'African' appears in ill-defined contexts even in discussions of the 1910–11 *Maternity*—a work whose actual derivation from Indian sculpture we have already established without very much doubt. Epstein himself has made the confusion worse with his 1940 claim to have 'discovered' the Pacific and African sculptures at the Paris Trocadero in 1902—some time before Picasso's celebrated encounter with them in 1906. [1]

[1] Jacob Epstein, *Let there be Sculpture: An Autobiography* (London, 1940), 23.

There is probably something in Bassani and McLeod's suggestion that Epstein deliberately overplayed the importance of his visit in order to have pipped the great Spanish Modernist to the post; not to mention Matisse, Derain, and Vlaminck. [2]

[2] Ezio Bassani and Malcolm McLeod, 'The Passionate Collector', in *Jacob Epstein Sculpture and Drawings* (Exhibition Catalogue) (London, 1989), 16. Vlaminck claimed throughout his life to have 'discovered' African art for Europe on the grounds that he had bought a Fang mask in 1905 (Maurice de Vlaminck, *Portraits avant décès* (Paris, 1943), 105–7.

More importantly, Epstein admitted in the same document that he had not gone near the British Museum's 'vast and wonderful collections from Polynesia and Africa' until 1912. [3]

[3] Epstein, *Let there be Sculpture*, 215.

Given that he had been actively

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incorporating elements drawn from the museum's other extra-European collections since 1906, it seems extremely unlikely that he would have postponed such a visit for six whole years if their relevance to contemporary Western art had already been understood and put into practice. Far more likely is the idea that Epstein was awakened to the possibilities of using aesthetics derived from such works by his Africaphile friend Amedeo Modigliani during the six-month stay in Paris that followed the installation of the Wilde Memorial, and that the sculptor followed up this revelation with a visit to the museum upon his return to London. Epstein saw Modigliani 'for a period of six months daily', reporting later that the Italian's studio had been 'filled with nine or ten of those long heads which were suggested by African masks'. [4]

[4] Epstein, *Let there be Sculpture*, 46

On visiting the studio of Constantin Brancusi, Epstein decided that the work on display there must 'no doubt' also have been influenced by African sculpture, despite the Romanian artist's aside to him that 'one must not imitate Africans'. [5]

[5] Ibid. 63.

It is seldom realized that in 1912 it would have been possible for Epstein to look at both African and Oceanic work, not only at the Trocadero, but also at commercial galleries in central Paris. Carl Einstein's seminal illustrated volume *Negerplastik*, the first Western publication ever to discuss African sculpture in formal aesthetic terms, would not appear for an additional three years. [6]

[6] Carl Einstein, *Negerplastik* (Leipzig, 1915).

Its full-page photographs had, however, been obtained from the Parisian art dealers who had agreed to sponsor the project. Most notable among these was the Hungarian entrepreneur Joseph Brummer, who had begun selling African masks as expensive curios from a wooden kiosk on the Rue Falguiére—an operation that he shifted at some point during 1909 to a small shop on Boulevard Raspail. Paul Guillaume, who would become famous during the First World War as a supplier of similar such materials to Picasso, de Chirico, Braque, and members of the newly affluent Paris avant garde from his shop near the Elyseé, no doubt also contributed. Despite certain wild claims that have recently been made about Epstein's pre-war acquisition of African pieces from these two dealers, it is extremely unlikely that the sculptor could have afforded to buy anything from either of them until 1920 at the earliest. [7]

[7] Alan Munton has recently alleged that Epstein 'began to collect African and Oceanic sculpture in 1912 or 1913, buying it from the newly established dealer

Paul Guillaume', giving only a page reference from Epstein's biography in support ('T. E. Hulme, Jacob Epstein and Wyndham Lewis', in Edward P. Comentale and Andrezej Gasiorek (eds.), *T. E. Hulme and the Question of Modernity* (Aldershot, 2006), 79). Epstein never claimed anything of the sort, however, stating only the following with regard to the Parisian art dealer: 'When I was in Paris in 1912, I saw an advertisement in a colonial paper asking for African carvings in hard wood. Calling at the Address in Montmartre I met Paul Guillaume for the first time, in a small attic room' (*Let there be Sculpture*, 215). Epstein further mentions visiting Joseph Brummer's shop the following year, but records being unable to afford the steep prices charged by 'that astute dealer' (ibid.). Bassani and McLeod's excellent analysis of Epstein's art collection argues very convincingly (and with evidence) that Epstein could not possibly have acquired anything before the war from either Paris dealer for purely financial reasons, and this seems far more likely to have been the case (Ezio Bassani and Malcolm McLeod, *Jacob Epstein Collector* (Milan, 1989), 27).

The fact that in more

prosperous times Epstein scrupulously tracked down and purchased items that had been shown in Paris during 1912 and 1913, however, strongly suggests some kind of engagement with them during his time there with Modigliani. The Italian artist's enthusiastic remarks must have represented no small factor in opening Epstein's eyes to the expressive power of such carvings, and their purchase at a much later date is likely to have fulfilled a nostalgic as well as an aesthetic need.

It is hardly surprising that an artist even of Epstein's proven openness to extra-European influences had failed to take account of Africa and Oceania during his earlier tours of the British Museum. We have had cause to note before that exhibits on the upper floor of the building were displayed as anthropological specimens rather than as art, and a large number of items from both these regions, as well as from Central and South America, had been crammed into three galleries on the east side of this same section of the building. To an even greater degree than the Indian and Chinese exhibits to be found nearby in the North and South Wings, the East Wing galleries were arranged with regard to the perceived scientific significance of objects rather than their aesthetic value, and the items of figure sculpture to be found there were obscured by legions of spearheads, musical instruments, smoking devices, and other mundane tools of village life; two large wall cases even contained wooden dummies made up and clothed to provide 'models of South African natives'. [8]

[8] *A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum (Bloomsbury)*, 3rd edn (London, 1908), 108.

In short, everything about the display and its arrangement was designed to draw attention away from the formal qualities of the exhibits and towards an appreciation of them as an indicator of the perceived level of progress attained by their cultures of origin. This last point is illustrated

quite nicely by the museum's official guidebook for 1908, which outlines the intended function of the galleries in a way that is worth quoting at length:

> The purpose for which a collection such as the one here exhibited is brought together, is to enable us to understand by what methods man, in his earlier efforts of development towards civilisation, supplies his wants of existence, protects his life, expresses his religious ideas, and gradually advances towards the cultivation of the industrial and ornamental arts. The material and form and make of his instruments and utensils for peaceful occupations, of his weapons for the chase and war, and of his clothing and ornament for the body will indicate the state of savagery or of primitive civilisation in which he exists, and also the conditions, and more particularly the climate, of the land which he inhabits...The savage does nothing without a reason. He has his periods of progress from the more debased to the less debased, from the lower to the higher, and, as in all other developments, there is a method in his progress. An ethnographical collection is not to be regarded as a mere haphazard gallery of native curiosities without educational value. [9]

[9] *A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum (Bloomsbury)*, 3rd edn (London, 1908), 105.

Figure sculpture, in particular, was to be regarded, not as the individual work of a particular artist working within clearly defined traditions of aesthetics, but merely as 'the form in which he represents his idea of a god or a supernatural power and the objects used in his superstitious or religious ceremonials'—the word 'art' does not appear in the guide even once. Such exhibits were considered valuable only in that they afforded 'a clue to the inner working of his mind and the effect upon it of wonders and phenomena of nature'.

With regard to regions conforming to Victorian and Edwardian notions of relative civilization—this would include contemporary Greece and the Amaravati district of India that had been home to the famous reliefs—conservation was often cited by colonial agents as a reason for the removal of objects to Europe. In the cases of African and of Oceanic art, by contrast, no such justification was thought necessary. The 1908 official guidebook describes a 'valuable series of idols...brought home by missionaries from the South Pacific islands', a

reminder that the first artworks to reach Europe from the area were religious icons removed from village sites by well-meaning followers of monotheistic cults such as Christianity. Such transactions were typically conducted under an implied or actual threat either of violence or of

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other punitive measures to be delivered via the apparatus of colonialism. After the missionaries, Ethnographers appeared, relying on scientific necessity as a justification for what was, even as late as the 1930s, very often little more than barefaced theft. Michel Leiris, who took part in the anthropologist Marcel Griaule's Dakar–Djibouti ethnographical expedition in 1931, has left a frank account of the acquisition techniques employed:

> Yesterday people refused, horrified, our request for several rain-producing statuettes as well as a figure with raised arms that had been found in another sanctuary...While saying an affectionate farewell to the elders...we keep watch over the green umbrella that is ordinarily opened up to shade us but today is carefully tied shut with string. Swollen with a strange tumour that makes it resemble the beak of a pelican, it now holds the famous statuette with raised arms, which I myself stole from the base of the conical mound that serves as an altar for this statue and others like it. I first hid it in my shirt...then I put it in the umbrella...pretending that I was urinating in order to turn away people's attention. [10]

[10] Diary entry for 12 Nov. in Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantome* (Paris, 1934), trans. in Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilised Places* (Chicago and London, 1989), 72.

The methods used in collecting the majority of the so-called ethnographical exhibits at institutions such as the British Museum meant that almost no information about their function, context, or even culture of origin was available to curators; for this reason exhibits were usually tagged with faulty information or just displayed unlabelled. Not many people would have noticed this, for the galleries were so infrequently visited that it was 1910 before the museum even published a guidebook to them. [11]

[11] *British Museum Handbook of the Ethnographical Collections* (London, 1910).

Despite Brancusi's warning not to imitate such work, the period following Epstein's return from Paris in November 1912 was full of experiments based on African and Pacific island sculpture. The announcement of this new direction may be seen in a sketch of 1913 that was published by Richard Buckle in his 1962 book of Epstein's drawings. [12]

[12] Richard Buckle (ed.), *Epstein Drawings* (London, 1962).

It shows a woman's head, the jaw, lips, and basic hair outline of which have been rendered naturalistically, but whose eyes, nose, and hair seem to incorporate conventions of representation derived from West Africa. By the time the drawing was created, Epstein had gone to live at Pett Level—a remote cliff-top area some three hours' train journey from London—in

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order to remove himself from metropolitan distractions. Mark Gertler visited him there the following summer and reported to Dora Carrington that a black artists' model had also taken up residence, forming what the young painter perceived as a ménage-a-trois with the sculptor and his wife. ‘Epstein has a filthy mind and he always has some girl living with him *including* his wife,’ wrote the neurotic Gertler in July 1914. ‘Now he has a horrible black girl.’ [13]

[13] Gertler to Carrington, July 1914, reproduced in *Mark Gertler: Selected Letters* , ed. Noel Carrington (London, 1965), 71, emphasis in original.

Whatever the nature of Epstein's relationship with his latest model, the African head sketches the sculptor made during this period clearly owe something to her presence at Pett Level. In a similar way to the handling of the ‘Indian’ figures for the BMA, Epstein appears to have begun with a relatively naturalistic drawing from life, into which stylistic conventions from a particular culture were subsequently introduced. William Fagg, later a curator of the British Museum's ethnographical collections, found the opportunity during the 1950s of observing Epstein engaged with his own collection of sculpture from Africa and the southern Pacific islands—a collection which by that time had grown to become one of the finest in Europe. What interested the sculptor, Fagg would recall in 1960, had not been the overall impact of individual pieces nor indeed their perceived exoticism, but the formal innovations discovered by the carver when faced with problems of artistic representation. Epstein would ‘spend hours in silent contemplation or animated discussion of them’, Fagg wrote of Epstein's favourite extra-European pieces, ‘considering always the sculptural problems with which the artist confronted himself, or was confronted with by tradition, and the solutions which he had found for them’. [14]

[14] William Fagg, introduction to *The Epstein Collection of Tribal and Exotic Sculpture* (Exhibition Catalogue) (London, 1960), 2.

By February 1913 Epstein had already acquired the foundation for his later collection in the form of four cut-price African carvings. These had been acquired, according to a letter of that month to the collector John Quinn, ‘by the greatest good luck and wholly by chance...for 100 francs each’. [15]

[15] Letter from Epstein to Quinn, Feb. 1913, the Quinn Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, quoted in Elizabeth Barker, ‘New Light on Epstein's Early Career’, *Burlington Magazine*, 130/1029 (Dec. 1988), 906.

These newly acquired possessions were not, however, available for direct reference as the sculptor began work at Pett Level.

Dependent as he was during the pre-war years upon public transportation, Epstein had evidently found himself unable to carry the heavy, tropical hardwood carvings with him to Sussex. Instead, they had been left for safe keeping at the Tate Gallery in the care of his friend J. B. Manson, an official who would later become that institution's director. It is a previously unpublished letter sent to Manson from Epstein at Pett Level, however, that helps clarify exactly which African artworks the sculptor did have access to during his first experiments with the aesthetics of the region. The main purpose of Epstein's letter is to thank Manson for sending an unexpected gift. ‘It is a splendid book,’ the letter runs. ‘The Benin things are fine, fine.’ [16]

[16] Epstein to J. B. Manson, 16 July 1913 (from Pett Level), TGA 801.1.302, Tate Gallery Archive.

It is an aesthetic derived from Benin—not the modern nation but the highly developed West African city state that enjoyed its heyday between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries—that emerges in the drawings of African heads made by Epstein at Pett Level. Olfert Dapper's account of the city, based on the testimony of a Dutch trader who had toured the region in the 1660s, describes the city as larger and better-organized than contemporary Rotterdam. [17]

[17] Olfert Dapper, *Déscription de l'Afrique* (Amsterdam, 1689).

Victorian globetrotter Richard Burton passed through two centuries later, remarking—perhaps predictably, given his cultural background—that the refined architecture of the city must somehow have been derived from that of Rome. Over the century preceding Burton's visit, however, the slave trade and other factors had already driven the city into cultural decline. By the time of the European ‘scramble for Africa’ some years later, the Oba—as the king of Benin was titled—found his borders marching with those of the British Niger Coast Protectorate. This administrative region was soon to become the fully-fledged colony of Nigeria, and the British authorities were not slow to explore the possibilities for an inclusion of Benin City within the boundaries of that new political entity. James Robert Phillips, then the Deputy Consul General of the region, wrote to the Foreign Office in 1896 that if reasons could be found for a military expedition against Benin, ‘I have reason to hope that sufficient ivory may be found in the King's house to pay the expenses in removing the King from his Stool’. [18]

[18] Quoted in Robert Home, *City of Blood Revisited: A New Look at the Benin Expedition of 1897* (London, 1982), 33.

Perhaps ironically, it was the death of Phillips himself at the head

of a diplomatic mission sent to the Oba early the following year that would provide exactly such a *casus belli*. The party had failed to heed a warning from the monarch not to enter the city during a religious ceremony that was then taking place, and were slaughtered to a man by a detachment of the local soldiery.

Sir Reginald Bacon, who served as information officer to the subsequent punitive expedition that stormed Benin City on 17 February of the same year, was not above registering the quality of the artefacts his men could be seen pillaging from various shrines and from the royal enclosure itself. ‘Two magnificent leopards were the chief articles of note,’ Bacon wrote, adding—again somewhat predictably—that an Egyptian influence must have determined their design. [19]

[19] Reginald Bacon, *Benin: City of Blood* (London and New York, 1897), 92.

After their dispatch to the British Museum, the elaborate brass castings from the city were mistaken for bronzes, but elicited surprised admiration from curators for their high levels of technical accomplishment. Despite the obvious evidence of a developed civic culture to be found in these new additions to the British Museum's holdings, however, descriptions of Benin made prior to the First World War invariably portrayed the civilization as bloodthirsty, unreasoning, and barbaric. Bacon's own account was luridly entitled *City of Blood* , and began by dismissing the city's history as ‘one long record of savagery of the most debased kind’. [20]

[20] Ibid. 13.

Even the somewhat less unhinged description of Benin offered in 1903 by the ethnologist Henry Ling Roth could not help including the

culture's perceived ‘horrors’ in its own title. [21]

[21] Henry Ling Roth, *Great Benin: Its Customs, Art and Horrors* (Halifax, 1903).

Epstein would have found the brass and ivory sculptures representing the spoils of the 1897 land grab in the ethnographical galleries of the Museum's Upper East Wing, ‘occupying’, according to the 1908 general guide, ‘three cases in the centre of the floor’. [22]

[22] The guide makes a mistake with the date of the Benin expedition, stating that it happened in 1898 instead of 1897 (*A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum (Bloomsbury)*, 7th edn (London, 1908), 108).

The display included the two ivory leopards mentioned in Bacon's account, as well as a comprehensive series of brass reliefs that had once decorated the outside of the Oba's royal enclosure. These last exhibits undoubtedly would have attracted Epstein's attention because of his interest in architectural sculpture. It should be remembered that, by this date, Epstein had produced no three-dimensional project more abstract than

the Wilde monument or the 1910–11 carving *Sun God*, preferring usually to begin with an illusionistic treatment of a motif onto which less representational styling or abstract details were subsequently overlaid. He would, therefore, have been struck by the similar balance drawn in the art of Benin between naturalistic depiction and the strong abstract tendencies preferred in other, less urbanized West African cultures. Epstein must have described the British Museum's Benin holdings with some enthusiasm to J. B. Manson, and, when the sculptor found himself cut off at Pett Level from his own small set of African carvings, the curator sent him instead an illustrated book on the city's sculpture.

The ‘splendid book’ received by Epstein in July 1913 was undoubtedly A. H. L. Pitt-Rivers's *Antique Works of Art from Benin*, the most recent work in English on the subject—a volume containing fifty pages of quality photographs illustrating examples from the British Museum and other European collections. A great many of the works illustrated in the volume were portraits or other representations of the Iyoba—or ‘King Mother’—Idia, probably the most revered of Benin's historical rulers. The most famous of these portraits, a sixteenth-century brass bust, would find itself included in a still-life painting by Mark Gertler after the First World War. A brass mask illustrated by a conspicuously large illustration in Pitt-Rivers's volume probably also represents the Iyoba. Idia had led the city state during the minority of her son, the late-fifteenth-century Oba Esigie, and was particularly remembered for her successful prosecution of a military campaign against the neighbouring Igala civilization. This uncompromising strength of character—as opposed to the seductive femininity of the Indian *shalabhanjika* or the vapid elegance of the Greek Venus—may be seen to represent the most unmistakable single quality of Epstein's African head drawings from Pett Level.

After exploring the relatively naturalistic sculptural ‘solutions’ of artworks from Benin city, Epstein was able to approach the less representational aesthetics of carvings from rural parts of West Africa. It has already been noted that during his student years Epstein had been obliged to scour Paris for a sitter fitting his interest in Indian sculpture, and it might well be imagined that a similar search was undertaken for a model conforming to the sculptor's recently assembled notions of African beauty. Epstein evidently met the woman who eventually modelled for the two African head drawings via London's Slade art school, for Mark Gertler clearly recalled her telling him that

she was accustomed to sitting for life classes at that institution. [23]

[23] Gertler to Carrington, July 1914, reproduced in *Mark Gertler: Selected Letters*, ed. Noel Carrington, 71.

The African head drawings may, then, be seen as an attempt to emulate the fusion of observed details and stylistic conventions that is typical of the art of Benin. In the first African head, the chin, lips, and earrings of the sitter have been translated into two dimensions using recognizably European techniques of pictorial illusionism. As with the brass mask illustrated in J. B. Manson's book, however, the eyes are rendered as geometric, pupil-less almonds, which Epstein has further stylized by hedging them between strongly defined eye ridges that sweep down into the bridge of the nose. Elizabeth Barker has suggested that a second African head drawing from the Pett Level years in fact represents an accurate still-life sketch of the so-called Brummer Head—a now famous piece of Gabonese (Fang culture) sculpture that Epstein may have seen at the Hungarian dealer's shop early in 1913. [24]

[24] ‘It is tempting to speculate that this drawing was a means of fixing his impressions of a great piece of African sculpture which he could not afford to purchase at the time’ (Elizabeth Barker, ‘New Light on Epstein's Early Career’, *Burlington Magazine*, 130/1029 (Dec. 1988), 996).

The hair arrangement of the Gabonese piece certainly appears to have found its way into the drawing discussed by Baker, while the first sketch—which she does not include in her discussion—incorporates the Brummer Head's dramatically stylized nostrils. To assume that the second African head drawing is a direct imitation of this carving is, however, to ignore the significantly greater naturalism shown in

Epstein's approach to African aesthetics. The value of African art for the sculptor, as he would explain to Arnold Haskell in 1931, did not lie in a perceived tendency towards radical abstraction, but rather in what he called a 'union of naturalism and design'. He even added in the same discussion that 'it is a great mistake...to lose sight of the naturalism'. [25]

[25] Jacob Epstein, in Arnold L. Haskell, *The Sculptor Speaks: Jacob Epstein to Arnold L. Haskell—a Series of Conversations on Art* (London, 1931), 90. Van Dieren would subsequently write a favourable review of the second 'Venus' for the *New Age* (7 Mar. 1917, pp. 451–3).

Like the first African head drawing, this second sketch has clearly been taken from a live model and then stylized, again in the quasi-naturalistic mode of a brass casting such as the British Museum's brass head of Iyoba Idia, a quality photograph of which was available at Pett Level courtesy of J. B. Manson's book.

Epstein's next project at Pett Level would emphasize the abstract qualities of West African sculpture, while also drawing attention to their perceived sexual overtones. It was the sexual liaison between him and the model who had come to join him at Pett Level that probably provided the initial impetus for the two *Venus* carvings of 1913–14 and 1914–16 (Fig. 41). Epstein hinted as much in remarks made at the first public exhibition of the latter of these two pieces in February 1917. 'What sacrilege', he said to the composer Bernard van Dieren then, 'to present to public view that work which I for a long summer privately and almost in secrecy worked at for my own pleasure...Few will see what I've expressed or aimed to express in it, and if they did they would be unholily shocked.' [26]

[26] Epstein to Bernard van Dieren, 8 Mar. 1917, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, quoted in Evelyn Silber, introduction to *The Sculpture of Epstein with a Complete Catalogue* (Oxford, 1986), 34.

Epstein's famous *Doves* series seems to have originated around the same time. Some relatively naturalistic sketches of these creatures from 1913 confirm that live examples were present at Pett Level, and it was perhaps inevitable that the sculptor would eventually begin to equate the creatures' relentless sexual appetites with his own. As with the African head carvings, then, Epstein is likely to have begun the first *Venus* and the first version of the *Doves* with studies taken from life, before introducing stylistic elements derived from his observations of African artworks.

Manson's Benin volume contains a photograph that seems to have contributed some of the stylistic elements of the first *Venus*, while others probably came from Epstein's visits to Joseph Brummer's shop in Paris, or from sketches made there. The photograph shows an ivory figurine with many postural similarities to Epstein's carving, particularly in that the hands are positioned at the sides of the body, which is unusual in carvings from West Africa. The example shown in Fig. 42 shows a more typical positioning of the hands on the belly, but others of its aesthetic features suggest that it also has some relationship with Epstein's first *Venus*. Published photographs of this second West African carving, which appears to be Akan (probably produced by the Baoulé culture of present-day Côte d'Ivoire), would not have been available to Epstein until Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik* came out in 1915; there it would have three full pages dedicated to it, indicating its importance in the author's estimation. As was noted at the beginning of this chapter, however, most of the photographs for *Negerplastik* were provided by none other

Fig. 41. ***Venus*** **(first version), by Jacob Epstein, 1913–14. Marble. 123.2 cm high.** ***(Baltimore Museum of Art)***

Fig. 42. Female figure, probably Baoulé, from present-day Côte d'Ivoire (Akan). ***(Photograph reproduced as it appears in Carl Einstein's Negerplastik (Leipzig, 1915))***

than Joseph Brummer, and the book may be seen as a good indicator of the contents of his shop prior to the First World War. If the carving was indeed one of Brummer's, then Epstein would have seen it during his time in Paris with Modigliani and may have made drawings of it at that time. He was probably reminded of it by the ivory figurine in the Benin book, a work that its author, the anthropologist Pitt Rivers, contrasted with the more naturalistic brass castings there by saying it possessed 'a design as rude as found in any part of Africa'. Rather than ivory or hardwood, of course, Epstein used marble—the archetypal base material for classical Greek sculpture—for his two *Venuses*. Just as in Hulme's contemporary writings, the arrival of a new classicism based on extra-European conventions had been definitively announced.

Epstein's motif of two conjoined birds, which Lord Drogheda would later dub 'those fucking doves', was also the result of Epstein's interest in published material on Africa. [27]

[27] In 1914 Epstein was invited by Lady Drogheda to exhibit work at her home in Wilton Crescent, the dining room of which had been decorated in 'African' style by Wyndham Lewis the year before. Lord Drogheda was particularly unimpressed by one of the *Doves* carvings, which he threatened to throw out of the window (Kate Lechmere interviewed by Richard Cork, cited in Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age* (London, 1976), 125 n. 85).

By far the most widely read pre-war volume to describe the cultures of the continent was the German anthropologist Leo Frobenius's 1912 study *Und Afrika Sprach*, a work that came out in English as *The Voice of Africa* early in 1913. [28]

[28] Leo Frobenius, *Und Afrika Sprach* (Berlin: Vita, Deutsches Verlagshaus, 1912); trans. Rudolf Blind, *The Voice of Africa*, 2 vols. (London: Hutchinson, 1913).

The book contains a considerable amount of commentary on West African art and its social context, and would certainly have been consulted by Epstein at some point during his initial period of enthusiasm for the continent. As we have noted, the *Doves* series had its origins in the naturalistic sketches done by Epstein at Pett Level. Its original incarnation in three dimensions—as the base of the first *Venus* carving—bears, however, a far greater and more convincing resemblance to Frobenius's own illustration of a drinking vessel from the Yoruba culture (Fig. 43). This design, produced by West Africa's largest and most influential ethnic group, was subsequently carried over in a very decisive way by Epstein into the first version of the *Doves* as a separate motif (Fig. 44). In the *Venus*, the tall humanoid figure stands for the implacable force that motivates sexual intercourse between the two birds; in the *Doves*, however, Epstein is interested only in the act itself.

Henri Gaudier-Brzeska was quick to fall in with Epstein's tendency to view both African artworks and those from the Pacific Islands as expressive of a mindset primarily concerned with sexual acts. 'They fell into contemplation before their sex,' he wrote in *Blast*, conflating

the work of African artists with those from Oceania in a way that echoes the arrangement of artefacts from these two regions in the British Museum, in whose galleries they were exhibited side by side as ethnographic specimens. It was precisely these galleries in the building's Upper East Wing that provided the venue for the 1913 conversation between Frank Harris and Gaudier that has been described in an earlier chapter. Harris had been busy 'looking about among the cases containing the idols and art-products of the South Sea islanders' when he had caught sight of the

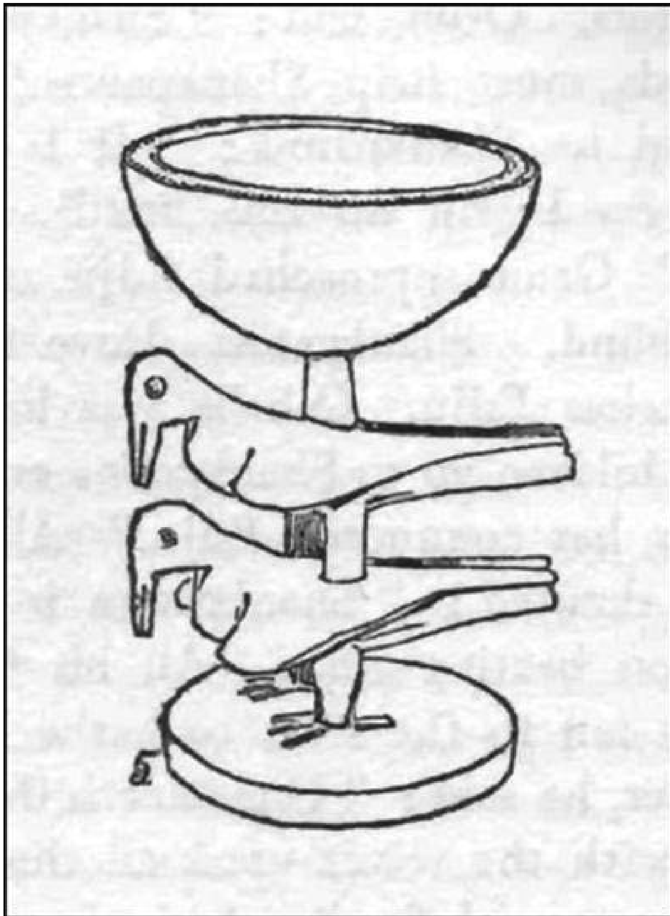

Fig. 43. Yoruba drinking vessel. (As illustrated in Leo Frobenius's *Und Afrika Sprach* (Berlin, 1912))

young sculptor. Gaudier said to Harris that he often visited that part of the museum, describing the figure sculptures of Oceania and Africa as 'masterpieces...of all sorts' that he found 'more wonderful than the daughters of Pheidias [*sic*]' downstairs in the Elgin Room. [29]

[29] Frank Harris, 'Gaudier Brzeska', in *Contemporary Portraits* (3 vols.; New York, 1920), iii. 151–2.

'They pulled the sphere lengthways and made the cylinder,' Gaudier subsequently wrote in his seminal article for *Blast*. 'This is the VORTEX OF

FIG. 44. *DOVES* (FIRST VERSION), BY JACOB EPSTEIN, 1913. MARBLE. *(PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE COURTAULD INSTITUTE, LONDON; ORIGINAL SCULPTURE IS NOW IN THE HIRSHHORN MUSEUM, WASHINGTON DC)*

FECUNDITY, and it has left us the masterpieces known as love charms.' [30]

[30] 'Vortex Gaudier Brzeska', *Blast* (London, 1914), 157.

Gaudier's own love charm, the 1914 *Ornament* he carved from an ivory toothbrush handle, shows very obvious similarities to the many staves and paddles from Fiji and New Caledonia which at that time occupied the museum's display cases. James Edge-Partington's comprehensive *fin de siècle* catalogue of the nation's Pacific collections clearly demonstrates just how many of these particular exhibits were kept on show there, and it would have been easy for such artefacts to be understood by a visitor as the region's primary sculptural genre. [31]

[31] James Edge-Partington, *Ethnographical Album of the Pacific Islands: An Album of the Weapons, Tools, Ornaments Articles of Dress, etc., of the Natives of the Pacific Isles* (London, 1890 (Series 1) and 1894 (Series 2)).

When it came to portraiture, Gaudier was happy enough to follow Epstein's method of life drawing followed by the introduction of conventions drawn from a particular extra-European culture, and with a subsequent overemphasis of the finished work's sexual implications. Like Epstein's drawings of his model at Pett Level, Gaudier's drawings

of Ezra Pound's head are relatively naturalistic, while the *Hieratic Head* itself incorporates the representational conventions and the 'block aesthetic' of the *Hoa Hakananai'a* standing on the front steps of the British Museum. Also, as with Epstein's African experiments, the base material used is not the Rapa Nui artist's choice of basalt or volcanic tuft, but rather Pentelic Marble dug from the very same quarries as the stone used by Phidias. The phallic implication of the *Hoa Hakananai'a* is barely noticeable, but it is played up in Gaudier's head to the extent that it resembles a stylized champagne cork, as the painter Horace Brodzky was able to observe after watching Gaudier at work on it. Brodzky remembered Gaudier telling him explicitly 'that it was to be a phallus', and noted that this 'pornographic' aspect of the work was fully understood by Pound. [32]

[32] Horace Brodzky, *Henri Gaudier-Brzeska 1891–1915* (London, 1933), 58–9.

D. H. Lawrence, whose novel *Women in Love* hints at his dealings with the London avant-garde of the 1910s, was also able to demonstrate an awareness of African sculpture and the way in which it was being interpreted. [33]

[33] Though the manuscript for *Women in Love* was largely complete by the end of 1916, Lawrence was initially unable to find a publisher, and the novel did not appear in print until 1921.

Lawrence seems first to have encountered West African art in 1916 at the London home of Philip Heseltine, the young composer whom Lawrence would parody in the novel as the effete character Halliday. A letter of the same year from Heseltine to Frederick Delius confirms the presence of a statuette from the region at the flat he had occupied since the previous winter. [34]

[34] Heseltine to Delius, 22 Apr. 1916, British Library MS 71167–8.

Epstein had known Heseltine since at least 1915, and introduced him to a third composer, Bernard van Dieren, at some point the following

year. Heseltine soon developed what his biographer has called an ‘obsessive, schoolboy-like hero- worship’ for van Dieren, who we have already noted was one of the biggest admirers of Epstein's *Venus* carvings. [35]

[35] Barry Smith, *Peter Warlock: The Life of Philip Heseltine* (Oxford, 1994), 100.

The idea that the two older men nurtured Heseltine's interest in African aesthetics seems unavoidable, and the sculpture at his home was almost certainly purchased on Epstein's advice. Lawrence followed up his own interest in Heseltine's figurine with a reading of Leo Frobenius, finding the anthropologist to be a ‘tiresome writer’, but admiring the same sections on the Yoruba that had caught Epstein's attention. Lawrence was even prompted by what he read to speculate not only that the Yoruba

civilization pre-dated Egypt and Carthage, but also that it had given rise to the myth of Atlantis. [36]

[36] Mark Kincaid-Weeks, *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile, 1912–1922* (Cambridge, 1996), 437.

It is unfortunately not clear whether Lawrence followed up these new interests with a visit to the British Museum or by tracking down a copy of *Negerplastik*. His familiarity with avant-garde ideas regarding such work is, however, beyond question, as the ‘Lawrence character’ Birkin's reaction to Heseltine's ‘glossy and suave’ carving demonstrates:

> He realised that there were great mysteries to be unsealed, sensual, mindless, dreadful mysteries, far beyond the phallic cult...the elongated, long, long body, the curious unexpected heavy buttocks, the long imprisoned neck, the face with tiny features like a beetle's. This was far beyond any phallic knowledge, sensual subtle realities far beyond the scope of phallic investigation.

The ‘phallic cult’ apparently pursued by Epstein, Gaudier, and Gill, then, did not for Lawrence offer a satisfactory interpretation of West African sculptural aesthetics. That he perceived Epstein particularly as belonging to such a movement was hardly surprising, for the sculptor had recently exhibited one of the most phallic works of art ever produced—the 1913 *Rock Drill.*

Existing criticism of the *Rock Drill* dwells almost exclusively upon its industrial elements with their connotations of Futurist organic-mechanical amalgamations. Its preparatory drawings, however, follow the development of works such as the *Venuses* and Gaudier's *Hieratic Head* in that they begin with naturalistic observation which is then re-expressed using mannerisms derived from Africa and the Pacific islands. Epstein first encountered heavy drilling equipment in 1911, when he was shopping for stone at the Hopton Wood quarries. Pneumatic hammer drills had recently been introduced at the site; from the drawings, these were probably of the Ingersoll-Rand 1902 type, powered by portable air compressors. The image of a workman seemingly directing—but perhaps in fact directed by—a powerful, phallic instrument clearly made an impression on Epstein. That he saw it as the male counterpart of the *Venus* carvings is confirmed by a contemporary sketch, now owned by the British Museum, showing male and female figures with grossly outsized sexual organs standing in opposition on different sides of the page. Just as the unseen sexual principle that was embodied in the *Venuses* by the towering figure of the goddess was imagined to

determine with its insistent weight the actions of the two birds at the base of the composition, so, in the *Rock Drill* sketches, the large phallus finds itself directed inevitably towards the vaginal opening at the foot of the illustration (Fig. 45). It is not the intentionally puny arms and tiny, featureless head of the completed plaster figure that direct this process, but more powerful, less rational factors working through him. For the three-dimensional version, Epstein acquired a much older Ingersoll drill, not pneumatic, but of the steam-driven type of the 1870s. The flattened features of the figure's head resemble *otobo* (hippopotamus) ceremonial masks from the Kalabari culture of what is now Nigeria, of which several were present at the British Museum.

The family group represented by the *Rock Drill*, the *Doves* series, and the two *Venuses* represents Epstein's last really significant project before his nervous breakdown in the spring of 1918. This ‘mental crisis’ came at the end of a year-long battle by the sculptor to avoid conscription into the British army for the war in the Middle East, and may be seen unequivocally to round off his ten-year phase of intensive experimentation with extra-European aesthetics and techniques of sculpture. [37]

[37] Epstein to Bernard van Dieren, undated, Harry Ransom Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, quoted in Stephen Gardiner, *Epstein: Artist against the Establishment* (London, 1992), 187.

After the war, portraiture modelled in clay again became the sculptor's stock in trade, and only occasional attempts were made to reprise the monumental carving projects that had defined his efforts during the 1910s. ‘The experimental artist is doomed,’ Epstein wrote to his friend Alfred Yockney in the summer of 1918; ‘there is a shortage of everything now. The shortage is brains.’ [38]

[38] Epstein to Alfred Yockney, 27 July 1918, Archives of the Imperial War Museum, London.

With the increasing post-war retreat of Eric Gill into monastic Christianity, and with both Gaudier-Brzeska and T. E. Hulme dead in the trenches, it would be left to younger artists such as Moore, Dobson, and Hepworth to rediscover and extend the lessons of the British Museum.

It is very telling that the work that probably represents London's final and most profound pre-war departure from the traditional aesthetics of Europe should have been titled by its creator *Venus*— an idealized Graeco-Roman motif sufficiently beloved of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century academic sculptors to have become a cliché even as

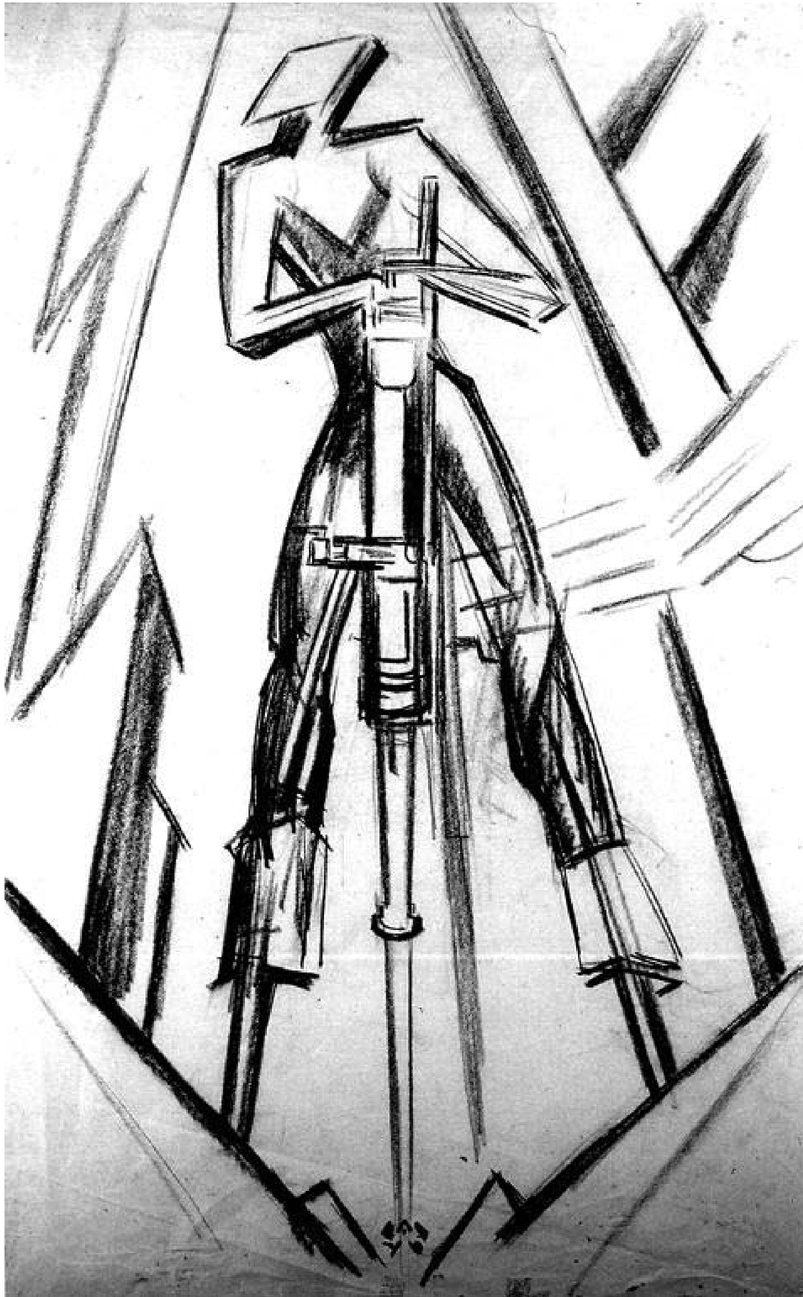

Fig. 45. *Sketch for the Rock Drill* , by Jacob Epstein, 1913. Crayon on paper. 67.5 cm × 42.5 cm. *(Walsall New Art Gallery, United Kingdom)*

early as the 1860s, as Honoré Daumier's well-known parody sketches from that decade confirm. Contrary to popular misconception, in Epstein's hands the idealism of such academic works does not disappear. European conventions of beauty—particularly of female beauty—are merely modified or replaced by those of other world civilizations seen as possessing equally valid—if equally conventional—traditions of representation. Just as the conventions of the Elgin Marbles had been systematically studied and emulated by previous

generations of artists living in London, these extra-European works now began to be recognized by Epstein's contemporaries as the masterpieces of a wider artistic canon representing a global—rather than merely a provincial European—survey of independent traditions in fine art. There is extraordinary irony in the fact that the British Museum—an institution whose function had been to uphold eighteenth- and nineteenth-century narratives of Greek (and therefore European) superiority in art—should find itself at the centre of such developments. The alternative approach to the museum's exhibits announced in the work of Epstein, Gill, Gaudier, and Hulme clearly implied an aesthetic relativism that made obsolete the linear narrative of artistic progress proposed by the layout of the displays themselves. Despite the inevitable anti-Greek rhetoric that emanated at times from the pre-war London avant-garde, however, this relativism was best summed up by Ezra Pound in 1915. 'We have kept, I believe, a respect for what was strong in the Greek, for what was sane in the Roman,' he wrote that February in his meditation on the death of Gaudier. 'We have other standards, we have gone on with the intentions of Pico, to China and Egypt.' [39]

[39] Ezra Pound, 'Affirmations: Gaudier Brzeska', *New Age*, 4 Feb. 1915, pp. 409–11, reproduced in *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts*, ed. Harriet Zinnes (New York, 1980), 16.

Rather than a decisive break with the European tradition, the radical changes in the attitude of London's artists and writers towards sculpture in the years leading up to the First World War are best seen as an unprecedented engagement and dialogue between that tradition and the rest of the world.

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9 ‘Kuanon of all Delights’

Seven Lakes, Eight Views, and the Korean Goddess of *The Cantos*

Rupert Richard Arrowsmith

Pound's involvement with the British Museum might be expected to have ended with his decisive departure from London in 1920, but that was not in fact the case. After his support of Mussolini during the Second World War, he was arrested by Allied forces in spring 1945 and imprisoned in an open cage at a penal camp near Pisa. With few reading materials and little company, Pound was forced back on his memories of London before the First World War, and *The Pisan Cantos* dwell obsessively upon the remembered city, its characters, its art, and particularly its museums. So clearly had Pound come to realize the importance to that lost age of Bloomsbury's temple of the muses that he began to refer to the pre-war years as ‘a British Museum era’. Given the intense concentration on East Asian art that had characterized his museum experiences in those years, it is hardly surprising when imagery drawn from such works begins to permeate the fresh cantos to a new and unprecedented degree.

One does not have to wait until the 1940s, however, to see the museum connection re-established. During the early 1930s Laurence Binyon decided to write an ambitious verse translation of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. When his initial draft of the *Inferno* was finished at Christmas 1933, T. S. Eliot sent a copy of it to Pound to review for the *Criterion*. Pound wrote directly to the curator on 21 January to express his ‘very solid appreciation’ and to offer his assistance. Binyon was delighted at this suggestion, and Pound, who was by that time living in Rapallo on the Italian Riviera, continued to contribute comments and recommendations on Binyon's translations by post until December 1939. At that time the quickening slide towards war in Europe meant that the exchange of typescripts between residents of England and

those of Italy became impossible. ‘I meant to write to you long ago, and send you some more cantos,’ Binyon told Pound at the end of that month. ‘But according to the papers, typed MSS are not allowed to go abroad...I want very much to have your opinion of my new cantos, but I suppose that must wait.’ [1]

[1] Binyon to Pound, 29 Dec. 1939, BLA, vol. 75.

Pound's probable collaboration on Binyon's 1913 study of Botticelli was explored in Chapter 5, but it is not the work of the Florentine artist that Pound felt would be the most useful in visualizing the holiest part of Dante's universe—the *Paradiso.* It might be remembered that Pound's main impression of Japanese prints viewed at the British Museum had been one of ‘Paradisal calm and *aura dolce*’, and so his recommendation of East Asian art as the basis for Dante's heaven is perhaps unsurprising. ‘All your work on Oriental art is bound to profit you when you come to the lighting of the Paradiso,’ he wrote to Binyon in March 1934. ‘Not one hour of it can but go into the rendering.’ Perhaps referring to his own dealings with East Asian visual culture, he then added: ‘one's preparation for a real job is possibly never what one does when one thinks one is preparing.’ [2]

[2] Pound to Binyon, 6 Mar. 1934, reproduced in *The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907–1941* , ed. D. D. Paige (London, 1951), 340.

The most intensive period of Pound's correspondence with Binyon was 1936–7, and it was also during this period that Canto XLIX, more commonly known as *The Seven Lakes Canto*, was written. Kodama Sanhide and Zhaoming Qian have done a lot of work on linking the imagery of these verses to a Japanese illustrated book that had been sent to Pound back in 1928 by his mother. [3]

[3] See Kodama Sanhide, ‘The Eight Scenes of Sho-Sho’, *Paedeuma*, 2/6 (1977), 23; and Zhaoming Qian, ‘Pound's Seven Lakes Canto’, in *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art* (Charlottesville, Va., and London, 2003), 123–37.

The book is a rather crude and colourless version of the *hakkei* or ‘eight-views’ motif described in Chapter 9, with accompanying poetic inscriptions in classical Chinese. Pound got the opportunity to translate these later the same year when one ‘Miss Thseng’, described by the poet as ‘a descendent of Confucius’, was passing through Rapallo. [4]

[4] There is some controversy about whether this translation was made in 1928 or 1929. Hugh Kenner's 1972 article on the subject gives the date, supplied by Pound's daughter Mary de Rachelwitz, as 1929 (‘More on the Seven Lakes Canto’, *Paideuma*, 1/2 (1974)). However, as Angela Jung Palandri has pointed out, Pound wrote the following lines to his mother on 1 Mar. 1928: ‘Dorothy is up a mountain with a returned missionary. Yes, Chinese book arrived, verry interestin’, returned missionary promises us a descendent of Confucius in a month or so, who will probably be able to decipher it.’ On 30 May 1928, Pound wrote to his father on the same subject: ‘Translations of Chinese poems in picture book is at Rapallo. They are poems on a set of scenes in miss Thseng's part of the country’ (Angela Jung Palandri, ‘The Seven Lakes Canto’, *Paideuma*, 3/1 (1974), 52). Considering the above, the date was more likely to have been April or May 1928 than 1929.

While Kodama finds the text of the

screen book the most significant with regard to Pound's visualization of the seven lakes, Qian prefers to concentrate on the drawings. What neither critic can satisfactorily explain, however, is why he waited eight full years before working the material into a poem of his own. Dorothy Pound later wrote to Binyon's daughter Nicolette of her husband's excitement at his 'discussions by letter with Mr Binyon' —discussions that had immediately given rise to memories of 'Oriental art'. [5]

[5] Letter to Nicolette Gray from Dorothy Pound, 27 Oct. 1965, Binyon Loan Archive, British Library Manuscript Collection (BLA), vol. 4.

It was certainly this renewed contact with the curator and the talk of a paradise based on East Asian visuals that prompted Pound to get out the notes he had taken on the screen book all that time ago.

Kodama and Qian both agree on the fact that there are many anomalous mismatches between Pound's reworking of the contents of the screen book and the original text and images, but the poet may well have incorporated elements of more vibrant renditions of the same motif remembered from his years in London. The translation he produced with the help of 'Miss Thseng', for example, says, 'cloud shuts off the hill, hiding the temple', while Pound's finished canto has 'behind hill the monk's bell'. The original illustration, by contrast with both these descriptions, shows the temple standing in full view on the crags of a mountain overlooking the lake. Qian speculates that the illustration of 'the pagoda in ink and light colour could have taken Pound "somewhere else" ', but does not speculate upon where that might have been. [6]

[6] Qian, *Modernist Response to Chinese Art* , 131.

The answer, assuredly, was into memory; into the mental store of ghost images that had already caused Pound to see 'real Japanese prints, not on paper' at the house of Harriet Shaw Weaver. On that occasion, as we have conjectured elsewhere, it may have been *Autumn Bell at Mii Temple* from Hiroshige's magnificent eight views of Lake Biwa near Kyoto. The very next print in that series, *Autumn Moon at Ishiyama Temple*, shows the building cast in shadow by a foothill that decisively separates it from the nearby village and lakeshore.

A second interesting anomaly is the vivid image 'fire from frozen cloud', which appears both in Pound's early notes and in the final canto, but which does not feature either in the illustrations or in the text of the

screen book. In the absence of a more convincing explanation, Qian finally accepts Kodama's guess that Pound's translator 'might have said "adhere" for the ideogram meaning "stick", which Pound might have heard as "fire" ', but the reader's mere vocalization of the words 'fire' and 'adhere' will allow this rather elaborate shot in the dark to refute itself. [7]

[7] Sanhide Kodama, *American Poetry and Japanese Culture* (Hamden, Conn., 1984), 113. Also quoted in Qian, *Modernist Response to Chinese Art* , 129.

It is perhaps a bit more satisfactory to propose that the intense flash of orange and red sky above freezing mist in *Descending Geese at Katada*, yet another one of Hiroshige's eight views, may have been used to fill the screen book's vacuum of colour. The screen book seems to have represented, then, not only a source in its own right for *The Seven Lakes*, but also the most recent layer of a hierarchy of ghost images extending back to the uniquely intensive viewing conditions of Binyon's Print Room.

This 'hierarchy of ghost images', if it existed, would help a lot in explaining the East Asian imagery that emerges with far greater strength and insistence in the *Pisan Cantos* written about eight years later. In these, Pound is able to connect a hill facing his place of imprisonment, not only with a Chinese mountain sacred to Daoism, but also with another landmark that can only have been remembered from his time at the British Museum. 'Mt Taishan @ Pisa', he wrote from his cage; 'as Fujiyama at Gardone'. [8]

[8] Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (London, 1986), 441.

In discussing both of these peaks, Pound is aiming to evoke the kind of 'Paradisal calm and *aura dolce*' he had experienced from viewing both the 'real Japanese prints' landscape at Cedar Lawn and actual East Asian art in the Print Room. This aim becomes particularly clear when the ghost of Mt Fuji appears again two cantos later in the same Italian context:

this wind out of Carrara
is soft as un terzo cielo
said the Prefetto
as the cat walked the porch rail at Gardone
the lake flowing away from that side
was still as it never is in Sirmio

with Fujiyama above it: 'La donna...'
said the Prefect, in the silence.

It is interesting that this, too, is a view with 'Paradisal' connotations. Gardone is a village on the west bank of Lake Garda not far from

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Sirmione, Pound's habitual holiday retreat. On his initial visit in 1910, he described the lake as 'a very large sapphire which certain damn fools think is water. The gods reside on Mt Riva at the other end of it.' [9]

[9] Undated letter to Mary Moore, quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (London, 1988), 145.

The placid, unnaturally blue expanse with the cone of a mountain in the distance had evidently combined to trigger the sensation of looking at 'real Japanese prints' again for Pound. It is hardly surprising this was the case, for Mt Fuji, usually with a body of water in front of it, is easily the most common and widely recognized of all *nishiki-e* motifs. There can be no doubt at all that Pound had seen versions by Hiroshige and Hokusai—its most prolific interpreters—at the Print Room. Fuji-san is considered in Japanese mythology to represent a goddess, as Binyon would doubtless have explained to Pound on his visits there. In his *Japanese Colour Prints*, the curator calls it 'the peerless mountain, which for unnumbered generations has shone in its solitary attitude as a symbol of the soul of Japan, haunting the memory of her poets, and even for the humblest and the poorest seeming a kind of heavenly possession of virgin beauty'. [10]

[10] Laurence Binyon and J. J. O'Brien Sexton, *Japanese Colour Prints* (London, 1923), 157.

Such associations may well add significance to the Prefect's quoted statement 'La Donna...' that disturbs the stillness of the scene as Pound describes it.

Pound certainly considered his Fuji surrogate, Mt Riva, to possess a spiritual significance, settling upon it as early as 1910 as the destination of his and Dorothy's souls after death. 'Soul, if she meets us there,' the end of the piece runs, 'will any rumour | Of havens more high and courts desirable | Lure us beyond the cloudy peak of Riva?' [11]

[11] 'Blandula, Tenulla, Vagula', originally published in *Canzoni* (1911).

Binyon had also been deeply impressed by the serene topography of Lake Garda, describing it in an unpublished letter as 'the most beautiful place I have ever been to'. [12]

[12] Unaddressed letter fragment of 16 May (no year given), written in the Hôtel de France, Milan, BLA, vol. 1.

It is easy to imagine him with Pound at the Print Room in 1912 applying the poet's comparison in reverse—with Riva as the remembered mountain and one of Hokusai's or Hiroshige's prints on the stand before them. The two nineteenth-century printmakers' series of Fuji prints—both of which were represented by complete sets in the Print Room by the time of Pound's initial visits—are made up of thirty-six landscape or cityscape views whose diverse foreground scenes are

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connected only by the looming shape of the mountain in the background. 'The continued presence of this solitary form throughout the series', wrote Binyon in 1925, 'gives to the whole array of prints a unity of theme'. It is fascinating then to note with regard to this technical observation that, in *The Pisan Cantos*, the silhouette of a mountain, whether it is Fujiyama, Riva, Taishan, or one of the unnamed peaks of the Carrara hills that were visible to Pound north of the Disciplinary Training Centre, always stands behind the fleeting historical scenes in the poem's foreground as a timeless symbol of continuity.

A very similar linking effect is provided by another transcultural motif that begins to flit in and out of *The Cantos* during Pound's time at Pisa: the mysterious composite goddess of the poem's later stages. This figure is at times linked to Greek and Renaissance depictions of Aphrodite, but most frequently appears as Kuanon, the elegant Buddhist deity of compassion. In order to understand Pound's goddess and her direct derivation from Japanese, Chinese, and Korean depictions, it would help us to get to grips with Laurence Binyon's own tendency to conflate the identities of feminine figures from diverse mythological traditions. An interesting way into this is to look at his approaches to Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, and to a rare and interesting triptych print by Kitagawa Utamaro called *The Awabi Fishers*—two artworks that Binyon seems to have felt belonged together (Fig. 46). Binyon's personal interest in acquiring the Utamaro print is betrayed by the amount the

Fig. 46. *The Awabi Fishers*, by Kitagawa Utamaro, late eighteenth century CE. Woodblock print (triptych). *(British Museum, London)*

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normally canny curator was prepared to pay for it. [13]

[13] Many of Binyon's financial negotiations on behalf of the museum were surprisingly predatory. In 1920 he wanted to buy 'a real painting by Korin' (as opposed to the museum's *The Wave Beaten Rock*) that had come onto the London market for £1,000. 'Now,' the curator asks in a letter to Robert Ross, 'do you think there is any chance of that rich lady who was at my last lecture giving such a thing?? Can't remember her name; she was elderly, and you suggested she might help us someday.' He closes the letter with the remark, 'do let me know if there is any other bleedable person you can think of' (letter to Robert Ross, 6 Jan. 1920, BLA, vol. 75). Ten years previously, Binyon had been looking for the money to buy a portion of the Wegener collection of Chinese paintings: 'do you know E. P. Warren well?', he asked Ross. 'We have only a week left and want £4,000...[Sidney] Colvin seems unable to get money. I (to my own surprise) have done much better than he has' (letter to Robert Ross, 1910 (n.d.), BLA, vol. 75).

We have seen him acquire the priceless T'ang dynasty *Admonitions* scroll for £25, and Arthur Morrison's *nishiki-e* collection for around £5 each. For the *Awabi Fishers* in 1910, he put down £150—far and away the highest amount paid for a woodblock print during his long tenure at the museum. [14]

[14] Laurence Binyon, *Painting in the Far East* (London, 1908), 166.

The print depicts girl divers coming ashore after diving for abalone shellfish, and Binyon justified its high acquisition cost by saying that it 'holds its own with Greek design'—a statement apparently designed to put it on a par with the more heavily sponsored artworks in the museum's sculpture galleries. [15]

[15] Ibid. 253.

The Awabi Fishers could well also have been the print Dorothy Shakespear tried to track down in 1913 on Pound's recommendation. Just after getting her admission ticket to the Print Room, she wrote to him saying she had 'seen a portfolio of Utamaro', following this with the question: 'I wonder which you liked so much?' [16]

[16] Letter to Ezra, 22 Feb. 1913, reproduced in *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear: Their Letters 1909–1914*, ed. Omar Pound and A. Walton Litz (London, 1985), 190.

There can be no doubt that Binyon would have shown the print to Pound, and may even have overtly compared it to the work of the Florentine master with whom they were both so familiar.

One has only to compare Binyon's published statements on *The Birth of Venus* and *The Awabi Fishers* in order to appreciate the osmosis that was occurring between his interpretations of the two works. This is what he has to say about Botticelli's painting:

> the water stretches far away to the solitary horizon; not a sail is on it, not a cloud in heaven. And for all her sweet humanity of feature, this maiden floating from the sea's solitude to flowering earth appears no mortal. She comes from where no men and women are...it is as if some supernatural power had given us, at some clear early dawn, when the world still sleeps, actual vision of the winds...and of

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this divine stranger floating to her home on earth...it stirs the sense of worship and of mystery.[17]

[17] Laurence Binyon, *The Art of Botticelli: An Essay in Pictorial Criticism* (London, 1913), 119–22.

And this is how *The Awabi Fishers* is described:

> The group of nearly nude forms, with unbound hair, on the rocks, with infinite sea behind them, yield a sense of latent and mysterious powers, as if they shared in the secrets of the deep waters which they are used to plunge in; the human body appears strange and wonderful, a symbol more significant than ever it had been hitherto...the theme is indefinitely deepened and broadened into an imaginative 'beyond', as, in the print, the sea-waves melt away into the unseen.[18]

[18] Laurence Binyon, *Japanese Colour Prints* (London, 1925), 133–4.

One contemporary of Binyon's who recognized very clearly the parallels that were being drawn was the young Japanese art historian Yashiro Yukio, a very regular visitor to the Print Room just after the First World War. In 1922, Yashiro wrote to Binyon to explain his intention of writing a book 'in which I shall make a comparison of oriental and occidental conceptions of art, and, in which I shall make clear what I, a man brought up in an artistic atmosphere utterly different from that of Europe, feel of Botticelli'. Significantly, however, his letter rapidly concedes the following: 'It seems that you are doing all the work I myself want to do. It seems that I am walking on the same road, following you.'[19]

[19] Letter to Binyon, 29 Nov. 1922, BLA, vol. 11.

When Binyon's proclivities with regard to Italian and Japanese art are known, it comes as little surprise that the svelte figure of Kuanon features far more regularly in his writings and lectures than any other Asian religious figure, including Gautama Buddha. He even takes the time to describe a dreamed Kuanon in his little 1908 work *Painting in the Far East* . 'A goddess like figure was standing between two pillars of the mountains, not less tall than herself,' it says. 'At her feet was a mist, hung above deep woods, and from human dwellings unseen the smoke rose faintly.'[20]

[20] John Hatcher, *Laurence Binyon: Poet, Scholar of East and West* (Oxford, 1995), 176. Hatcher mentions that, aside from dreaming about Far Eastern works, Binyon had examined in his sleep imaginary drawings by Lorenzo di Credi and Albrecht Dürer, both of which artists are represented by actual works in the Print Room.

It is important to understand that Kuanon, as an aspect of the hermaphroditic bodhisattva Avalokitesevara, should technically

display both male and female characteristics in equal measure.[21]

[21] A bodhisattva is roughly equivalent to a saint in Christian mythology. Traditionally, they are Buddhists who have achieved enlightenment, but who have chosen to remain on Earth as teachers instead of entering the timeless, disembodied condition of Nirvana. Much in the same way as Christian saints, particular bodhisattvas are identified with particular personal qualities. Avalokitesevara (the Sanskrit name for Kuanon) is identified with compassion and forgiveness.

Binyon overlooks this, however; deliberately drawing the deity in among the other members of his transcultural pantheon of feminine deities. It is fascinating, then, to see emerging from Pound's cage at Pisa a hybrid goddess composed of exactly such diverse elements:

> in this air as of Kuanon
> enigma forgetting the times and seasons
> but this air brought her ashore a la marina
> with the great shell borne on the seawaves
> nautili biancastra
> By no means an orderly Dantescan rising
> but as the winds veer[22]

[22] 'Canto LXXIV', in *The Cantos*, 457.

Kuanon is here overtly conflated with Botticelli's Venus, who comes ashore on a cockle shell, and—just like Binyon—Pound strongly emphasizes the bodhisattva's feminine attributes. Something else connecting this description with Binyon's thinking is the idea of Venus emerging from the sea being like rising, 'Dantescan', from the underworld. The curator had proposed something very similar in his own

discussion of Botticelli, comparing the arrival of the goddess to 'Persephone's return...maiden and innocent, yet with knowledge in her eyes as of the things that suffer and are not satisfied'. [23]

[23] Binyon, *The Art of Botticelli* , 10.

Various critics have tried to track down the origins of Pound's Kuanon to particular pieces of flat art from East Asia, but the candidates suggested are all far too masculine. Zhaoming Qian goes with some early paintings of the deity from the Buddhist caves of Dunhuang in western China that were displayed at his hobby-horse 1910–12 exhibition at the British Museum. [24]

[24] Qian, *Modernist Response to Chinese Art* , 13.

These had been sent back from a expedition by the Hungarian adventurer Aurel Stein, who had been engaged by the colonial government of India to perform an 'archaeological and geographical investigation' of the region. In 1907 Stein had come across a series of sealed sacred caves that were still attended by local guardians

to prevent looting. Judging by the rather cryptic remarks in Binyon's own 1914 account of the affair, Stein seems to have bribed one of these guardians to turn a blind eye, in consequence of which 'an immense addition was made to the collections of the party'. [25]

[25] Binyon's account states that 'negotiations with the guardian of this horde were brought to a satisfactory issue' (*Guide to an Exhibition of Paintings, Manuscripts and other Archeological Objects Collected by Aurel Stein in Chinese Turkestan* (London, 1914), 2).

Because the British Museum had contributed 20 per cent of the expedition's budget, a fifth of the plunder from the violated cave was divided off and shipped to London, while the rest was forwarded to the National Museum in Delhi. [26]

[26] Aurel Stein, *Serindia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost Asia* (Oxford, 1921), ii, ch. 22.

The London portion included several Kuanon paintings, including the *Water Moon Guanyin* and the *Standing Guanyin* suggested by Qian as prototypes for the goddess of *The Cantos*. [27]

[27] Because of differences in pronunciation between Mandarin and Japanese, Chinese representations of the deity in British museums and publications have traditionally been assigned the name 'Guanyin' or 'Kuan Yin', while those from Japan are called 'Kuanon', 'Kwannon', or 'Kannon'.

Unfortunately, rather than concentrating on the feminine aspect of the deity, as both Pound and Binyon unarguably do, the Dunhuang paintings go to the opposite extreme. They are apprehended by most observers as strapping male figures whose square jawlines even sport pronounced moustache and goatee combinations similar to Pound's own. Britton Gildersleeve suggests instead a reproduction of a Kuanon by the T'ang Dynasty painter Wu Tao-Tzu that was included as an illustration in Fenollosa's *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art.* Fenollosa himself points out in the text, however, that 'there is clearly a moustache' on the figure's upper lip, and even uses this fact to justify using the pronoun 'he' when referring to it. The problem is partly one of date, as the gender characteristics of Kuanon may be seen to change over the centuries. Binyon fully understood this, indicating in his lecture notes that 'Kwannon, at first conceived of as male, young and beautiful, was transformed in time into female form.' [28]

[28] Undated typescript of lecture on 'Religious Art' with pencilled additions, BLA, vol. 30.

It is in much later images of the deity from China, Japan, and especially Korea that the true beginnings of Pound's goddess are to be found.

Pound's first encounter with Kuanon did not happen at the Print Room or even at the British Museum, but at Laurence Binyon's Albert Hall lectures in 1909. The many revisions of the curator's notes and

slide lists for his lectures over the years show that he generally adhered to the same, fixed sequence of projected images during his talks, especially in the earliest examples. The first slide of a 'Kwannon', as Binyon spells it, to be shown was described as a sculpture sitting 'in the attitude of Rodin's famous statue called *Le Grand Penseur* '. This would doubtless have been the same photograph of the celebrated Miroku image from Koryuji temple in Kyoto that Binyon selected to illustrate Fenollosa's *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* three years later. Miroku is not technically a Kuanon at all, but the Japanese version of the bodhisattva Maitreya, known in Shingon Buddhism as 'the future Buddha'. [29]

[29] Shingon Buddhism is a salvationist sect founded at the beginning of the ninth century CE by the monk Kobo Daishi. It formalized the existing belief that Miroku (Maitreya), classified as a bodhisattva in Buddhist mythology, would return in the future as a fully-fledged Buddha, at which time all sentient beings would automatically become enlightened.

Like Kuanon, he or she should technically be androgynous, but the feminization of bodhisattva images that has been described above allows Binyon to present her as unequivocally female. 'She too is thinking, lost in thought,' his lecture notes add, continuing the comparison with Rodin's *Penseur*; 'but thought which illuminates, not torments'.

The second Kuanon slide projected by Binyon is far more significant. The artwork it represented is identifiable only via a pencilled note in the corner of the lecture manuscript saying it had been 'discovered by Fenollosa in the Horiuji [Buddhist] temple, where it had been lying wrapped up in yards of cloth and hidden away for hundreds of years'. The slide, then, was of the Yumedono Kuanon, which had been unveiled rather controversially by Fenollosa at the Nara site in the 1880s. It is worth quoting his description of the way this happened at some length:

> The central space of the octagonal Yumedono ['Hall of Dreams'] was occupied by a great closed shrine, which ascended like a pillar towards the apex. The priests of the Horiuji confessed that tradition ascribed the contents of the shrine to Corean work of the days of [seventh-century Empress] Suiko, but that it had not been opened for more than two hundred years. On fire with the prospect of such a unique treasure, we urged the priests to open it with every argument at our command. They resisted long, alleging that in punishment for the sacrilege an earthquake might well destroy the temple. Finally we prevailed, and I shall never forget our feelings as the long disused key rattled in the rusty lock. Within the shrine appeared a tall mass closely wrapped about in swathing bands of

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> cotton cloth, upon which the dust of ages had gathered. It was no light task to unwrap the contents, some 500 yards of cloth having been used...But it was the aesthetic wonders of this work that attracted us most. From the front the figure is not quite so noble, but seen in profile it seemed to rise to the height of archaic Greek art. [30]

[30] Ernest F. Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* (2 vols.; London, 1912), i. 51.

Now this story was not published until 1912, and Binyon would not have known about it until he met Fenollosa in person. The date of this meeting can be dated, thanks to an unpublished letter, to the autumn of 1908; and so the original manuscript to which the pencilled note on Fenollosa's story was added is likely to pre-date that. [31]

[31] Unpublished letter from Ernest Fenollosa to Binyon, 10 Sept. 1908, BLA, vol. 4.

This same sequence of slides, or something very like it, would then have been what Pound was exposed to the following year at the Albert Hall.

The Yumedono carving deviates in several unique ways from standard representations of Kuanon, and one of these seems to link it quite neatly with the goddess of *The Cantos*. The main difference from other representations of the bodhisattva is the position of the forearms, which are brought laterally across the chest with the elbows pointing out. In the hands, held at about heart level, is a representation of a precious stone. [32]

[32] Art historian William Watson's detailed discussion of the aesthetics and iconography of the Yumedono Kuanon makes the following observation: 'The position of the hands and of the sacred jewel they hold is not repeated in any other image; neither is characteristic of Kannon' (*Sculpture of Japan from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1959), 56).

This feature gives the figure its official title of the *Nyoirin Kuanon*, meaning 'Kuanon holding the magic wish-granting jewel'. It does not seem unreasonable to speculate that this object, held out by the bodhisattva as a symbol of redemption, was remembered by Pound during his earliest, sleep-deprived nights in the cage at Pisa. Perhaps indeed it prompted that most enigmatic line of the first canto written there—'Kuanon, this stone bringeth sleep'.

Another of the wooden Kuanon sculptures from Horiuji temple became an iconic presence in the life of Laurence Binyon throughout the 1930s and 1940s. In 1929 he made a long-anticipated trip to Japan with the idea of following in Fenollosa's footsteps to places like Nara and Kyoto. Inside the *kondo,* or 'great hall', at Horiuji, Binyon was immediately captivated by the slender, flowing lines of *The Kudara*

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Kuanon—another Korean image carved, like the Yumedono Kuanon, in the seventh century (Fig. 47). [33]

[33] Though the origin of the Kudara Kuanon is unclear, 'Kudara' in old Japanese signifies 'Paekche'—the most southerly of the Korean kingdoms existing at the time of the statue's manufacture. Most critics currently agree that the carving was either brought from Korea or created in Japan by a Korean artist (Garrett Chatfield Pier, *Japanese Temple Treasures* (New York, 2005), 15).

He would already have known the name of this work and its position in Japanese art history, for he had selected Fenollosa's photograph of it more than fifteen years previously for inclusion in *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* . Fenollosa's text, though clearly biased in terms of preference towards the Yumedono figure, had found the Kudara Kuanon to be ‘like a Gothic statue from Amiens [cathedral], but far more peaceful and unified in its single system of lines’. [34]

[34] Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* , i. 51.

So impressed was Binyon by his own examination of it that he arranged shortly afterwards for an exact replica of it to be carved by Niiro Chūnosuke—at that time the most highly renowned temple sculptor in Japan. It was no small undertaking. For the new figure to be created according to traditional principles, it was necessary for complex rituals to be performed at each stage of its production. These even extended to the searching-out of a suitably auspicious camphor tree, which was worked using the *ichiboku zukuri* method. This meant that the figure was carved in one piece directly from the tree trunk—an operation that would certainly have impressed Jacob Epstein. Because of its complex manufacture, which took two years to complete, Binyon's Kuanon was no mere replica, but an empowered religious icon in its own right. [35]

[35] For further details on the manufacture of the British Museum's version of the Kudara Kuanon, see Hatcher, *Laurence Binyon*, 252.

Some of the other illustrations selected by Binyon for the *Epochs* project, though not technically Kuanons, would certainly have contributed to Pound's complex of goddess images. Pound read the two volumes of Fenollosa's study in 1913, doubtless on Binyon's recommendation, and by December of that year was enthusiastic enough about it to recommend it to his father as a way of getting to grips with ‘what [Fenollosa's] work means’. [36]

[36] Letter to Homer Pound, 5 Dec. 1913, Yale University Archive, quoted in Britton Gildersleeve, ‘Enigma at the Heart of Paradise’, in Zhaoming Qian (ed.), *Ezra Pound and China* (Ann Arbor, 2003), 199.

As one might expect, Binyon's choice of illustrations shows a disproportionate bias towards Japanese art of the *Ukiyo-e* school, with fifty illustrations provided for what is

Fig. 47. *The Kudara Kuanon*, seventh century CE. Probably from Korea (Paekche). Gilded camphor wood. 3.1 m high. Horyuji temple, Nara, Japan. Replica by Niiro Chūnosuke (1929–31) in the British Museum, London. *(Photograph courtesy of the British Museum)*

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basically one chapter of Fenollosa's text. Of the remaining plates, images of female deities, spirits, and saints predominate. Most of these images were reproduced from the British Museum collection or from slides and photographs collected by Binyon himself. His trips across the Atlantic had provided some of them, notably the black-and-white photograph of Korin's *Waves at Matsushima* in Boston, and several items from Charles Lang Freer's collection. A letter of 1913 from Freer to Binyon confirms that it was the curator who had arranged for these to be taken. 'I cannot at this distance recall just which of the specimens have been photographed,' the letter confesses. [37]

[37] Unpublished letter from Charles Freer to Binyon, 30 June 1913, BLA, vol. 4.

Binyon had visited the collection early in 1909, and must have gathered an initial set of reproductions during his stay in Detroit before writing to request more. Additional photographs and collotypes were provided by Mary Fenollosa from her husband's own selection. One of these—a gelatin collotype of some of the fresco paintings at Horiuji—is the most sharp and vibrant of the five colour plates used in the first volume, and depicts a flying angelic figure with clear aesthetic similarities particularly to the Kudara Kuanon. A similar figure is shown in another of Fenollosa's colour collotypes, a detail shot of the vast work *Five Hundred Arhants* by the Chinese Song Dynasty painters Lin Tinggui and Zhou Jichan. [38]

[38] Fenollosa credits only Lin Tinggui, whose name appears in its Japanese form as 'Rin Teikei' (Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* , ii).

This reproduction, which Fenollosa must have derived from the original in Daitokuji temple, Kyoto, shows a female divinity actually parting the clouds in order to descend on the *arhants*, or enlightened Buddhists, occupying the ground beneath. Actual Kuanon figures are only ever pictured standing calmly or sitting in the *hanka* position with one leg crossed over the opposite thigh, and so Pound's vision of an airborne version at the beginning of *The Pisan Cantos* may well owe something to these collotypes:

> and this day the air was made open
> for Kuanon of all delights [39]

[39] 'Canto LXXIV', in *The Cantos*, 442.

Even as late as the very last cantos, Pound was still describing Kuanon in a way that would have been very familiar to Laurence Binyon, had he not died in 1943 just after the publication of his *Paradiso* tranlstion. [40]

[40] Binyon died in 1943, shortly after publishing his translation of Dante's *Paradiso.*

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The most obvious tendency in the curator's early descriptions of the Yumedono and Kudara Kuanons is to liken their flowing contours to that of an undulating lake or stream. The 'long, flowing lines' of the Yumedono Kuanon, says one of his lectures, 'unbroken in their rhythm, affect the mind through the eye, like the lines of flowing water.' [41]

[41] Undated, typescript of lecture on 'Religious Art' with pencilled additions, BLA, vol. 30.

Writing in 1959–60, Pound ascribes a similar aesthetic to his own goddess. There he combines the linear flow of wood grain with the undulation of rippling water to achieve his effect, exactly as the creators of Binyon's sculptures had done.

> as of mountain lakes in the dawn,
> Foam and silk are thy fingers,
> Kuanon,
> And the long suavity of her moving,
> willow and olive reflected
> Brook water idles,

topaz against pallor of under-leaf

The lake waves Canaletto'd [42]

[42] 'Canto CX', in *The Cantos*, 792.

Crucially, at the very end of *The Cantos*, Pound's own conception of a 'nice quiet paradise' is offered as an entirely visual phenomenon. Paradise, he writes there, is 'to "see again" '. In the next line he repeats the same point with clear emphasis: 'the verb is to see, not "walk on" '. [43]

[43] 'Canto CXVI', in ibid. 810.

Pound's own *Paradiso*, then, is finally to be pictured in the mind's eye with the assistance of memory, not to be created underfoot by political means. From the artworks described throughout this book, an excellent reproduction of this entirely visual heaven could easily be assembled.

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