

Apostles of elegy
Bloomsbury's continental connections

A visitor to the National Gallery in London easily overlooks, as I have done many times, that the floor is also a space of visual display. Close to the main entrance, between the busy shops on the ground floor and the first floor's galleries, two large mosaics show allegories of the British character and allegories of modern life. One of them, labelled *Courage*, has Winston Churchill taming a wild monster, probably of Nazism, arising from the sea.

The artist behind the mosaic, Boris von Anrep, was a Baltic aristocrat who had escaped the Russian Revolution.¹ Between 1933 and 1952, Anrep designed two floor mosaics for the National Gallery. The latest sequence dates from 1952 and is called *Modern Virtues*. Like Anrep's earlier work, *The Awakening of the Muses* of 1928–33 [Fig. 25], it uses recognizable figures from public life, including Virginia Woolf, in place of abstract figures.

Not far from a segment titled *Humour*, which shows Britannia herself, along with a Union Jack, is a small segment featuring an unknown man with the line 'Here I lie' [Fig. 26]. The statement is likely an expression of English humour, linguistic pun in the style of a John Donne or Shakespeare. One of the ways in which the mosaic offers the viewer open 'lies' in displaying images of British national identity is the association of each virtue or abstraction with real historical personalities. The poets Anna Akhmatova, with whom Anrep had a love affair before the First World War, and T.S. Eliot are there, alongside the German scientist exiled in the United States, Albert Einstein.

As a group, these people never shared a pint in the same British pub. But as nodes of an imagined network of memory, they were nonetheless very influential. Like Anrep's mosaics, the creation of trans-imperial memory in interwar Europe was one of the by-products of intellectual exchange in European society of this period. This transnational mosaic of memory was

¹ For more details, see Lois Oliver, *Boris Anrep: The National Gallery Mosaics* (London: National Gallery Company, 2004).



Figure 25 Boris von Anrep, *Clio*, from his National Gallery mosaic (1928–32). © The National Gallery, London. Reproduced by kind permission of the estate of Boris Anrep

significant not only because of what it contains but also because of what it left out.

Anrep's mosaic, figures of German, French, and most cultures which are not classical Greece or modern Britain and the United States, are conspicuous by their absence. The only German to be absorbed in British national memory of Europe's common past was Albert Einstein, then already an American citizen. The place of German culture in this British version of Europe has been visibly called into question, while France and other European countries as well as the United States are altogether absent.

Anrep owed this prominent commission to the influential British art critic Roger Fry, who rose to fame in 1910 as a champion of the post-impressionists after a much-acclaimed exhibition in London's Grafton Galleries. Fry had turned a series of observations on contemporary art into a visible 'character' of the modern world.² He had brought neo-impressionism to London, including

² Roger Fry, 'Modern Mosaic and Mr. Boris Anrep', in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 42:243 (June 1923), 272–278. See also J.B. Bullen, 'Byzantinism and Modernism 1900–14', in *The Burlington Magazine*, 141:1160 (November 1999), 665–675.

the purchase of the Degas collection, which was discussed earlier. But now, the group was uncertain of its visual taste and shifted its attention to literature. As Virginia Woolf, a close friend, put it in 1924, the time was suffering from an absence of a ‘code of manners’ in which to express ideas, since neither the code of any one nation nor of any one particular period – Victorian, Edwardian, Georgian – seemed to apply. Theirs was an age of ‘failures and fragments’, and yet all the plots demanded completeness and success. Just as they had done with impressionist art, Fry and Woolf agreed, their contemporaries had to learn to tolerate the ‘spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure’, mixing ‘scraps of talk’ with different contradictory ideas and elements of theory.³ For this community, Anrep’s mosaic was a kind of mirror.

Germany and the builders of international society

Raymond Williams has used the case of the Bloomsbury group to identify ‘fractions of a class’ as a social phenomenon distinct from classes or groups as such.⁴ The Bloomsbury circle, a group that, as a saying goes, ‘lived in squares’ (an allusion to the squares of Bloomsbury in London, where they lived) and ‘loved in triangles’, were an association of friends from Cambridge University, as well as their siblings, partners in marriage, and lovers. Unlike the Apostles, an exclusively male secret society in Cambridge, their circle in London was conspicuous by greater intellectual as well as sexual openness, even though it remained socially exclusive. This constellation is famed for having produced a creative environment in which individual authors also achieved great distinction. People like John Maynard Keynes, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, the Strachey brothers, as well as Roger Fry were each in their own right highly successful members of the British Edwardian elite. But what Williams did not remark on in that essay is the fact that such fractions always had connections to like-minded configurations across imperial and national boundaries. In fact, in transnational perspective, such communities appeared even more significant in their role as shapers of public opinion in spheres such as literature and the arts, and increasingly, also politics. In the late nineteenth century, they had started entire fashions such as impressionism among Europe’s educated elites; in the twentieth century, their interest shifted to literature. But what remains invisible is the whole of which that

³ Virginia Woolf, ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’, in *The Hogarth Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1924), 21–24.

⁴ Raymond Williams, ‘The Bloomsbury Fraction’, in Raymond Williams (ed.), *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 2005), 148–170.

fraction is a part: that whole, to the extent that any society is a whole, was not national but continental.

'We were in the van of the builders of a new society.'⁵ Leonard Woolf, in one of the most quoted passages of his work, thus announced what held the multi-vocal activities of the Bloomsbury circle together. Contemporaries of the aesthetic avant-gardes and of political vanguards, these builders gave themselves a different kind of nobility by indicating that their aesthetic genealogy was older.⁶ They proceeded from engineering a revolution in aesthetic taste to what they hoped would be a social, political, and economic transformation. Vanity, though not a word that is obviously related to the families of vanguards, was another component of their work. Much of it involved the cultivation of different pursuits of self-representation, including bibliophile handwriting, self-portraits in front of hand-designed interiors, and publications of smaller and larger works of memoirs. This body of work has been influential both as a group and individually, especially the economic theory of 'Keynesianism'.⁷

A key element in Bloomsbury's capacity to furnish relationships, personal as well as political, were their global connections. These former Victorians were also Wagnerians, Nietzscheans, and admirers of modern impressionist art. The Bloomsbury fraction was simultaneously influenced by the cultural impulses associated with Bolshevik radicalism, the 'white émigré' culture' of people like Anrep and, indirectly, the 'internal exile' of like-minded elites like Anna Akhmatova, who occupied a former palace in the heart of Leningrad. Among these connections, however, their German network has been forgotten.

Thinking without headmasters: from the age of bad taste to a new society

One of the key figures whose life and thought allows us to reconstruct this connection was Count Harry Kessler, the Prussian count who had travelled to Mexico as a young man, then became a promoter of post-impressionist art in Germany, served as an officer in the Prussian army, and then

⁵ Leonard Woolf, *Sowing: An Autobiography of the Years 1880–1904* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), 137.

⁶ On Bloomsbury thought as a group, see Victoria Rosner (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), esp. introduction by Victoria Rosner, 1–15.

⁷ On Keynes' rise in the 'golden age of capitalism' and calls for a return to Keynesianism in the economic crisis of 2007–09, see Robert Skidelsky, *Keynes: The Return of the Master* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).

advocated an alternative League of Nations. Like Roger Fry, Count Kessler in Germany identified ‘bad taste’ as a *chiffre* and perspective for his critical stance towards Wilhelm II. As Kessler admitted, the source of his irritation with the establishment of the Reich was the Kaiser’s uniform ‘lack of taste’ in almost all spheres of life, in ‘the choice of his friends and advisors, in art, in literature, in lifestyle, in politics’.⁸ Wilhelm II, he argued in 1931, was in fact the very ‘opposite of the German nobleman or the English gentleman’ and made the German people more ‘barbarian’. His interest in secessionist art movements and his open criticism of Wilhelm II himself made him susceptible to a search for political alternatives. Just like the Bloomsbury group, particularly, Leonard Woolf and John Maynard Keynes, Kessler turned his taste in art and literature, for which he was renowned in the European intellectual circles of his time, into the foundation of his political activism. For him as for them, the project of a bibliophile press combined aesthetic with political activism on an exclusive scale.

Having inherited a vast fortune from his father in 1892, Kessler became a patron for artists and writers and built an important collection of impressionist and neo-impressionist art. He was one of the first European patrons of Edvard Munch and Aristide Maillol.⁹ By 1905, Kessler thought that ‘no one else in Germany’ enjoyed such high ‘means of influence’ on his contemporaries – especially in the sphere of cultural politics – as he did at that point.¹⁰ His roles included his position on the directorial board of the German Artists’ Union, co-founded by Kessler in 1903; his role as Artistic Director of the Weimar museums, a post he held since 1902; his connections with the modernist theatre of Max Reinhardt; his relations with the Nietzsche Archive, which he helped to found in 1894; his personal friendships with great artistic personalities in Europe like the Austrian poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, with whom he collaborated on his opera *Der Rosenkavalier* and other works, and the Belgian designer Henry van de Velde, whose work he promoted in Germany; the progressive press, including *Die Zukunft* and *Die Neue Rundschau*; as well as ‘Berlin society, the Harrachs, Richters, [. . .], the Regiment’; and finally, he added, his ‘personal standing’.¹¹ Kessler sought to use this unique social position for

⁸ Kessler, 5 December 1931, in Kessler, *Diaries*, vol. 9.

⁹ On the reasons for his resignation, see Thomas Steinfeld, ‘Als die Moderne nach Weimar wollte: Harry Graf Kessler, die Kunstdiplomatie und der Skandal um Auguste Rodin’, in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Nr. 26, 31 January 1998, as well as chapters in Grupp and Easton McLeod.

¹⁰ Kessler, *Diaries*, 15 November 1905.

¹¹ Kessler was referring to his 3rd Guard Ulan Regiment and the names of prominent Berlin salonnières, such as the house of Helene von Harrach, Helene von Nostitz, or the salon of Cornelia Richter, perhaps the most prominent meeting place for German intellectuals in Berlin at the time.

a 'renewal of German culture' and to become nothing less than a *princeps juventutis*.¹² Weimar's classical age was one historical model for this endeavour, Nietzsche's utopia of a revived European culture another.

Kessler, who, as we saw, worked as cultural attache for the German Foreign Office during the war, responded to the war similarly to the Bloomsbury group in other ways, too. He used German funds to sponsor the Comintern-funded Malik Publishing House, which had a very similar publishing programme in German to the Hogarth Press. One of its founders, the poet Else Lasker-Schüler, chose this name from the Hebrew term *melek*, which means King, but was also reminiscent of the *Moloch*, the false idol who demands large sacrifices.¹³

Historians of political thought have paid little attention to Kessler as a political thinker and, indeed, compared to contemporaries like Max Weber, whom he knew personally, he was hardly a significant writer. Yet, Kessler's political works – the essay on Nationality (1906, 1919, 1921), the manifesto *Guidelines for a True League of Nations* (1919–21), and the book *Germany and Europe* (1923) – represent a novel aspect of interwar German political thought.¹⁴

Discrediting old authorities and a commitment to a new internationalism was a key characteristic, which the Bloomsbury group shared with their wider European network, which included Kessler. For the Bloomsbury group, this idea was most clearly represented in one of the portraits of *Eminent Victorians*, the critical account of the Rugby school left by the influential Victorian Matthew Arnold.¹⁵ This sense of dissidence towards received forms of authority was associated with a positive figure, namely, Friedrich Nietzsche. But they also shared many common influences. Among them was the work of Oscar Wilde, and the bibliophile press movement with its intellectual origins in the Victorian Arts and Crafts movement such as William Morris's Kelmscott Press.¹⁶ Kessler belonged to the core of the first interpreters of Nietzsche who attempted to combine his aristocratic radicalism and his 'good Europeanism' into a political

¹² Kessler, *Diaries*, 15 November 1905.

¹³ Wieland Herzfelde (Hg.), *Der Malik-Verlag*, Ausstellungskatalog (Berlin: Deutsche Akademie der Künste, 1967), 21.

¹⁴ See, for example, Lothar Möller, 'Sekretär seiner Zeit: Harry Graf Kessler', in *Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, 43 (1989), 174–181; Bernhard Zeller, *Harry Graf Kessler. Zeuge und Chronist seiner Epoche*, in *Abhandlungen der Klasse der Literatur* (Wiesbaden and Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1989).

¹⁵ Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (Letchworth: Garden City Press, 1918).

¹⁶ On the importance of the Kelmscott Press for Bloomsbury, see Katherine Mullin, 'Victorian Bloomsbury', in Rosner (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group*, 19–33.

programme.¹⁷ But he was also intimately familiar with the world of the English schoolmasters and those who rebelled against them, having attended St George's School in Ascot as a boy.

The case of Kessler and his circle highlights the transnational significance of new cult authorities invoked to dismantle old beliefs. Kessler used the abbreviation 'Marx+Nietzsche', sometimes adding Kant, in this list.¹⁸ This implied a middle ground between the violent political revolutionary action of the Spartakists (which they rejected) and 'formal' or 'bourgeois democracy' with its strong emphasis on the role of the state through party representatives. In addition to the more radical November Club, Kessler was also involved in the foundation of the more patriotic and centrist Union for a New Fatherland.¹⁹

Like Sidney and Beatrice Webb of the Fabians, and Leonard Woolf with his 1917 Club, the members of Kessler's November Club were also influenced by Saint-Simonean and Cobdean ideas of the modern as a technique of industrial as well as social organization. The emphasis of the November group on a foreign policy that emphasized national integration together with internationalist projects which involved the integration of labour and industry in Europe, and a domestic policy focusing on the social question and the nationalization of industry, marked not only the identity of the Weimar coalition. It was also a sign of the left and liberal policy that the Fabians were trying to find a kind of third way between the Comintern and the League.

From candour to new diplomacy

In 1929, Kessler was in London preparing for a radio conversation at the BBC about Germany's role in the present world, with the editor of the observer, the Irish intellectual James Louis Garvin. At this time, Virginia Woolf was engrossed in reading Kessler's biography of Walther Rathenau,

¹⁷ Justus H. Ulbricht, *Klassikerstadt und Nationalsozialismus: Kultur und Politik in Weimar 1933 bis 1945* (Jena: Glauk, 2002); John A. MacCarthy, *Zensur und Kultur: zwischen Weimarer Klassik und Weimarer Republik mit einem Ausblick bis heute: From Weimar Classicism to Weimar Republic and beyond* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995). Finally, Rathenau also followed Nietzsche's postulate 'to live dangerously' – a citation that had been heavily used in the British and French press during the First World War to show Nietzsche's influence on German militant spirit. Harry Graf Kessler, *Walther Rathenau*, transl. Denise Van Moppès (Paris: Grasset, 1933), 125. Nicholas Martin, "Fighting a Philosophy": The Figure of Nietzsche in British Propaganda of the First World War, *The Modern Language Review*, 98:2 (1 April 2003), 367–380. Kessler, *Rathenau*, 75.

¹⁸ Kessler, *Diaries*, 19 February 1919.

¹⁹ The Union for a New Fatherland would be re-founded as an organization of exiles from Nazi Germany in 1935 as *Bund Neues Deutschland*.

the German finance minister who had been assassinated by right-wing extremists in 1922. 'You know, you have been spoiling my sleep this last week, by my husband insisting on reading to me passages of Your book', Virginia confessed to Harry over tea in her Bloomsbury home, soon after the book had been translated into English.²⁰ The work was an example of 'new diplomacy', an idea that captivated both the German and British disenchanted elites who saw in it a polite response to the post-imperial frankness of the Bolshevik *Red Archives* publication of formerly classified imperial documents.

The biography was written in the spirit of the Bloomsbury group's shared passion for personal memoirs. The Memoir Club gathered at the Woolfs' house regularly since the early 1920s. About sixty meetings are reported to have taken place in the forty-five years of the club's existence.²¹ One occasion was particularly emblematic, when Leonard Woolf read a piece about his Ceylon civil service, E.M. Forster on difficulties with a landlord in Surrey, and Duncan Grant on the Cambridge Apostles. Woolf recalled that it was 'composed of old friends and family who were thoroughly familiar with the lives, characters and personalities of each memoirist'.²² Kessler's *Rathenau* book and his work as a memoirist for the *Deutsche Nation* were thus not only socially but also formally complementary. They were all in search of a common phantom, the 'character' of the modern: not only their own, but also of others. Rathenau was a famously elusive and difficult character, and a model for Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*. Peculiarly for this age, his murderer, Ernst von Salomon, not only outlived him but also published memoirs in later years.²³

The new post-war memoirists made use of the interest in 'new diplomacy' as a vehicle of political communication, which included literature and literary exchange. At the same time as 'diplomacy by conference' continued a long tradition of international affairs established since the Holy Alliance, this generation of intellectuals acted as a collective 'social conscience' and a check on the politicians.²⁴ As Felix

²⁰ Kessler, *Diaries*, 14 November 1929.

²¹ S.P. Rosenbaum, *The Bloomsbury Group Memoir Club* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 8.

²² Woolf, *Sowing*, 158 on Keynes' *Two Memoirs*. See also S.P. Rosenbaum and James H. Haule (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Group. A Collection of Memoirs and Commentary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 5.

²³ Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1930–43); Ernst von Salomon, *Der Fragebogen* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1951).

²⁴ Arno Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917–1918* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959); Kenneth W. Thompson, 'The New Diplomacy and the Quest for Peace', in *International Organization*, 19 (1965), 394–409; Frederick Sherwood Dunn, *The Practice and*

Gilbert remarked in 1951, repeating the experience of the United States and France in the eighteenth century, the twentieth-century idea of a ‘new diplomacy’ was once again developed by authors writing on behalf of states, which found themselves in an isolated position. This explains why the concept became attractive to Russia and post-war Germany.²⁵ The case of Kessler reflects this perspective. He wanted Germany to regain the status of a world power. He also wanted to show that out of its very defeat it generated new ideas that other states could learn from.

It had become common to speak of a new age of foreign affairs, when the old ‘cabinet diplomacy’ would be replaced with new forms of ‘mass diplomacy’.²⁶ Like the League of Nations project, this notion of a ‘new diplomacy’ was associated with Woodrow Wilson, who proclaimed that in the future the world needed ‘open covenants of peace, openly arrived at’.²⁷ Wilson’s ‘new diplomacy’ responded to the Bolshevik declaration of a new diplomacy, developed around the same year. Kessler’s circle, the November Club, espoused this notion programmatically.²⁸ Kessler considered the League of Nations to play a fundamental role in this new diplomatic turn. In an article on ‘A New Method of Diplomacy’, he argued that Europe and the world needed to establish institutions and regular conferences that would ensure the status of war as ‘ultima ratio’ in conflict.²⁹

Procedure of International Conferences (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins Press; H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1929).

²⁵ On the ‘new diplomacy’ in international perspective, see Gordon Craig and Felix Gilbert, *The Diplomats: 1919–1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953); and Hajo Holborn, *The Political Collapse of Europe* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982).

²⁶ Kessler, *Diaries*, 20 January 1918.

²⁷ On the paradigm of new diplomacy, associated with Wilson and then applied to other historical periods, see Felix Gilbert, *The ‘New Diplomacy’ of the Eighteenth Century* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1951), 1. Sidney Bell, *Righteous Conquest: Woodrow Wilson and the Evolution of the New Diplomacy* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1972); A. L. Kennedy, *Old Diplomacy and New, 1876–1922, from Salisbury to Lloyd-George* (London: J. Murray, 1922).

²⁸ See *Eine neue Methode der Diplomatie*, special edition of *Der eiserne Steg* (Frankfurt/Main: Societätsdruckerei, 1925). The list of contributors comprises most members of the November Club and members of the pro-republican parties: Apart from Kessler, Friedrich Ebert, Hugo Preuss, René Schickele, Heinrich Simon, Fritz von Unruh, Alfred Fabre-Luce, Georg Bernhard, Leo Frobenius, Alfons Pauet, and some twenty other authors were among the contributors.

²⁹ Harry Graf Kessler, ‘Eine neue Methode der Diplomatie’, in *Die 5. Genfer Völkerbundtagung. Welche großen grundsätzlichen Fortschritte hat im September 1921 diese Tagung gebracht? Welche Vorteile hat Deutschland vom Völkerbund zu erwarten?* (Berlin: Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte, 1924), 18.

Queer sexuality and political dissidence

The link between sexual openness and the Bloomsbury fraction is often presented as a unique case both within British culture and of this particular configuration. But in some respect, this feature was one of the transnational features of its mentality. According to Florence Tamagne, there was a strong connection in interwar Europe between sexual deviance, aesthetic counter-culture, and political dissidence.³⁰ This was also true of queer identities in Germany, Austria, and Soviet Russia.³¹ At the same time, Weimar Germany and republican Austria functioned for British Edwardians like John Lehman and the wider circle of poets and intellectuals like Stephen Spender and Christopher Isherwood like the Maghreb did for André Gide: as sites where colonial and post-imperial situations of instability enabled new forms of sexual experimentation despite the nominal persistence of repressive laws.³²

Like members of the Bloomsbury circle, Kessler was known as a prominent dandy. He not only enjoyed what we now call Weimar culture in the company of male sexual partners but also enabled new forms of gender performance in general, for instance, by sponsoring private performances of Josephine Baker. When in 1906, Maximilian Harden, the editor of the journal *Die Zukunft*, started a public scandal by arguing that the so-called Liebenberg circle of advisors for Wilhelm II formed a 'homosexual conspiracy', Kessler faced a difficult choice.³³ As a homosexual himself, he nonetheless shared much of Harden's criticism of the Wilhelmine court.³⁴

Thus, the most productive period of intellectual exchange between the disenchanting elites of Wilhelmine Germany and Victorian Britain was the interwar period. A number of key members who got involved in his project

³⁰ Florence Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe: Volume 1 & 2: Berlin, London, Paris – 1919–1939* (New York: Algora, 2006).

³¹ Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia. The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

³² Cf. John Lehman, selections from *The Whispering Gallery* (1955), in Horst and Lois Jarka (eds.), *The Others' Austria* (Riverside, Calif.: Ariadne Press, 2011), 196–205.

³³ Susanne Zur Nieden, *Homosexualität und Staatsräson: Männlichkeit, Homophobie und Politik in Deutschland 1900–1945* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2005). See also Kessler, *Diaries*, 15 September 1918: 'Rantzau sei unmöglich, weil er, wie Stein aus sicherer Quelle zu wissen vorgiebt, von der Polizei in Kopenhagen "vigiliert" werde, wegen homosexueller Sachen; es existierten Polizeiprotokolle, die die Entente, wenn er Reichskanzler werde, veröffentlichen könne.'

³⁴ Maximilian von Harden, 'Enthüllungen', in *Die Zukunft*, 57 (3 November 1906), 169–198; Maximilian von Harden, 'Präludium', in *Die Zukunft*, 57 (17 November 1906), 251–266; 'Dies Irae. Momentaufnahmen', in *Die Zukunft*, 57 (1 December 1906), 325–341; 'Schlussvortrag', in *Die Zukunft*, 61 (9 November 1907), 179–210; See also Isabel V. Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1888–1918* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

‘Third Weimar’, such as André Gide, formed part of a kind of sexual dissident elite in France who formed a network of anti-fascist intellectuals. These networks obtained existential importance when they helped each other escape the Nazis.³⁵ Many of this group shared Virginia Woolf’s belief that rather than being a deviant minority, their more pluralistic conception of gender and sexuality signalled the changing nature of ‘human character’ itself which had changed in this period.³⁶ In searching for an adequate form for this new character, they naturally gravitated towards a new kind of poetry.

The age of new internationalism was not to be confused with the practice of foreign military conscription in imperial Europe. Then, as Bernard Shaw had written, ‘the Englishman’ was forced to ‘fight as a pressed man for Russia, though his father was slain by the Russians at Inkerman, and at France, though his grandfather fell at Waterloo charging shoulder to shoulder with Blücher’s Prussians. The German is compelled by the Prussian, whom he loathes, to die for Turkey and for the Crescent as against Anglo-Saxon Christendom.’³⁷ Only Germany, Shaw predicted, would come out of this victorious process of post-imperial conversion.

When the League of Nations was founded, the Fabians, just like their German analogues, did not like the form that the League eventually took. They all proposed their own ideas for a League of Peoples, a model where the nation would be far less prominent. For Leonard Woolf, the solution lay in an international organization of heavy industry as well as workers. Because trusts in industry were becoming increasingly international, they were using the opportunity to break strike by virtue of their employees’ divisions.³⁸ The task was to create structures that, in addition to these passions, would also represent ‘group interests’ which are not national.³⁹ As Daniel Laqua, Patricia Clavin, and others have shown, the institutional landscape associated with the International Labour Organization and similar associations has in fact indeed been greater than previously thought.⁴⁰ It remains one of the unjustly forgotten innovations of the

³⁵ Wolfgang Bialas and Burkard Stenzel (eds.), *Die Weimarer Republik zwischen Metropole und Provinz. Intellektuellendiskurse zur politischen Kultur* (Weimar, Cologne and Vienna: Böhlau, 1996).

³⁶ Virginia Woolf, ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’.

³⁷ Bernard Shaw, introduction to Leonard Woolf’s *International Government* (New York: Brentano’s, 1916), ix–x. More on Leonard Woolf’s work on the League of Nations and its reforms, see documents of the Fabian Research Department, and esp. his correspondence with Sidney Webb on ‘supranational reform’ (1915) at The Keep, Brighton.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 349. ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁴⁰ Cf. Daniel Laqua, ‘Transnational Intellectual Cooperation, the League of Nations, and the Problem of Order’, in *Journal of Global History*, 6:2 (2011), 223–247; see also Patricia Clavin’s joint research project into the history of the League of Nations: www.leagueofnationshistory.org/homepage.shtml, accessed 5 May 2014.

interwar period, particularly in the age when the concept of sovereignty again applies more to corporations than it does to states.

The Emperors of Elegy

In the intellectual networks of the European queer community, some texts, including Virgil's *Eclogues*, served as key nodes of cultural identification. Kessler's Cranach Press also published a bibliophile edition of this text.⁴¹ But after 1920, these ancient poets were eclipsed by new voices. To this disenchanted fraction, T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, which Leonard and Virginia Woolf first published in their journal *Criterion*, conveyed most clearly the ambivalent sense of loss associated with imperial decline.⁴² One of the main voices of this multilingual poem calls out in German: *Bin gar keine Russin. Stamme aus Litauen. Echt Deutsch!* This polyglot swan song of European culture gave a subjective form to what was a geopolitical crisis. Out of the territorial fragments of the Habsburg, Hohenzollern, and Romanoff empires, two generations of politicians shaped parliamentary republics or smaller kingdoms along new principles of political legitimacy, such as national self-determination and the referendum. For some groups of people who inhabited these regions, the conversion of their former imperial identities into a national form of status was less straightforward than for others, and it is those polyglot subjectivities that Eliot's stylized poem evokes most poignantly.

The woman's words in T.S. Eliot's polyphonic vision of the *Waste Land* belonged to a person who is 'not a Russian', 'from Lithuania', but 'truly German'. In his recollection of past seasons spent in Europe, 'mixing memory and desire', T.S. Eliot conjured up the memory of summers spent on Munich's Starnberg Lake.⁴³ Embedded in the author's memory of summer is another person's memory of a winter, recollected by a woman called Marie: 'And when we were children, staying at the archduke's,/ My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,/ And I was frightened./ He said, Marie,/ Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.'⁴⁴ The reference to Lithuania, to a family of noble background (the archduke), and the notion

⁴¹ *Les Eclogues de Virgile*, transl. and ed. Marc Lafargue, ill. by Eric Gill (Weimar: Cranachpresse, 1926).

⁴² J. Howard Woolmer, *A Checklist of the Hogarth Press, 1917–1938* (Andes and New York: Woolmer & Brotherson, 1987).

⁴³ T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', in *The Criterion*, 1:1 (October 1922), 50–64, 50. ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

of a nostalgic kind of memory suggests that one of the voices in his patchwork of European decline belongs to that of German settlers from the Baltic littoral, probably of aristocratic descent.

Another poet who was extremely popular in both British and German social circles in the 1920s and 1930s was Rainer Maria Rilke. He wrote elegies that appealed to a new generation of disenchanted educated elites in continental Europe because of his evocative sense of loss. He spoke like an oracle for that in-between generation of people who no longer belonged to the past and yet did not feel at home in the present. He called them the ‘disinherited’, or ‘those who used to be’, because they had never come into their own in the post-imperial world. To behold and to lament the world that they believed has been lost forever was all they could do. As Rilke put it:

Every time the world turns upside down it leaves some disinherited
Those who no longer own the past and do not yet grasp what is coming
For the nearest is too far for the people
We shall not be confused by this
may it strengthen in us the purpose to glimpse
a flicker of that recognised form.⁴⁵

The Adriatic castle of Duino, which elicited Rilke’s elegiac lament on decline, became a glue that connected this disparate yet related community of intellectuals who had been critics of empire yet mourned its decline.⁴⁶ In actual fact, the Rilke fans were the very opposite of a ‘disinherited’ community. Heirs of imperial wealth, derived from projects such as Anglo-German railway construction, banking, the British sugar trade, or the benefits of abolition, which resulted in compensation payments to a number of Bloomsbury families in the mid-nineteenth century, they were a rather well-to-do community of intellectuals who had made a point of converting this financial capital into symbolic values. Their influence consisted in their distinctive elite mentality, a sense of exclusivity

⁴⁵ ‘Jede dumpfe Umkehr der Welt hat solche Enterbte/ denen das Frühere nicht und noch nicht das Nächste gehört./ Denn auch das Nächste ist weit für die Menschen. Uns soll/ dies nicht verwirren; es stärke in uns die Bewahrung/ der noch erkannten Gestalt.’ My translation. Rainer Maria Rilke, Seventh of the *Duino Elegies* (1912–22).

⁴⁶ The last page reads:

Count Harry Kessler planned the format of this volume. Eric Gill designed and himself cut on wood the initials. The italic type was designed by Edward Johnston and cut by E. Prince and G.T. Friend. The paper was made by a hand process devised in joint research by Count Harry Kessler and Gaspard and Aristide Maillol. The book was printed in the spring and winter of 1931. [...] The book was printed for the Hogarth Press, 52 Tavistock Road, London W.C. 1, and both the English and the German texts were reproduced by the courtesy of the Insel-Verlag in Leipzig who are also the Agents for the book in Germany.

and anti-herd sentiment.⁴⁷ Rilke with his elegiac evocation of imperial decline as an irrevocable fact of modern life provided one of the affective bonds between these former dissidents of Wilhelmine Germany and the renegade establishment of Victorian Britain and Austria-Hungary, which formed between the 1890s and reached an apogee at the beginning of the 1930s. These links demonstrate the social and emotional genealogy of a very distinctive European internationalism that was politically neither on the Left nor on the Right. Politically, they could be called the global Fabians due to their espousal of an aristocratic form of socialism; aesthetically, their tastes evolved from post-impressionism and the visual arts towards an espousal of lyrical modernism, best represented in Rilke's work, towards Soviet and anti-colonial socialist realism. By pursuing the social network behind the literary fashion of decline, we can also reconstruct the structure and function of what was a transnational affective community. This reconstruction takes us back to the late nineteenth century, when Kessler and the Bloomsbury people alike formed the vanguard of Europe's art connoisseurs and the first collectors of artists like Manet.

Rilke himself was rather familiar with these elite contexts and enjoyed the patronage of a number of such figures in his lifetime. Often without a permanent residence, Rilke often stayed for extensive periods at the palazzos and houses of his many patrons and, more often, patronesses: owners of palaces on the Adriatic, in the Swiss Alps, apartments in Venice and in Paris. One of Rilke's most spectacular hosts was the Duchess of Thurn and Taxis, owner of the Castle of Duino at the edges of the Adriatic Coast, which was not far from Emperor Maximilian's romantic castle of Miramar. Rilke had spent time there in 1912. The Adriatic Littoral and its cosmopolitan owners shaped a cultural zone between pan-Slavic and Italian nationalism under Habsburg hegemony, which was under threat as a result of war. Heavily destroyed in 1915 after bombing from Italian dirigible balloons and clashes between Italian and the remaining Austrian imperial army, after the Great War it became part of the new Italian state.⁴⁸ Occupied by fascist leaders of the Saló Republic and later by the Gestapo, in 1945, the joint Anglo-British allied command that took control over the Adriatic after the defeat of the Axis powers would choose Duino as its headquarters.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Desmond MacCarthy, unfinished Bloomsbury memoir, in Rosenbaum and Haule (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Group. A Collection of Memoirs and a Commentary*, 66–67.

⁴⁸ Dominique Kirchner-Reill, *Nationalists Who Feared the Nation. Adriatic Multi-Nationalism in Habsburg Dalmatia, Trieste, and Venice* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012).

⁴⁹ Franklin Lindsay, *Beacons in the Night: With the OSS and Tito's Partisans in Wartime Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

On 2 November 1917, the war not over yet, Rilke was having breakfast with Kessler in Berlin's fashionable Hotel Adlon. He had briefly served in Austria-Hungary's propaganda department. After abandoning this office, he was stateless out of necessity and homeless out of choice.⁵⁰ Rilke is often thought of either as a German poet, by which people primarily mean the language in which he wrote but often imply the state, or as a poet of modernity without further specification.⁵¹ Yet in fact, both Rilke and Kessler formed part of a specific cosmopolitan community. Their way of thinking was geographical but not in a static way; they remembered the past in terms of symbolic events connected to symbolic places, experiences, and works of art that they considered canonical.

The encounter between the poet and reluctant propagandist for Austria-Hungary, and Kessler, the Maecenas, officer, and head German propaganda, was symptomatic of a particular circle of disenchanted imperial elites. Rilke admitted that the ongoing war made him confused. 'Where do I belong?' he asked. Kessler explained his sentiment with the fact that the war had undermined the 'entire foundation of his former life, of every poem that he had written'. His individual 'drive towards form', Kessler surmised, contradicted the 'force of the state', especially an Austrian state.⁵² Rilke's highly stylized sonnets and hexameters were particularly suited to the German language, and yet, Kessler thought, not to a particular state. At this time, his main publisher and supporter, Anton Kippenberg of the Insel publishing house, was leading propaganda efforts on Germany's western front, in Belgium; under his aegis, the image of the Leipzig Battle of the Peoples memorial, completed as a warning for peace in 1913, became the symbol of another war as it had been turned into the design for the censorship of the German army.

Rilke had been among a close circle of people who would receive Kessler's diary-like reports on the war from the eastern front. But like Kessler, he saw the war in a Tolstoyan light, as a social universe rather than as a frontline where Russia, Germany, and Britain were on opposite sides. He praised Kessler for writing about war in the spirit of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.⁵³ Rilke himself had been a Tolstoyan before the war. Rilke's lover at

⁵⁰ Originally, Kessler had wanted Rilke to move from Vienna to Bern in 1918, but then Rilke was able to acquire Czechoslovak citizenship by virtue of having been born in Prague and used this citizenship to continue living in Switzerland, where he died in 1926. Kessler, *Diaries*, 18 April 1918.

⁵¹ Cf. Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self. The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 501, drawing on Heidegger.

⁵² Kessler, *Diaries*, 2 November 1917.

⁵³ Rilke to Baronin Dorothea von Ledebur, 14 November 1917, in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe Zur Politik*, Hg. Joachim W. Stork. (Frankfurt/Main und Leipzig: Insel, 1992), Nr. 90.

the time, Lou Andreas Salome, a former passion of Nietzsche and a student of Freud, had introduced Rilke to Tolstoy on their trip to Russia.⁵⁴ In the 1920s, he immersed himself in translations of a historical epic poem from medieval Russia, the Song of Igor, about the decline of princely power and the Time of Troubles in the thirteenth century.⁵⁵ The Bloomsbury group was also attracted to these plots.

The kind of conversation that Rilke and Kessler were having was both a product and a contribution to the process of a sentimental education. In their conversations and in writing, they developed an emotional code whose function is to reflect on the loss of a beloved object: the life of Europe in the past.⁵⁶ When in England, Kessler frequented meetings of the Fabian Society, who influenced much of his political and economic thought. He was particularly drawn to intellectual circles which promoted new artistic movements, such as impressionism and neo-impressionism, across national boundaries. As a member of the artistic union *Pan* around the art historian Julius Meier-Graefe, he had introduced impressionist and neo-impressionist art to Germany, stirring resistance from nationalist circles. In Germany, Kessler also formed part of the first generation of German youths attracted to the cult of Friedrich Nietzsche, and began to play a prominent role in these circles. He closed Nietzsche's eyes on his deathbed in August 1900.⁵⁷

Rilke's elegiac sense of threat to this way of life, expressed in his *Duino Elegies*, a cycle of poems that he composed between 1912 and 1922, brought him world fame. It found echoes in his social circle, which comprised educated Europeans of higher social background. Most of them came from Germany, Russia, France, and Austria-Hungary. In translation, he would also become famous among English-speaking readers, but this fame would grow primarily after the Second World War.

Lovers of Rilke ranged from the Bloomsbury group in Britain to former admirers of neo-impressionist art in Germany, to a wider circle of European Nietzscheans.⁵⁸ A closer look at the transnational dimension of

⁵⁴ Lew Kopelew, 'Rilke in Rußland', *Die Zeit*, 21 April 1972. Cf. also Rilke to Alexei Suworin, 5 March 1902, in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe in zwei Bänden*, 1. Bd. 1896 bis 1919, ed. Horst Nalewski (Frankfurt and Leipzig: Insel, 1991), Nr. 27.

⁵⁵ 'Und da, Brüder, begann eine un gute Zeit; in der Einöde lag begraben die russische Macht'. 'Die Mär von der Heerfahrt Igers', Übertragung von R. M. Rilke, in *Dichtung und Welt*, 7 (1930); Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Aus der Übertragung der altrussischen Dichtung «Das Igorlied»', *Insel-Almanach auf das Jahr 1931*.

⁵⁶ On the term 'semantic deprivation', see Andreas Lawaty and Hubert Orłowski (eds.), *Deutsche und Polen. Geschichte – Kultur – Politik* (Munich: Siedler, N6, 2003).

⁵⁷ Kessler, *Diaries*, 27 August 1900.

⁵⁸ Leonard Woolf recalls being secretary of Roger Fry's second post-impressionist exhibition at the Grafton galleries. Woolf, *Sowing*, 122.

this community of taste raises the question as to what extent we should consider them ‘fractions’ of their class within any one nation or empire, or if we should consider them representatives of one ‘fraction’ of the same class across national boundaries. I would suggest that it is at least as valid to speak of a transnational emotional community of lovers of modernist art whose taste, however, ceased to evolve in some respects after the mid-1920s. To use an expression coined by Barbara Rosenwein, these emotional communities also contributed to a political sentiment or political regime, which has very real political repercussions.⁵⁹

After Rilke’s untimely death in 1926, Count Kessler collaborated with Germany’s Kippenberg publishing house, as well as Leonard and Virginia Woolf’s Hogarth Press, to bring out the *Duino Elegies* in English translation.⁶⁰ The illustrations were designed by the British sculptor Eric Gill, who made woodcuts for the book, and the paper was made by the Maillol brothers; the printer was Kessler’s long-time lover Max Goertz.⁶¹ The Woolfs also published Rilke’s *Notebooks*, and the Hogarth executive John Lehmann later oversaw the English translation rights for Rilke in the British Empire in negotiation with US publishers.⁶² The taste for Rilke shared by this small circle of British and German intellectuals was echoed by other contemporary literary cults, such as the growing fascination with the poetry of T.S. Eliot, the prose of Marcel Proust, and, in Germany, the poetry of Stefan George.⁶³

The European social network of Rilke lovers had evolved from similar roots. For people such as Kessler and the Woolfs, this path began with an aesthetic and spiritual disenchantment with the political ideology into which they were born, which was Victorian Britain and Wilhelmine Germany. It led them through a period of aesthetic innovation, during which – around the 1900s – they began promoting neo-impressionist

⁵⁹ Barbara Rosenwein, ‘Worrying About Emotions in History’, in *American Historical Review*, 107:3 (June 2002), 821–845.

⁶⁰ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duineser Elegien. Elegies from the Castle of Duino*, transl. V. Sackville-West and Edward Sackville-West (London: The Hogarth Press, 1931); this book was printed by Harry Kessler and Max Goertz in Weimar: Cranach Press.

⁶¹ Woolmer, *A Checklist*, 92–93.

⁶² Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge*, transl. John Linton (London: The Hogarth Press, 1931). See also the Woolfs’ edition of Rilke’s *Poems*, transl. J.B. Leishman (London: The Hogarth Press, 1934), as well as, by the same translator, *Requiem and Other Poems* (1935), *Sonnets to Orpheus* (1936), and finally, *Later Poems* (1938). For the background to this collaboration, see Ms2750/379, Archives of the Hogarth Press, Reading, for a correspondence with Cranach Press regarding the translation of Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Duino Elegies*.

⁶³ On the Stefan George circle in the context of post-imperial mourning, see Melissa Lane and Martin Ruehl (eds.), *A Poet’s Reich: Politics and Culture in the George Circle* (London: Camden House, 2011).

French art in Germany and Britain, respectively, and took on Ruskinian ideas in promoting an elite kind of socialism. Finally, politically, it culminated with a sincere attempt to contribute to a new European internationalism through the institutional framework of the League of Nations and international labour organizations.

As Heinrich Simon of the Fischer publishing house said of Count Kessler, he formed the centre of a social circle that constituted the aristocratic Fronde against the conservative milieu around Wilhelm II. It was this Fronde that eventually shaped the transition of the Kaiserreich into a 'republic'.⁶⁴ This group had long delegitimized Wilhelm II and his entourage. While critical of the Versailles settlement, they nonetheless saw in Germany's peace settlement a unique opportunity for a revolution from above. The parallel with the original Fronde implied in this reference worked on two levels. Firstly, labelling them a 'Fronde' was appropriate because it referred to the seventeenth-century resistance of the French nobility against the encroachment of its liberties by a corrupt monarch and his counsellor Cardinal Mazarin; secondly, it indicated that, just as in seventeenth-century France, a civil war mounted between the nobility and the monarch eventually culminated in a European war of a much larger scale.⁶⁵

Mixing memory and desire: in search of a post-imperial character

From questions of aesthetic modernism and the education of a public, the community of British Fabians and German republican dissidents turned easily to the subject of international order. Leonard Woolf began compiling a series of works on war and peace with significant contributions from Russia during the war, along with a memorandum on international government that was given to the British delegation in Versailles.⁶⁶ With the help of poets like T.S. Eliot and Rilke, post-imperial melancholy became an affective glue for an international community of intellectuals located on the left-liberal spectrum, whose lives span both the interwar period and Europe's second post-war.⁶⁷ Leonard Woolf's *International Government*

⁶⁴ Kessler, *Diaries*, 5 December 1931. Kessler's publisher Heinrich Simon used this expression to describe Kessler's career.

⁶⁵ On the Secession group, see Peter Paret, *The Berlin Secession: Modernism and its Enemies in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980); Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968).

⁶⁶ Leonard Woolf papers, IF9b, 'A short peace and war bibliography', University of Sussex Special Collections. On Woolf's internationalism, see also Christine Froula, 'War, Peace and Internationalism', in Rosner (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group*, 93–112.

⁶⁷ Kessler, *Diary*, 6 December 1929.

(1916) was in many ways a British forerunner to Kessler's *Guidelines for a True League of Nations* (1919–21).⁶⁸ Both author-publishers significantly transformed their patronage of other people's writing in the interwar period. In Woolf's case, he began promoting anticolonial writing such as the work of C.L.R. James, while Kessler published a collection of war poems with illustrations by the communist artist George Grosz. Both were sensitive to the ambiguity of empires between cultural pluralism and economic hierarchy, they devoted a significant amount of time to the League of Nations, and particularly to drafting its reforms. Moreover, both did so by considering the possibility of a synthesis between spiritual internationalism, industrial and workers' councils, and parliamentary democracy. They also forged ties between Russian socialists and Western liberals, something Kessler was very much part of during his time in Switzerland.⁶⁹

In the American preface to his novel about Ceylon, one of Britain's first experiments of imperial devolution in which Woolf served as a civil servant, Woolf provided an allegory of civilization and barbarism through the lens of the village and its surrounding jungle. His main fascination was with tracing 'vanished' villages in the midst of desolation. One particular village

had strange things about it and in it. It had once many hundreds of years ago been populous, a country with powerful kings and a civilisation of its own. The ruins of great buildings and kings' palaces and temples and gigantic dagobas still stand in Tissamaharama. And in the north, buried in the jungle so deep that thirty yards away you can see no trace of them, I have come upon the remains of magnificent irrigation works, giant sluices, stone work and masonry, and the great channels which – you can still trace them – brought the water miles and miles from the Walawe River to the great tanks and reservoirs, now mere jungle. In those days all over the country which is now a wilderness there must have been villages and rice fields. Those were the days of Sinhalese kings.⁷⁰

The effect of post-imperial mourning among this transnational fraction of an imperial elite was varied. On the one hand, it produced highly articulate accounts of international government and justifications for supranational

⁶⁸ See, for example, Müller, 'Sekretär seiner Zeit: Harry Graf Kessler', 174–181; Zeller, *Harry Graf Kessler. Zeuge und Chronist seiner Epoche*, in *Abhandlungen der Klasse der Literatur*.

⁶⁹ Cf. Boris Nicolaevsky Papers, Correspondence between N. Rubakin and Prof. Yaschenko (book seller in Berlin), Folder 32: 126 (17 January 1921), HA; Box 496/ 3, Letters from M.N. Pavlovski (31 October and 8 and 26 November 1962), with copies of enclosed internal German government correspondence, Akten Ru (Martel), L. 849/L. 244.000.244.046, HA.

⁷⁰ Leonard Woolf, *The Village in the Jungle* (New York: Harcourt, 1937), preface.

organizations for labour as well as producers and, in the case of Kessler's plan, of spiritual organizations. On the other hand, these circles retained some serious limitations, from being almost exclusively masculine to having their origins in secret or closed associations. They originated in student fraternities and secret societies such as the Cambridge Apostles or the Canitz fraternity in the case of Kessler. The biographical and autobiographical genres provided them with a means to express contradictory feelings of nostalgia for imperial multiculturalism and sympathy for the new revolutions.

Within this genre, they engaged in detailed phenomenologies of cosmopolitan identity in the age of empire. As Leonard Woolf put it, 'When I try to look objectively into my own mind, I detect feelings of loyalty to: my family; "race" (Jews), my country, England in particular, and the British Empire generally, places with which I have been connected, such as Kensington and London (born and bred), counties, Middlesex and Sussex, where I have lived, Ceylon, Greece; school; Trinity and Cambridge.'⁷¹

There is a painting by Vanessa Bell, which illustrates how memory functioned at both a personal and a social level in the Bloomsbury circle. In 1920, the group, including the Woolfs, the Bells, the Keynes, and others, started a series of gatherings they called 'The Memoir Club'. It persisted into the early 1960s. On the painting itself, from 1943, we see twelve members of the Bloomsbury circle, mostly men like Leonard Woolf and Maynard Keynes, and some women like Lydia Lopokova, Keynes's wife, surrounded by portraits of deceased members, including, by this point in time, Virginia Woolf herself.⁷²

The purpose of sharing such diverse memories was to identify their place in the present in relation to a common account of the past. As Leonard Woolf put it,

I feel that my roots are here and in the Greece of Herodotus, Thucydides, Aristophanes, and Pericles. I have always felt in my bones and brain and heart English and, more narrowly, a Londoner, but with a nostalgic love of the city and civilization of ancient Athens. Yet my genes and chromosomes are neither Anglo-Saxon nor Ionian. When my Rodmell neighbours' forefathers were herding swine on the plains of eastern Europe and the Athenians were building the Acropolis, my Semitic ancestors, with the days of their national greatness, such as it was, already behind them, were in Persia or Palestine. And they were already prisoners of war, displaced

⁷¹ Woolf, *Sowing*, 212–213. ⁷² Vanessa Bell, *The Memoir Club* 1943. Tate Britain.



Figure 26 Boris von Anrep, 'Here I lie'. Fragment from his National Gallery mosaic (1952).

© The National Gallery, London. Reproduced by kind permission of the Estate of Boris Anrep

persons, refugees, having begun that unending pilgrimage as the world's official fugitives and scapegoats which has brought one of their descendants to live, and probably die, Parish Clerk of Rodmell in the County of Sussex.⁷³

He then gives another test to his divided identities by suggesting that in a game or sport he is distinctly happy if one of the following wins: St. Paul's, his school, Cambridge University, his university, followed by England, and the British Empire, followed by Sussex and Middlesex in county cricket. In the autobiographic remarks of this 'born and bred' Londoner, we can sense a greater multiplicity of consciousness than in the pages of the colonial subject C.L.R. James, who is at home in the great

⁷³ Woolf, *Sowing*, 15.



Figure 27 Vanessa Bell, *The Memoir Club* (ca. 1943).

© estate of Vanessa Bell. Reproduced by kind permission of Henrietta Garnett

literary genres, in the game of cricket, and in the national idea of the West Indies.

In a contribution to an earlier gathering, the Society of Heretics, in 1924, Virginia Woolf suggested that the character of the British imperial self was changing in their lifetime. She compared this process to the way an imaginary train moved from Richmond to Waterloo. The works of the age of transition are full of 'incompleteness and dissatisfaction' because they fail in the primary expectation which people have from literature, namely to turn 'phantoms' into the actual characters of an age. Imagining a classic scene of literary modernism, a conversation in a train, she thought how a Frenchman, an Englishman, and a Russian would narrate it, before concluding that great novels, 'clumsy and verbose' as well as 'rich and elastic', would betray their calling if they praised the 'glories of the British empire' or any doctrine instead of being sincere expressions of the characters of their time.⁷⁴ The challenge was that in the 1920s, imperial

⁷⁴ Woolf, 'Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown', 10 and passim.

dissolution itself had become manifest in the characters of particular individuals, and it is from the crisis of that character that the crisis of forms, in her view, also derived.

The international thought of this combined fraction of post-Victorians and the post-Wilhelmians could be described as the theoretical equivalent to this aesthetic search. Insofar as they acknowledged the need to disarticulate forms of privilege and geopolitics typical for empires, experimentation with genres for this community was inseparable from their experimentation with theories of social organization. The Hogarth Press was the virtual location that brought all of these strands together: alternative diasporic identities for Jewish and Caribbean intellectuals, personal memoirs and biographies, internationalist political treatise, and poetry reflecting on Europe as a wasteland. Here was the link between a form of exclusive print production in the era of print capitalism, a voluntary demodernization of an intellectual elite. The connection between decolonization and psychoanalysis, as Said perceptively noted, was not only a connection that later scholars would impose on the past. It was also rooted in the corporate history of the European presses of the interwar period, their collaborations with each other, and with their authors.

Bell's painting of the Memoir Club can be compared to another room with portraits we last encountered in the context of Pan-Europeanism. In the photograph of the opening of Coudenhove's Paneuropa Congress, we saw a very different public space. Yet, in some essential way, it is a space that is very similar to the private intimacy of the Memoir Club. The photograph of the congress of 1926 is emblematic of the enthusiasm with which European internationalists set out to build better post-imperial foundations for a new and better European Empire. The painting from 1943 – even the fact that it is a painting is significant – indicates a retreat into the private realm of introspection and memoirs. In this juxtaposition, we have the arc of development that the social history of 'European civilization' had taken from the end of the First World War until the outbreak of the Second World War.⁷⁵

The oceanic feeling for empire

While Leonard Woolf and the Fabians primarily meant the working classes when speaking about non-national interests, there were also two more functions of the Hogarth Press that their press ended up fulfilling. They

⁷⁵ Williams, 'Fraction', 154 and *passim*.

served as a bridge for two social groups that at first sight do not have a lot in common. They were the Jewish community of refugees from Nazi Germany and Europe, who settled in London after 1933, and the community of intellectuals who came to London or other parts of Britain to study from the Caribbean. For all these communities, imperial memory provided a secular analogy to the 'oceanic feeling' that they, together with Freud, criticized among the religious fundamentalism of the Victorian 'headmasters'.⁷⁶

An interest in reading against the grain of dominant historical narrative was another commonality of this circle. In this respect, James's interest in Toussaint L'Ouverture, the black Caribbean double to Europe's continental revolutionaries, can be compared to Freud's interest in Habsburg philosemitism and in Moses's non-European, Egyptian roots. In his essay on anti-Semitism from 1938, which he published in the émigré journal *Die Zukunft*, co-edited by Arthur Koestler and others, Freud recalled an author whose name he had forgotten, and who had written a text that celebrated the contributions of the Jews to European cultural life. He invited his readers to help: 'Perhaps one of the readers of this periodical will be able to come to my help?' But then, Freud interjected:

A whisper has just reached my ears that what I probably had in mind was Count Heinrich Coudenhove-Kalergi's book *Das Wesen des Antisemitismus*, which contains precisely what the author I am in search of missed in the recent protests, and more besides. I know that book. It appeared first in 1901 and was re-issued by his son in 1929 with an admirable introduction. But it cannot be that. What I am thinking of is a shorter pronouncement and one of very recent date. Or am I altogether at fault? Does nothing of the kind exist? And has the work of the two Coudenhoves had no influence on our contemporaries?⁷⁷

To those authors who mourned the Habsburg past, this mourning was often expressed with reference to the dynasty itself, or to other noble families.⁷⁸ Habsburg's decline and that of other high nobility became an allegorical narrative for the loss of a cultural system. Sigmund Freud's work provided a guide for viewing geography psychologically. His amateur studies of Roman archaeology and the multilayered archaeological

⁷⁶ See Freud's critique of Matthew Arnold in the introduction to *Civilization and its Discontents*.

⁷⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'A Comment on Anti-Semitism', in Freud, *Moses and Monotheism, An Outline of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works* (1937–38), vol. xxiii, ed. and transl. James Strachey (London: Vintage/The Hogarth Press, 2001), 287–301, 292–292. Originally published in *Die Zukunft: ein neues Deutschland, ein neues Europa*, 7 (25 November 1938).

⁷⁸ Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*.

memory of the city of Rome served to him and the international following of his Psychoanalytic Society as a metaphor for grasping the decline of more than one empire. If, by a ‘flight of imagination’, Freud urged his readers, we supposed that the city of Rome was a ‘psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past’, what we would find would be a multi-layered presence of all its epochs at once. The ruins of the city made visible to visitors of Rome the absence of the past, which for many people looked different. Some longed for Rome of Antiquity in the republican period; the fascists around Mussolini, undoubtedly, looked for the Roman Empire’s expansion under the Caesars as their model. For others again, the model of Roman greatness lay in the Renaissance, when the city had actually shared its importance with other cultural centres, such as Florence. The city became an object of different kinds of political mourning, the suffering of a loss not of a ‘beloved person’ but of ‘an abstraction’ with which one could be enamoured, such as the ‘fatherland, freedom, an ideal, etc.’⁷⁹

The Hogarth Press not only first introduced Freud to English readers. It also did the same for another intellectual outsider, the West Indian aesthete C.L.R. James, who had arrived in England first to accompany a cricketer and who ended up becoming a theorist of West Indian self-government with the help of the Woolfs. His *Case for West Indian Self-Government* effectively extrapolated the Wilsonian logic of nation states devised for post-imperial Europe for the colonies of the British Empire in the Caribbean.

At a time when other British publishers were reluctant to publish critiques of empire, such as Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery*, the Woolfs seemed to be happy to take the risk. C.L.R. James can be rightly counted as a belated member of the Bloomsbury group. He had even adopted their manner of writing memoirs and biographies – the subjects of a regular club formed by the original Bloomsbury circle – and ended up writing further books in a much more biographical fashion. His masterpiece remains his cricket autobiography *Beyond a Boundary*, a book in which he argued that the British art of cricket was an imperial art form. A reluctant Trotskyist, James eventually gave up his identity as a diasporic theorist for the case of West India in favour of a more universalist espousal of socialist realism. Leonard Woolf was concerned with the British mandate system and was a very active member of the League of Nations

⁷⁹ Sigmund Freud, ‘Trauer und Melancholie’, in *Internationale Zeitschrift für Ärztliche Psychoanalyse*, 4:6 (1917), 288–301.

Union.⁸⁰ These imperial elites' previous complicity in colonial violence, wrote John Strachey in 1959, gave Europeans the task to resist turning the 'sword of empire' into a 'stone of indifference' to the plight of the formerly colonized.⁸¹

More recently, new British history has challenged previously existing ideas of the 'national' character to which such groups contribute by extending Bloomsbury to the British Empire. But these directions of research have not yet challenged the image of the club as distinctly national, rather than internationalist, in character. In this way, Anrep's mosaics could be compared to the selected 'scraps of talk' and fragments which dropped German and other cultures from this selectively cosmopolitan memory of empire.

On 23 July 1940, three years after Kessler had passed away in exile in Lyon, the Hogarth Press was trying to locate his heirs in order to transfer payments for royalties from the book. In response, they received these words passed on from a renowned British calligrapher who knew William Rothenstein, who had gone to the same British school as the German Count: 'Kessler was a good man who lost, not only a fortune, but practically everything he valued in life.'⁸²

Financial ruin, suicides, on one end, and radicalization towards the Soviet Left or fascist right on the other end were the most visible markers of this dissolution. This elite had been most at home in the opposition to imperial governments with bad taste, those associated with Wilhelm II or high Victorianism. But in the absence of these institutions, they were no longer the angriest of the angry young men. In fact, their aesthetic tastes had evolved in a rather similar direction to the international modernism which the new empires, the Nazis and the Soviet Union, demonstrated in Paris. This, as Kessler remarked, was particularly awkward as they had been used to associating good taste with ideas for a good government.

This generation of internationalists provided other Europeans and non-European contemporaries of their class with a vocabulary for grasping multiple forms of political decline and social disintegration. Between the year 1937, the year of the Great Exposition in Paris, and 1941, the year when the Blitz war destroyed large parts of Bloomsbury, this

⁸⁰ Leonard Woolf, 'The Mandates and the Mandated Areas (Tropical Colonies)', in Leonard Woolf papers, 3.1, Special Collections, the University of Sussex. See also Leonard Woolf, 'Perpetual Peace by Immanuel Kant 1795', and 'A short Peace and War Bibliography', *ibid.*, section 9.

⁸¹ John Strachey, *The End of Empire* (New York: Random House, 1959).

⁸² George Milsted to the Directors of the Hogarth Press, 23 July 1940. Reading Special Collections, Hogarth archive.

group disintegrated. As Europe's imperial frontiers had moved more aggressively into Africa in the nineteenth century, terms like 'hinterland' and 'borderland' began to be used closer to home and applied metaphorically to the unconscious.⁸³ After the Second World War, it became particularly common to compare the internal frontiers of eastern Europe with the uncharted lands of Africa.⁸⁴

This transnational social fraction of an old imperial elite had a significant impact on the way Europeans imagined Europe in the inter-war period and on the formation of the concept of a European civilization that was to survive even such atrocities as the Holocaust. Its impact beyond Europe was to provide a framework for thinking postcolonially. But in Europe these 'civilizers' never decolonized themselves. Even the sceptical fraction of a self-doubting European imperial class remained, to adopt the title of Leonard Woolf's book, a small village in the jungle. Its intellectual exclusivity and its narcissistic parochialism were two sides of the same coin.

⁸³ Mary Katharine Bradby, *Psycho-Analysis and Its Place in Life* (1919).

⁸⁴ Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945).