

FOREWORD

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Whether as a site of longing and learning or as the land of pillage, or indeed all of these at one and the same time, the Mediterranean is at the heart of European culture, having nurtured for millennia its economy, art and languages and fed, periodically, the thirst for renovatio that has punctuated the historical process since the Carolingian middle ages. The medieval historian Georges Duby stresses with energy the liveliness of such an early dissemination on the Northern map of what he calls 'Mediterranean aesthetics' (Duby 1987: 267-282): flourishing from Aachen to St. Gall as in Scotus's scholarship, or, not many centuries later, in the gigantic collective task of translating Arabic and Greek manuscripts, down to Aristotle and Plato. As to the sixteenth-century Renaissance, it enhances these already vital links, thanks to the continued circulation of artists, words, images and forms, in the wake of a "fully assimilated classical memory" (Ibid., translation mine). In Duby's perception, the catastrophe of the fruitful exchange between Northern and Mediterranean Europe is to be ascribed to the prevailing of archaeology and its related antiquarian modes; if, in this sense, Winckelmann is the historian's *bête noire*, scholars of English literature are well acquainted with the connoisseur modes that frame, increasingly, the Grand Tour culture and the collecting mania of eighteenth-century Britain. Thus, in place of the animated transactions between the Mediterranean areas and the North, museums and taxonomies were born: to make the classical heritage visible, of course, but also to keep it as well at a safe distance; a language soon stiffened into the canonical discipline of the Canovas and the Thorvaldsens. No surprise, therefore, if so many nineteenth-century artists and intellectuals, precisely to escape the strictures of a Mediterranean turned

academic, leave Northern Europe – temporarily – in search of the actual and real Mediterranean, anxious to experience living memory, living Latins and Greeks and the possible raptures of flesh and sun: the other side, in a word, of the urban, industrial and philological coin!

The essays that follow are all situated at this juncture of the tug-of-war between Northern Europe and the Mediterranean. They lie in the shadow of Nietzsche's *The Birth of the Tragedy* (1872), a text that had notoriously taken classical certainties by storm and invited even the unphilosophically minded to go beyond stereotypes and rigid dichotomies; and, in particular for the Anglo-Americans considered in this volume, they come on the morrow of John Ruskin's major works which, albeit in contradictory ways, had reactivated a vivid conversation with Mediterranean Italy: echoes ineluctable, Nietzsche's and Ruskin's, to be heard more or less softly in many of the modernist voices gathered in these pages (Jane Harrison, W.B. Yeats, Adrian Stokes). To which must be added the specific weight of British Imperialism, a major force in the shaping of both exotic images of the Mediterranean and subversive reactions to them (E.M. Forster, Wyndham Lewis, W.S. Blunt). The Mediterranean of the Modernists is in turmoil, aesthetically and politically: no longer, or not solely, a culture or a humanity to be consumed on location or at home, but a source of debate, ideas and forms; not "the Mediterranean submitted to being recreated in the image of British longings and aversions, hopes and fears" (Pemble 1987: 274), but a culture addressed in its bewildering diversity and linguistic wealth; not a promised land nor a necropolis, but a laboratory and a workshop.

Being curious and perhaps disliking trodden routes, the Modernists inscribe unvisited places on the map. Precious few people, in early-twenties Anglo-Saxondom, knew about Puglia and the Baroque marvels investigated by Sacheverell Sitwell and his brother; and though Robert Adam had visited – and drawn extensively – Split and Diocletian's palace in 1757, Dalmatia remained a virtually estranged territory at the beginning of the twentieth century: a fact that renders the artist Ivan Meštrović's British reputation and the critic Adrian Stokes's Adriatic musings most intriguing. And while Trieste is of course not new to modernist geography, the volume lifts the veil on fresh cultural and critical data concerning the part played by its poets and politics in the genesis of English-speaking Modernism. Attracted by the unknown or the less known, the Modernists have a knack for discovering it in the familiar: under Ezra Pound's formidable gaze, Roger Fry's more gentle if not less

acute eyes, and Ford Madox Ford's adventurous pen, slumbering Provence reveals powerful thematic and formal potentialities, ready to be blended, as it were, in Virginia Woolf's prose (among others'). Only a few miles away from Cézanne's Provence, the French Riviera of the American expatriates Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald holds up a mirror to the United States while offering a fragile refuge from them.

More important still is the modernist steering away from *idées reçues* and simplistic polar oppositions. In quite un-Ruskinian fashion, industrialization and nature, past and present, modernity and archaeology, are enmeshed in the fabric of Mediterranean images. It is no random attention that Fry lends to the industrial harbour of La Ciotat, as years before W.S. Blunt had kept an eye on the politics of Egypt rather than on its pyramids; and while Yeats imports Byzantine aesthetics into the politics of the Irish Free State, Ford blends in one single striking image the medieval tower in provençale Beaucaire and the Flatiron in New York (Ford 1995: 16). Unabashed and unafraid of dissonance, the modernist Mediterranean accommodates the ruins and the skyscrapers, Knossos and the clanking sounds of machines. In its huge and often harsh contrasts, the Mediterranean speaks to modernist dramatists and novelists the language of a liberated prose and perhaps even of a liberated temporality. To the poets, as Ezra Pound well knew, as indeed he taught to his friends and disciples, to Stokes and to Stevens, the Mediterranean offered a fresh sense of the objects, the crisp reality to be laid on the page, as clearly as the outlines of a limestone sculpture; it gave the language of Anglo-American modernity the time-old chisel of a long forgotten and most needed *lima amorosa*.

Bibliography

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