

Modernity in Practice

A Comparative View of the Cultural Dynamics of Modernist Literary Production in Australia and Canada

The recent tide of interest in postcolonial modernisms—encompassing work by scholars including Sara Blair, Susan Stamford Friedman, Simon Gikandi, and Andreas Huyssen, and volumes such as Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel’s *Geomodernisms* and Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker’s *Geographies of Modernism*—has led to renewed interest in modernism’s “placedness.” To scholars of Canadian literature and postcolonial studies, the value of exploring how writers have articulated the tensions of modernity in particular national contexts is usually self-evident. However, prior to the mid-2000s, the geographical reach of Anglo-American modernist studies rarely extended beyond the borders of Europe and the United States. As modernist scholarship has moved beyond Anglo-American literature, the benefits of a comparative approach to modernist studies is coming into focus. As Glenn Willmott observes, modernism’s very contentiousness as a category “has been re-understood as a part of the many-voiced dialogue and many-historied dialectic proper to its interpretive power” (7).

One way of opening up this dialectic to scrutiny is to investigate the points of correspondence and divergence across different histories and geographies, in order to throw some light on the relationship between modernist subjectivities and their “locational and ideological (dis) affiliations” (Sarker 473). One of the most significant of such affiliations among Anglophone writers of the twentieth century is nationalism, a force whose influence can be felt across a range of colonial and postcolonial cultural products. The point I argue is that in order for modernist experimentation to become a viable mode of literary expression in Anglophone contexts beyond Britain and the United States, it

needed to find ways to articulate itself through the vocabulary and preoccupations of cultural nationalism. Correspondingly, cultural nationalists needed to find in modernist forms and styles appropriate vehicles for the expression of nationalism, if they were to make use of a mode whose complexities risked obscuring textual meaning and ideological messages.

As with “modernism” itself, “nationalism” is an unstable term which has signified differently to different constituencies at different times. Jody Berland offers a helpful way of viewing these two concepts as frameworks within which a range of actors—artists, writers, critics, administrators, politicians and others—“grappled with changing relationships between culture, space, time, and identity” (14), with the resulting alliances and antagonisms acting as significant shaping forces on twentieth-century lives. As the writers and artists whose work registered the effects of these changing relationships were often politically left-leaning, many points of connection can be found between modernist experimentation on the one hand, and socialism, communism, and feminism on the other. The ideological resonances between the distinct political projects of nationalism and these other “isms” can be observed in a number of ways in Canadian literature. Caren Irr argues that mass culture, socialist culture, and national culture are interdependent and help to define one another. She notes that the fostering of Canadian literary culture was a priority for those on the left more generally, invested as they were in formulating a national resistance to the influence of mass culture from the US. Indeed, the left-wing Canadian magazines of the 1930s—the *Canadian Forum*, *Masses*, and *New Frontier*—all had a nationalist orientation (182–83, 191). In probing the interactions between nationalist and modernist thought, then, this paper will also gesture towards places where they overlap with leftist political affiliations.

Scholars seeking to understand how twentieth-century texts engage with the upheavals and contradictions of modernity are increasingly turning their attention to a wide range of forms from across the spectrum of literary innovation, from the elite to the popular, and from naturalism to expressionism, in which the socio-cultural effects of modernity can be observed (Sarker 472; Rifkind, *Comrades* 14), rather than restricting themselves to texts with the formal and stylistic traits of Anglo-American canonical modernist writing. This approach to conceptualizing modernism is captured by Charles Altieri, who observes that its impulse to “dramatize intense refusals of received conventions” accompanies a demand that “this negative be transformed into a positive assertion capable in principle of

handling the problems demanding such innovation” (67). Altieri’s formulation offers a way of understanding the project of cultural nationalists in former colonial nations—intent on dramatizing their rejection of the received conventions of literature from the Anglo-American centres of cultural and political influence—as at the same time akin to the project of modernist writers in those same metropolitan centres. In Australia, writers experienced a similar set of pressures to those operating in Canada, including cultural nationalism, the difficulties involved in getting a book published within one’s own borders, and the looming presence of a canon of literary works—British and, increasingly, American—whose reference points were located elsewhere. A comparison of Canadian and Australian literary modernism, then, makes sense and indeed is timely, since the last decade has seen a considerable interest in modernism among scholars of Australian literature.¹ This work, along with scholarship in cognate fields such as art history, architecture, and area studies, has explored the ways in which writers and artists can be understood as giving expression to the encounter with modernity, not as mainstream literary criticism for many years represented it—with reference points that were largely Anglo- and Euro-American—but rather modernity in its postcolonial specificity, including its inextricable links with the project of articulating the nation and various associated leftist political goals.

Canadian writers of the early- and mid-twentieth century whose stylistic, formal, and technical innovations have been linked to modernist aesthetics were also frequently involved with left-wing politics and grassroots democratic movements. Dorothy Livesay was an active member of the Communist Party and later the New Democratic Party (NDP). F.R. Scott was affiliated with several groups oriented towards Fabian socialism, and was a founding member of the CCF, the precursor to the NDP. A.M. Klein stood for office in Montreal under the banner of the CCF (Dudek 11). Other poets’ alignment with left-wing politics, while less formal, is revealed in their work, for example A.J.M. Smith’s poems from the 1930s. Candida Rifkind has detailed aspects of the convergence between avant-garde theatre and working-class politics in the 1930s, seeing the aesthetic diversity of this theatre as “part of a broader culture of performativity in 1930s socialism characterized by . . . ephemeral and ‘relative performances’ of political sociability” (“Modernism’s Red Stage” 181). A 1931 article by Scott provides an evocative illustration of the symbolic resonance between these categories. In this article, Scott uses modernism as a metaphor for a force whose revitalising effects had achieved

for art what socialism could achieve for society, namely the creation of a “new and more suitable order”:

It is generally thought that the modernist is utterly opposed to the writing of poetry in established forms—that he would abolish eternally all rhythm, rhyme, metre, and the other 39 Articles of orthodox verse, leaving nothing by his own aberrations for the use of posterity. This attitude corresponds very nearly, and with as little show of intelligence, to the view of the Red, Socialist, Communist, or Bolshevik . . . which is still held by the better-to-do sections of Canadian society—the view that he is a man whose sole aims are bombs, blood, and burglary, or possible riot, rebellion, and rape. Whereas the truth is that the modernist poet, like the socialist, has thought through present forms to a new and more suitable order. He is not concerned with destroying, but with creating . . . The modernist poet frequently uses accepted forms, and only discards them when he discovers that they are unsuited to what he has to say. Then he creates a new form, groomed to his thought. (“New Poems” 338)

In Australia, by contrast, there was no such seamless metaphorical connection to be drawn between radical politics and accepted aesthetics. There was, rather, entrenched and explicit opposition between writers who were characterized as the “radical nationalists,” and those thought of as modernists. Writers including Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard, James Devaney, Marjorie Barnard, and others in the circle surrounding Vance and Nettie Palmer had strong affiliations to leftist political groups and saw it as a crucial part of their task as writers to articulate and promote an explicitly Australian national poetics. Those who were attracted to new aesthetic movements issuing from Europe, including the poets Christopher Brennan and Judith Wright and the novelists Christina Stead and Patrick White, were on the outside of radical nationalist circles. To those in the nationalist camp, modernist artistic techniques were inescapably inflected with overtones of British cultural imperialism, and their use perceived as cravenly derivative and politically suspect (see McQueen 33-35). Modernists tended either to be ignored or derided by cultural nationalists, even if their personal politics and their texts demonstrated a sympathy for outsiders and marginalised figures, as is the case in the work of Stead, White, and Wright.²

The antithetical relation between modernism and nationalism in Australian literary discourse is illustrated by *The Darkening Ecliptic*, the suite of hoax poems assembled in 1944 by the young poets James McAuley and Harold Stewart under the guise of a fictional modernist poet, “Ern Malley.” When McAuley and Stewart sent the poems to the avant-garde journal *Angry Penguins* in the attempt to discredit its editor, Max Harris, and thus modernism more generally, they seeded the texts with references to

European culture, languages and the classical world—"Albion," "Mytilene," "Traumdeutung," "Adonai," "Hyperion," "Thaisa," "Nero," "The Tigris," and "Venice" ("Malley")—alongside a handful of references to Australian locations ("Princess St," "Footscray," and "Melbourne"). Indeed, the title poem, "Dürer: Innsbruck, 1495" (later revealed to have been a genuine poetic effort of McAuley's) addresses the difficulty of escaping European models and traditions in one's own creative work. Tracking the changing critical responses to the Malley poems illustrates how their significance has shifted from triumphant proof of modernism's putative lack of artistic value and semiotic coherence—its "emperor's new clothes" quality—to cultural artefacts that are themselves remarkable for their avant-garde quality and their prefiguring of postmodernist techniques such as bricolage (Atherton 154). As Kirkpatrick observes, "these days more people see at least some artistic value in the poems than do not" (221). Certainly the poems and the narrative of the hoax have themselves become catalysts for expressions of Australian cultural nationalism, for example Sidney Nolan's assertion that the juxtaposition of European surrealism with the Australian landscape was crucial for his Ned Kelly series of paintings (Rundle n.pag.). What is interesting for my argument here is that as far as I have been able to determine, critical responses to the Malley affair do not generally pick up on the possibility that McAuley and Stewart were using the eurocentricity of the hoax poems to express a critique of modernism.

The virulence of the boundary-marking about what constituted acceptably nationalist writing meant that those Australian writers associated with cultural nationalism not only denigrated others who experimented with new techniques, but also excluded themselves from having their own literary innovations understood in light of Euro-American modernist experimentation elsewhere. It is clear, in retrospect, that Australian nationalist writers were engaged in much the same project of finding new directions and fresh idioms for their national literature as were their Canadian counterparts, who possessed similar political and nationalist sympathies, but for whom modernism was not a morass to be avoided but rather something to be embraced. As David Carter argues, Australian responses to modernity were "expressed through a set of radical polarizations" (160), and, crucially, what the polarization of the rhetoric around the modernism/nationalism divide in Australia obscures are the commonalities between the two camps, and the ways in which figures who were strongly associated with nationalism were also engaging with modernism. For example, Nettie Palmer reported on and reviewed key modernist texts

and authors—in 1928, for instance, writing articles on Katharine Mansfield, Marcel Proust, Rebecca West, D.H. Lawrence, and several on Virginia Woolf—including one that discussed modernity in the novel—thereby acting as a mediator of key Euro-American modernists to other Australian writers (Jordan, “Written” 94; “Elusive” 140). Robert Dixon is another critic who makes the case that Palmer’s writings were more cosmopolitan than is often acknowledged, pointing out that in her criticism she situated Australian writing in the context of world literary space (“Home” 13-14). Eleanor Dark demonstrated something of the difficulty writers had in navigating the tension between modernist and nationalist sympathies; as her biographer puts it, Dark sought stylistic and formal ways to bridge the gap “between the innovations of European modernist writing and the conventions of popular writing, and between an urban women’s consciousness and concerns about national identity and national culture” (Brooks 147; qtd. in Dixon “Australian Fiction” 244). In other ways, the Australian context shows that it was not easy to prise apart radical politics and radical aesthetics in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. Carter makes the case that the little magazine *Strife* illustrates the way in which “the various realisms promoted by the left in Australia can be considered as attempts to describe a radical, contemporary, oppositional aesthetic” (161). Prichard’s novel *Coonardoo* is one example of this, as its portrayal of Aboriginal living conditions and the exploitation of Aboriginal women by white men produced an outraged public reaction (Woollacott 187, 251). The case of *Coonardoo* is also interesting because even as it fulfils a core nationalist tenet—choosing an Australian setting and Australian subject matter—it simultaneously troubles a central element of white settler nationalism: the near-invisibility of Aboriginal peoples within narratives of the construction of the nation.

What the comparison with Australian literature brings to light with particular clarity, then, is how crucial it was to the flowering of Canadian modernism in its various permutations that it was able to work in tandem with the range of agendas associated with cultural nationalism. The question arises, then: why were poets and writers able to hitch their various leftist and nationalist wagons to modernism and the various sub-movements gathered under that term, such as imagism and surrealism, with relative ease in Canada but not in Australia? One hypothesis is that in Canada, there was already a model of how to be both Canadian and modern in the visual arts: the Group of Seven. Their influence on the first generation of Canadian poets can be seen in the titles and subject matter of poems such as A.J.M.

Smith's "The Lonely Land: Group of Seven," published in 1926 in the *McGill Fortnightly Review* and "Prayer," published in 1925 in the *Literary Supplement to the McGill Daily*, in which Smith explores the merging of modernist form with palpably Canadian subject matter. Bertram Brooker was another figure directly influenced by members of the Group of Seven, some of whom gave him personal encouragement in his forays into modern art and literature (Betts xxiv-xxv). Canadian writers and visual artists alike, then, were able to choose from the diverse array of styles and techniques associated with modernist innovation to both express and contest their understanding of the nation, whereas as we have seen, in Australia rhetoric surrounding the two categories was usually sharply polarized. "The Antipodean Manifesto," a polemic written to accompany a 1959 art exhibition, offers one example of this: rejecting the "bland and pretentious mysteries" of "*tachistes*, action painters, geometric abstractionists, abstract expressionists and their innumerable band of camp followers" (Blackman et al. 695), its authors declared that the proper vehicle for shaping and stimulating the growth of Australian culture was figurative art, as opposed to abstract and expressionist art (Stephen et al. 22).

A second hypothesis is that Canada's geographical proximity to the United States was crucial in making it a more hospitable environment for experimental writing, not only in providing aesthetic models and examples of how existing literary conventions might be ruptured, but also in disturbing the equivalence between modernism and British literature that so stymied nationalist writers in Australia. Taking the visual arts as a comparator bears this out. In contrast to literature, modernist art was by no means figured in Australia as issuing primarily from the British Isles; rather, it was understood as a movement whose proponents came from across Europe. The young artists—many of them women—who went to study abroad travelled to countries across Europe, rather than Britain alone (Woollacott 8). With its more nationally diffuse character, then, modernism in the visual arts did not seem to represent a misplaced Anglophilic conservatism in the same way as modernist literature did. Contributing to this was the fact that for many Australian critics and writers, literature was limited to the English language, so it could not be considered in its pan-European incarnation as easily as the visual arts or architecture.

In light of this second hypothesis, then, it is worth considering the extent to which writers in the two countries were familiar with literary developments in the United States. In Canada, there was a high level of

awareness among writers in the early decades of the twentieth century, with evidence ranging from the ephemeral—the coloured prints from *The Dial* hanging on the wall of the room in which, in 1926, Scott, Smith, and Leon Edel read modernist literature to each other and attempted to reproduce it themselves (Djwa 221)—to the more substantial. Alan Crawley provides one example of the latter, with his continual efforts to foster connections between *Contemporary Verse* and little magazines in the United States by exchanging issues with them and by submitting work from Canadian poets to publications including *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, as he did for Anne Wilkinson in 1948 (McCullagh 35). *Poetry*, in fact, proved a particularly important outlet for Canadian poets of the 1920s and 30s, publishing around fifty poems by identifiably Canadian poets including Louise Morey Bowman, Leo Kennedy, A.M. Klein, Raymond Knister, Martha Ostenso, Florence Randal Livesay, W.W.E. Ross, Constance Lindsay Skinner, and A.J.M. Smith in the years from 1912 to 1936 (James Doyle, n.p.). The relative paucity of modernist periodicals in Canada during these decades meant that the increased publication opportunities available to Canadian writers through their geographical proximity to the United States and its little magazines offered a crucial material advantage that was not available to the majority of their Australian counterparts. In later decades the connections with American avant-garde writing became even stronger, something seen for example in the associations between the *Tish* group and the Black Mountain poets in the 1960s.

In Australia, by contrast, literature and criticism of the early twentieth century looked largely inward; when writers did look outward, they were focussed on differentiating themselves from English cultural production and the “yellow peril” of Asia (Vickery 77). Thus, examples of American transactions and influence abound in Canadian literary history, but they are much scarcer in Australian literature. Two examples of Australia-US connections are the decade Christina Stead spent living there, and Patrick White’s success with American publishers and the book-buying public. White and Stead, however, were already marked as suspiciously cosmopolitan by the cultural nationalists, as they had both travelled extensively in Europe as well as the US by the time they came into prominence as writers, and both had set a number of novels in countries other than Australia. In some respects, then, they help to prove the point I am making: even though a significant proportion of their work is suffused with Australian content—for example the novels *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*,

For Love Alone, *The Tree of Man*, and *Voss*—they were coded as modernist in part because they were *not* members of the group of cultural nationalists, and their modernist inclinations were marked by their cosmopolitanism and references to cultures other than Australia.

Debates about the category of the “cosmopolitan,” especially as it was held in opposition to the “native,” are instructive in shedding light on some of the differences in the way the tension between modernism and nationalism played out in the two locations. The tension between the native and the cosmopolitan has been theorized by Pascale Casanova in terms of the rivalry between a national or popular conception of literature versus an autonomous view that seeks to rise above the concerns specific to a particular context (108). It is a dynamic familiar to scholars of both Canadian and Australian literatures, and one which emerges with some insistence in relation to the development of modernism. In Cynthia Sugars’ view, the dichotomy informed Canadian literary theory from its beginnings, emerging in the work of nineteenth-century cultural critics, and articulated most famously by A.J.M. Smith in the preface and table of contents of *The Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943), in which he divided the poets in the anthology into the categories of the native and the cosmopolitan (119-20). In Australia the same binary was at work, but without the benefit of a declaration such as Smith’s which might have fostered more explicit discussion about the values at stake and the process of division itself. Instead, the debate proceeded at a more submerged level, often taking the form of jibes and *ad hominem* attacks. For example, Dixon has shown how as late as 1956, Miles Franklin’s strongly nationalist preferences manifested themselves in *Laughter, Not for a Cage* as scorn for Christina Stead and her use of reference points outside Australia in the novel *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, whose characters Franklin deemed “introspective self-expositors touched with the brush of the coteries of the Latin Quarter, or Greenwich Village, or Bloomsbury” (“Home or Away” 16). Franklin’s rejection of modernist stylistic developments, it seems, was at least partially motivated by her refusal to accept the cultural authority of Paris, New York, and London, and a critique of deference to European standards that Franklin saw as issuing from “misguided academics” (Dixon “Australian Fiction” 252-53). In another context, the little magazine *Vision* (1923-24) also played a part in entrenching the nationalist/cosmopolitan divide. In its attempt to create an Australian Renaissance through a vitalist aesthetic oriented towards Europe, it nailed its anti-nationalist colours firmly to the mast with an article in the first issue proclaiming, “It is a short-sighted

Nationalism that can be proud only of verse about shearers and horses, and measures the reality of a work by its local references” (Lindsay qtd. in Kirkpatrick 214). As Kirkpatrick explains, while *Vision* did not embrace modernist experimentation, it resembled avant-garde little magazines elsewhere around the globe in its dismissal of cultural nationalism, its contempt for the popular and vernacular, and its critical reaction to the malaise following the First World War (214-15). If Jack Lindsay and others in the circle around *Vision* were looking back towards Europe in the search for a lost—and imaginary—golden age of myth, and the radical nationalists were looking forward to Australia, this left little ideological space in which modernism could flourish.

These and other examples suggest that as the debate in Australia proceeded polemically, there were few opportunities for its proponents to notice how unhelpfully polarized the terms of the debate had become. One effect of this opposition was to conflate and collapse particular terms: epithets such as “expatriate-minded” and “cosmopolitan” were used interchangeably by nationalists including P.R. Stephensen and Vance and Nettie Palmer (Dixon “Australian Fiction” 235), with the implication that the act of engaging with aesthetic and stylistic innovations originating from outside Australia was tantamount to abandoning one’s own country. Sugars captures the reductiveness of this opposition when she glosses the position to which the native/cosmopolitan distinction boils down: “If occupying the register of the cosmopolitan erases the native from view, to be *only* native is also to be invisible to the rest of the world” (120, emphasis in original). Casanova also remarks on the inadequacy of conceptualizing the division as a binary, preferring the idea of a continuum, given that “the many forms of antagonism to which domination gives rise prevent a linear hierarchy from establishing itself” (83). In Canada, by contrast, there appears to have been a greater level of nuance present in discussions around the binary in literary circles. Dean Irvine remarks on the freedom of opinion that characterized the debate, as seen in the pages of the *Canadian Forum* (217-18), while Irene Gammel argues that influences from Europe and the United States at this time were stimulating for the nation’s literary development, rather than the occasion for defensiveness (247). Earle Birney provides an illustration of how the two orientations could be considered together, commenting in 1946 in relation to the post-war cultural climate in Canada that “the most cosmopolitan service a Canadian poet can do is to make himself such a clear and memorable and passionate interpreter of Canadians themselves, in the language of Canada,

that the world will accept him as a mature voice, and be the reader for that to accept Canada as a mature nation” (qtd. in Howells 304).

What the Australian comparison suggests is that in Canada, the fact that writers and critics had the vocabulary, and the opportunity, to contest the native/cosmopolitan division was significant, in that it deprived the opposition of some of its force. This is not to say, of course, that its presence within literary criticism was without negative effects: Sugars details some of the ways it has troubled Canadian literary developments, observing for example that strands of postcolonial critical discourse have had the effect of shifting evaluative weight from one pole to the other (124-33). My contention here, however, is that in Australia, the critics marshalled on either side were caught up unhelpfully in binary oppositions without the kind of vehicles for debate and deconstruction that existed in the Canadian literary environment, and that this had the effect of further entrenching the political divisions between the two camps. In the Australian context, it is clear in retrospect that if nationalist writing and the stylistic features of European literature were seen as mutually exclusive possibilities within literary discourse—and critical battle lines drawn such that one could only be on one side or the other—it is inevitable that modernism would fall on the non-nationalist side. However, in the Canadian debates, we can see modernism being sustained as a legitimate literary possibility through the process of contestation. To take but two examples, Livesay’s relegation to the category of the “native” in Smith’s initial edition of *The Book of Canadian Poetry* provided the occasion for her to contest both this characterization of herself and to critique what she saw as the specious premises and colonialist mentality on which Smith had built his argument, while John Sutherland took the opportunity in 1947 to assemble the anthology *Other Canadians*, which critiqued and provided an alternative to Smith’s evaluative schema. The two national contexts illustrate Carter’s point—made in relation to Australian literature but equally applicable to Canada—that the idea of the “modern” needs to be understood as a site on which conceptual and ideological oppositions are played out (159).

Another hypothesis that would explain the disparity between the reception of modernism in the two nations emerges in relation to internationalism. Both literary and political writing from this period demonstrate how closely Canadian intellectuals of the period followed and were influenced by ideas circulating beyond their national borders. Livesay found in the writing of C. Day Lewis, Stephen Spender, W.H. Auden, and Louis MacNeice—whom she

discovered in a New Jersey bookstore—“revolutionary poetry but full of lyricism and personal passion” with “nothing like it in America or Canada . . . it threw Eliot aside and proclaimed a brave new world” (153). A glance at Scott’s writing in the *Canadian Forum* shows how attentive he was to international political developments, with articles including a discussion of the revival of socialist parties in different nations around the world and the significance of this for Canada (“The New Gradualism”), a report on his trip to the USSR which both praises and critiques the way communism is working there (“Impressions”), a comparison of Canada’s decision to outlaw communism in contrast to the positions taken by other nations (“Communists”), and a raft of other articles in which Scott situates Canada and its political situation in relation to other countries. While Canadian writers were familiar with international developments on both the political and aesthetic fronts, their Australian counterparts appear to have been open to the latter but much less so to the former. Australian writers on the left certainly drew inspiration from international political struggles to inform both their political and their nationalist agendas, with Dixon noting that in the 1930s, communism was one of the central intellectual formations through which Australian literature was connected to international literary space (“Australian Fiction” 241-42). Australian women who participated in feminist and left-wing political activism also found in these movements a way to connect to global concerns: the winding-down of European imperialism, the rise of fascism and communism, and co-operative endeavours such as suffrage and pacifist organizing (Bonnie Kime Scott, “Introduction” 7). The novelist Jean Devanny is an example of this, as her encounters with new currents of thought came largely through her exposure to political ideas such as socialism and suffragism (Ferrier 191). This is not to say, of course, that international influences were absent in the aesthetic realm; the difference is clearly a matter of degree. Carson argues, for instance, that in the work of Christina Stead and Eleanor Dark the transnational acts as a barometer for the encounter with modernity, demonstrating the increasing complication of modern lives “by the transmission of new cultural, political and social conventions that swirled around the world” (229), and certainly other writers also focalized their exploration of what it meant to be modern through an international perspective. However, taken broadly, international and transnational exposure did not fertilize Australian modernist experimentation in literature to the same extent as it did Australian political thought, and it is possible to interpret this as another factor leading to the disparities between modernist developments in the two countries.

Caution is needed in comparative studies when searching for the causes of cultural differences amidst the complexities of wider demographic, economic, linguistic, ethnic, and geopolitical patterns, which themselves have diverse histories and contested causal relationships to each other. For that reason, the hypotheses I have adduced here relate largely to epiphenomena, rather than larger social and cultural forces. It is however possible to put forward some broader hypotheses about the shape and direction of the two nations, and how this influenced their responses to modernism. One of these is that Australia was settled by a population that included a higher proportion of Irish Catholics, a demographic far less likely to view British or European influences in a positive light than the Anglophone settlers who first arrived in Canada: British Loyalists fleeing the United States and a significant number of Protestant Scots.³

Doyle and Winkiel observe that modernist texts evince a palpable self-consciousness about their relationship to other texts, giving “a sense of speaking from outside or inside or both at once, of orienting toward and away from the metropole, of existing somewhere between belonging and dispersion” (4). I have sought in this paper to flesh out a few of the geocultural specificities of this self-consciousness as it manifests itself in Canadian and Australian literature, two countries whose historical and colonial configurations are still largely invisible within geomodernist scholarship even as it begins to focus attention on the range of contexts around the globe in which different variants of modernism evolved. One of the most powerful elements inflecting modernism as it manifests itself in these two national literatures is an ambivalence between the desire, on the one hand, to try experimental techniques garnering praise and respect from taste-forming institutions in metropolitan centres of culture such as publishers (Faber), little magazines (*Blast*, *The Dial*, *Poetry* and others) and the academy, and the need, on the other hand, to differentiate oneself and one’s creative output from the work of those in the very same metropolitan centres.

This ambivalence is of course limited neither to modernism nor to Canada or Australia: it can be found in other contexts with fraught relationships to centres of cultural and political power.⁴ What they share is that they all are, in Sugars’ phrase, “historically condemned never to be the initiating locus of the terms of evaluation” (120). It is also not necessary to be a nation producing literature in English—or indeed in any European language in which modernist developments occurred—to feel the force of this exclusion. The modernist imperative to be at the forefront of cultural change in effect

automatically excluded those outside the Anglophone nexus of the US and Europe and condemned their nations to languish in the past.

What these literary contexts suggest is that an examination of the connections and the discrepancies between modernisms in different locations is a scholarly task worth undertaking. For Doyle and Winkiel, the value of probing these interconnections lies in their power to break open the concept into the category of geomodernism, which takes a locational approach to authors' engagements with the cultural and political dimensions of global modernity (3). Indeed, examining modernism in these two countries through the lens of nationalist commitment makes it clear that, in fact, nationalist writers in Australia—and also in Canada—were rupturing conventions in ways analogous to canonical Anglo-American modernists, albeit in ways not usually thought of as modernist by critics. Prichard, as we have seen, challenged representational conventions with her portrayal of Aboriginal people in *Coonardoo* (1929), an intervention Terry Goldie sees as a significant shift (54). Some decades earlier, Miles Franklin portrayed a proto-feminist heroine in *My Brilliant Career* (1901), using her to articulate the frustrations and limitations that the Australian bush placed upon women who were almost entirely erased from masculinist mythmaking about approved and “authentic” Australian identities. Both Franklin and Prichard can be seen as participating in what Doyle and Winkiel identify as a shared project for many white women modernists: exploring “the non-normative phenomenology of disenfranchised experiences” (13). Irvine makes a parallel case in relation to the emergence of women in key sites of Canadian cultural production such as little magazines, where the increasing prominence of women’s modernisms represents “critical ruptures and sites of critique within the histories of dominant, masculinist cultures” that form the core of literary-historical narratives of dissonance and crisis (19). Looking at this kind of experimentation in this light allows critics to understand it as literature on which the tensions of specifically *Australian* and *Canadian* modernities can be seen to register. While not wanting to subsume such work under the category of a hegemonic modernism in order to make it signify, it is still worth finding places where these kinds of representational innovations connect with parallel formations occurring during the same period in the imperial centres of culture. The interventions of the Australian writers in relation, say, to gender politics, can then be seen as breaking new ground in similar ways as did the left-wing Canadian modernists. As Woollacott observes, some of the most prominent Australian

women writers of the period were also notable for their engagements with political modernity: Prichard being a founding member of the Communist Party of Australia, Stead moving in radical leftist circles in the 1920s and 30s, and Franklin writing about the plight of the domestic servant (214). Sometimes the engagement with modernity took the form of gender politics, as is the case with Eleanor Dark's 1938 novel *Waterway*, which explores the roles afforded women through actual or potential marriages, as well as critiquing economic and class privilege (Bonnie Kime Scott "First Drafts" 21). Elsewhere in geomodernist and global modernist studies, scholars are reconsidering writers and intellectuals in the Anglophone world outside Britain and the United States in this light.⁵

One of the tasks for scholars of modernist studies attentive to its manifestations beyond the borders of the Anglo-American canon is to continue crossing back and forth across linguistic and national boundaries, so as to re-envision "the circuits within which capitalist modernity has placed us" (Doyle and Winkiel 14). If it is as difficult for critics and historians as it is for authors and readers to step outside these circuits, the process of comparative analysis does offer the possibility of more easily grasping the historical contingencies which have shaped such circuits, and thereby discovering in their points of overlap and divergence how these differently emplaced modernities have the power to transform our understanding of modernism's heterogeneity as it is articulated around the globe.

NOTES

- 1 The "Australian Vernacular Modernities" conference at the University of Queensland in 2006 gave rise to Dixon and Kelly's 2008 collection *Impact of the Modern*, while a special issue of the journal *Hecate* from 2009 on "Women Writers/Artists and Travelling Modernisms" gathered papers from the 2009 conference of the same name, also at the University of Queensland. More recent conferences have taken place which have focused on specific genres or individual authors, for example "Cinema, Modernity and Modernism" at the University of New South Wales and "Patrick White: Modernist Impact/Critical Futures" at the University of London, both in 2010.
- 2 Although Australian literary history has accorded the radical nationalist writers a prominent place in the development of Australian literature of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, this prominence and prestige is retrospective and was not something most of these writers experienced in their lifetime. While some won awards and enjoyed success, their position was precarious when compared to critics in university departments whose sole interest lay in British literature, and who were openly dismissive of Australian literature. What today seems like dominance, was then experienced as marginality, and what can look like

contemptuous bombast by a group of dominant writers is probably better understood as a series of defensive manoeuvres which helped to affirm the identity of a group who keenly felt their own marginality and exclusion from sites of cultural authority.

- 3 My thanks to Margery Fee for this suggestion.
- 4 Chang demonstrates how in Chinese literature, for example, nationalist and modernist affiliations were able to mesh together more successfully, but in a very different context: that of an overarching framework of economic modernisation and a gradual shift away from a state-controlled political sphere. She argues that one of the motivating forces behind Chinese cultural agents' interest in modernism was a nationalist desire to see Chinese aesthetic sensibilities modernize, and she makes the case that modernist aesthetics also provided a vocabulary for Chinese liberal intellectuals to challenge state control of cultural discourses (138-39).
- 5 Anna Snaith, for example, has argued that Sarojini Naidu, an Indian poet who was the first woman to become President of the Indian National Congress, needs to be seen as a pivotal figure within Indian modernity for her work advancing the causes of feminism and Indian nationalism, despite the fact that her poetry is fairly conventional (n.p.). It is not that Naidu should be shoehorned into a category of which she is not quite worthy. Rather, it is that her work for Indian independence should be understood as every bit as valid a response to what Marshall Berman terms "the maelstrom of modern life" (16) as the probing of the unconscious, the fragmentation of perspective, and the breakdown of language seen in the work of canonical modernist writers.

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