

77. The Awakening of Female Vorticism in Jessica Dismorr's Textual and Visual Representations¹

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Abstract

Vorticism was a London-based avant-garde movement of art and literature in the early 20th century. Launched by Wyndham Lewis with "The Vorticist Manifesto" in 1914, Vorticism employed the depiction of an image's movement and exalted the dynamism of the wartime machine age. Inspired by Futurism and Cubism, Vorticism is often considered masculinist, excluding women from the textual and visual canons. The British avant-garde poet and artist Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939) was one of the two female members of Vorticism. She contributed to the movement with her textual and artistic representations from its commencement to its demise; however, she was long overlooked by literary and aesthetic critics. This article, from intertextual, aesthetic and feminist perspectives, investigates how the textual and visual narrators in Dismorr's prose-poems "June Night" (1915) and "London Notes" (1915) and her painting, *Abstract Composition* (c.1915) problematize the exclusion of women in London's male-dominated city and public spaces and argues the relationship between urbanization and "Female Vorticism."

Keywords: Jessica Dismorr, Female Vorticism, Feminist Urbanization, *Abstract Composition*, "June Night," "London Notes"

Jessica Dismorr'un Yazınsal ve Görsel Yapıtlarında Kadın Vortisizmi'nin Uyanışı

Öz

Vortisizm Londra merkezli bir sanat ve edebiyat akımı olarak 20. yüzyılın başlarında Londra'da ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu akım, 1914 yılında Wyndham Lewis tarafından "Vortisist Manifesto" ile başlamıştır. Vortisizm imgenin hareketini tasvir eder ve savaş zamanı makine çağının dinamizmini yüceltir. Fütürizm ve Kübizm akımlarından esinlenen Vortisizm, kadınları yazınsal ve görsel kanonun dışında bıraktığından, genellikle erkek merkezli bir hareket olarak değerlendirilir. İngiliz avangart şair ve yazar Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939) bu akımın iki kadın üyesinden biri olarak karşımıza çıkar. Dismorr, yazınsal ve görsel temsilleriyle, başlangıcından sonuna kadar bu harekete katkıda bulunmuş ancak edebiyat ve sanat eleştirmenleri tarafından uzun zaman göz ardı edilmiştir. Bu makale, Jessica Dismorr'un "Londra Notları" (1915) ve "Haziran Gecesi" (1915) adlı düzyazı şiirlerini ve *Soyut Kompozisyon* (c.1915) adlı tablosunu, metinler arası, estetik ve feminist açılardan inceler ve bu yapıtlardaki yazınsal ve görsel anlatıcıların, Londra'nın erkek egemen kentsel ve kamusal

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mekanlarında kadının dıřlanmasını nasıl sorunsallařtırdığını arařtırır. Ayrıca bu makale kentselleřme ile "Kadın Vortisizmi" arasındaki iliřkiyi tartıřır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Jessica Dismorr, Kadın Vortisizmi, Feminist Kentleřme, *Soyut Kompozisyon*, "Haziran Gecesi," "Londra Notları"

Introduction

Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939) was an English poet and artist of the early 20th century; she joined nearly every avant-garde group on the London scene between 1912 and 1937. After studying at the Slade School of Fine Art³ in London between 1903 and 1906, she went to Paris to continue her artistic studies at the Académie de La Palette. Then, she returned to London and joined the Rebel Art Centre,⁴ cofounded by Kate Lechmere, an English Cubist painter and Wyndham Lewis, a British writer and artist, in 1914, and became engaged with the development of the Vorticist movement. "Though the Rebel Art Centre lasted only four months, it produced *Blast* and inspired the Vorticist group, the most dynamic and innovative movement in modern English painting" (Meyers, 1983, p. 160).

The Rebel Art Centre was the place where, along with the British artist Helen Saunders, Dismorr became one of the two female artists to appear as formal signatories of the "Vorticist Manifesto." Furthermore, as "two women amongst 11 disunited males" (Freeman, 2020, p. 134), Dismorr and Saunders were the fully paid-up members of the group, which was rare for women at that time. Dismorr was also the only female contributor to Group X, a short-lived British artistic movement founded in the 1920s, which was an attempt to revive Lewis' Vorticist group after it was dissolved. As one of the few English artists, her textual and visual works composed in an abstract manner placed her exceptionally on the avant-garde map alongside her male contemporaries. Dismorr contributed to the movement through her textual and visual representations from its birth to its demise; however, she was long neglected and understudied by literary and aesthetic critics due to the lack of any surviving visual works by her as well as the scarcity of her archival documentation.

As a pioneering member of the Vorticist movement, she crafted poems, prose poems, essays and illustrations in the Vorticist journal *Blast* in 1915. She also produced essays, poems and prose poems in various avant-garde publications, such as *The Little Review*, *Rhythm*, *London Mercury* and *The Tyro*. Dismorr's experiences with *Blast* and *Rhythm* as well as her influence within the Vorticist group made her a pioneer of British avantgarde; she mirrors the spirit of the innovative textuality and artistry of the 20th century. As Francesca Brooks notes:

Despite the limited body of her writing, with literary contributions to the modernist magazines *Blast* (1914-1915), *The Little Review* (1918-1919), *The Tyro* (1922) and the *London Mercury* (1935), Dismorr's continued involvement in radical avant-garde movements is testament to her social and cultural commitment to, and engagement with, her historical moment. (Brooks, 2015, para. 2)

³ See for more details about the Slade School of Fine Art and its graduates from <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/slade/about/history/> Accessed 20 May, 2023.

⁴ See more details about the Rebel Art Centre at <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/r/rebel-art-centre>

Dismorr's drawings and graphic illustrations were published both as separate images, such as *Izidora*, printed in *Rhythm*⁵ in 1911 and as vertically placed images alongside some poems, such as *Study* along with Arthur Crossthwaite's "Songe d'Été" in *Rhythm* in 1911.⁶

Among her well-known semi-abstract paintings are *Landscape with Figures* (c.1911-1912); *Sunlight, Martigues* (c.1911-1912); *Night Scene, Martigues* (c.1911-1912); and several Pointillist *Self-Portrait* works. Her three well-known abstract works are *Abstract Composition* (c.1915), *Related Forms* (1937), and *Superimposed Forms* (1938). Dismorr's paintings were displayed in various exhibitions. "Numerous key galleries and museums such as Pallant House Gallery have featured Jessica Dismorr's work in the past" ("Biography of Jessica Dismorr," para. 1.)⁸ The most recent exhibition was held between in 2019-2020 at the Pallant House Gallery in England, entitled "Radical Women: Jessica Dismorr and Her Contemporaries,"⁹ curated by Alicia Foster. According to Jo Freeman,

Foster presents a fascinating visual and intellectual panorama that not only reasserts the presence of Dismorr as a versatile artist in her milieu, but also shows her to have been a gifted. . . writer and a knowledgeable bibliophile. . . she invigorates a complex period in life and art with a swathe of new information, and the history of women in British art during the mid-20th century will be richer for it. (Freeman, 2020, p. 134)

The exhibition attempted to "reposition her as an important artist, and explored how Dismorr and her female contemporaries engaged with modernist literature and radical politics through their writings, paintings, sculptures, graphic art and archival materials" (2019, para. 17). Even though little of her Vorticist work survives, Jessica Dismorr contributed to the Britain's avant-garde milieu through her unique feminist-vorticist practices in the early 20th century.

This paper, from the feminist and aesthetic perspectives and through an intertextual analysis, investigates how the narrators in Dismorr's two selected prose texts "London Notes" (1915) and "June Night," (1915) and her iconic painting, *Abstract Composition* (c.1915), which seems to be visually and thematically analogous to these two poems, problematize the masculinist urbanization and the exclusion of women in metropolitan city spaces. It is also argued that Dismorr's textual and visual narrators challenge the male centric logic by employing Vorticist concepts for the feminist purposes, and suggest a new feminist approach, "Female Vorticism." What visual and textual narrators imagine is the urban spaces in which women can be free in their own creativity outside of the gender-based expectations and oppressions. Furthermore, Dismorr's other selected artworks, namely *Related Forms* and *Izidora* will also be analyzed through their intertextual relations to the arguments.

⁵ *Rhythm* is an avant-garde literary magazine edited by the short-story writer Katherine Mansfield and her partner, the literary critic John Middleton Murry" (para. 4), Nicola Homer, 2019. <https://www.studiointernational.com/jessica-dismorr-and-her-contemporaries-review-pallant-house-gallery-chichester>

⁶ See the full content of *Rhythm* 1911-1913, edited by Murry, John Middleton, which includes Dismorr's drawing, *Study*, alongside of Arthur Crossthwaite's Songe d'Été on page 13 of the Modernist Journal Project, <https://modjournal.org/issue/bdr433383/>

⁷ Pointillism is a style marked by using many small points of color to form an image. See Dismorr's Pointillist *Self-Portrait* (1924) at <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1037042/self-portrait-watercolour-dismorr-jessica/>

⁸ See for more details, "Biography of Jessica Dismorr," at *MutualArt*, <https://www.mutualart.com/Artist/Jessica-Dismorr/67E92A418C11C886/Biography>

⁹ See more details about the exhibition, "Radical Women: Jessica Dismorr and her Contemporaries," curated by Alicia Foster in partnership with *Pallant House Gallery*, held between 2 November 2019 and 23 February 2020 at <https://pallant.org.uk/perspectives-shelf-life-catalogues/>

1. A Brief Overview of Vorticism

Vorticism was a short-lived but influential British avant-garde movement in art and literature that emerged with the publication of the Vorticist journal *Blast* by Wyndham Lewis in 1914. Opposing to the sentimentality of the 19th century, Vorticism exalted the energy of machine technology. Aiming to relate art and literature to industrialization and urbanization, the movement embraced the dynamism, energy and technological advancements of the modern world. The Vorticist ideas and practices were experimented with by various painters and sculptors, such as Wyndham Lewis, Umberto Boccioni, William Roberts, and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and poets, such as Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Hilda Doolittle and Jessica Dismorr.

Italian Futurist artist Umberto Boccioni suggests that “All creative art emanated from an emotional vortex” (1914, as cited in “Vorticism: The Style That Never Existed,” 2000, para. 1). In the first issue of *Blast*, Wyndham Lewis defines the “Vorticist” as follows: “You think at once of a whirlpool. At the heart of the whirlpool is a great silent place where all the energy is concentrated; and there at the point of concentration is the Vorticist” (1914, as cited in Solomon, 2022, para. 5). The Vorticist artists used angular, diagonal, sharp and dynamic forms to emphasize the energy, velocity and dynamism of the era while the Vorticist poets aimed to compress the image and its movement through words. Engulfing the viewer into the focal point of vortex, Vorticist works focused on the experimental depiction of an image’s movement.¹⁰

Related with the catastrophic effects of WWI as well as the use of mechanization brought about by the industrial age, Vorticism was initially inspired by the Italian Futurism, a literary and aesthetic movement launched by the publication of “The Futurist Manifesto” by Filippo T. Marinetti in *Le Figaro* in 1909. Marinetti and his contemporaries outlined their Futurist ideas as misogyny, anti-feminism, admiration of war, hyper-masculinity, velocity, mechanization, and violence in the “Futurist Manifesto.” Like the Futurists, Vorticists also rejected the traditional forms by using straight lines and circles, evoking motion and the mechanical age in their artworks and an unusual typography and free verse in their textual works, but Vorticism focused on directing to the centre of the word and image. Vorticism was also influenced by the French Cubism; it merged Cubist fragmentation of reality with sharp-edged imagery derived from machines, the industrial age, and urbanization, but featured the form of geometric style that inclines towards abstraction, an artistic form that depicts the scenes or objects using symbols and abstract elements to create an overall composition in a vibrant way, and intends to convey emotions to express an idea.

Thus, Vorticists wished to go beyond Futurism and Cubism; they used deformed human silhouettes with sharp geometric shapes and a limited number of colours to depict the effects of war and the industrial age on individuals and human personality. An intriguing difference between Futurism and Vorticism is that while Futurists depicted the effects of WWI, industrialization and mechanization as positive phenomena, Vorticists often depicted their negative effects on human life and personality. Moreover, contrary to the stillness of Cubism, Vorticism favoured motion and dynamism. Therefore, Vorticism not only synthesized Futurism and Cubism, but also brought a different state-of-mind and a new way of art

¹⁰ See, for example, Wyndham Lewis' *The Dancers* at <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-dancers-study-for-kermesse-233022>. In the painting, there is a focal point, drawing the viewer into the vortex and the three figures are moving and turning around it.

and literature responsive to the modern cities and mechanization, which helped to develop the English avant-garde in the wake of modernism.

2. Female Vorticism and Exclusion of Women

In the pre-WW I avant-garde coterie, there was a general view that women were less able to be artists. Thus, the avant-garde movements of the early modernist period often excluded women from the canon of visual and textual production. Like Futurism and Cubism, which often excluded women from the literary and artistic canon, Vorticism is often considered masculinist in literature and art. As for the neglect of women in the artistic canon, Linda Nochlin, in her influential essay, "Why have There Been No Great Women Artists," responds to her titular question as follows:

The fault lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles, or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education - education understood to include everything that happens to us from the moment we enter this world of meaningful symbols, signs, and signals. (Nochlin, 1971, p. 5).

The early 20th century was a time when the suffragette movement started to grow in many countries through the protests and struggles of women activists, who fought for women's voting rights as well as their equality and liberation in social, artistic and literary realms. Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry claim that "Vorticism was the only avant-garde grouping in Western Europe before 1914 to include women among its members" (1998, p. 36). However, the French poet Valentine de Saint-Point also had close engagements with Futurism in the 1910s; she penned the "Manifesto of Futurist Woman" in 1912 as a response to Marinetti's Futurist ideas.¹¹ Helen Jaskosky notes that she was "the first woman to make a rejoinder to Marinetti and the one most related to [Mina] Loy's work" (1993, p. 349). Likewise, the British avant-garde poet and artist Mina Loy's poems, such as her experimental poem "Lions' Jaws" (1919) also feature the Futurist practices of Marinetti. As Virginia Kouidis suggests, it was the Futurist movement that "awakened Mina Loy to the potentialities of the self, the need to reject the structures of the past, and the availability of new poetic forms for discovering and expressing her freedom" (1980, 170).

Based on art critiques, four Vorticist women artists, Jessica Dismorr, Helen Saunders, Kate Lechmere and Dorothy Shakespear appear in accounts of the movement. However, as the only two female signatories of the movement, Dismorr and Saunders come to prominence with their distinctive works since the last two detached from the movement soon afterward.

In 1961-62, British artist William Roberts illustrated the reunion of the canonical Vorticists to depict the celebration of the first issue of *Blast* at a French restaurant in The Hotel de la Tour Eiffel in London: *The Vorticists at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel: Spring 1915*.¹² This composition depicts how women are excluded from the Vorticist group, reproduced in Figure 1

¹¹ See the full version of Valentine de Saint-Point's "Manifesto of Futurist Woman (Response to F. T. Marinetti)" (1912) at <http://mariabuszek.com/mariabuszek/kcai/DadaSurrealism/DadaSurrReadings/FtrstWoman.pdf>

¹² In the early 1900s, The Hotel de la Tour Eiffel in London was known as the centre for the Imagist poets including Ezra Pound, Hilda Doolittle and William Carlos Williams.



Figure 1. *The Vorticists at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel: Spring, 1915* by William Roberts (1961-62).

In Roberts' painting, there is a crowded table. At the front and centre are Wyndham Lewis in a black hat and William Roberts, the painter with Ezra Pound to the left. Their backs are turned to the door. Frederick Etchells is holding the first issue of *Blast* and Edward Wadsworth is sitting next to him. Standing to the right is Rudolph Stulik, the owner of the restaurant, serving the dessert to the group. It is obvious that the men leave no seats at the table for the women standing in the doorway. They are Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders. They are situated at the back of the artwork, which shows their subaltern status. As Cottrell also suggests, "Roberts is deliberately positioning them as peripheral and perhaps therefore he viewed them as less important members of the Vorticist group" (2013, pp. 8-9). The two female figures are shown as a late arriving couple and separated from the inner circle of the group as if they were liminal figures.

As it can be seen in this canonical painting, depicting the Vorticists by a Vorticist artist, the only female contributors to the movement are excluded from the main group although they were the fully paid-up pioneers of the movement. Here, Dismorr's clutching her purse is also ironic as she was giving financial support to the group at that time. Saunders, next to her, is holding a copy of *Blast*. All the figures look cartoonish with their large eyes, short necks, and unnatural facial complexions. However, it definitely seems to be a climactic moment in their lives when they were hopeful that the movement would have a permanent effect on the British avant-garde.

3. Dismorr's Vorticist Artistry

In a coterie of male Vorticists, Jessica Dismorr produced a remarkable body of textual and artistic works. Challenging the male-dominant ideologies and synthesizing Vorticism with feminist trajectories, Dismorr obviously deserves more recognition. She takes the movement one step further and repositions Vorticist ideologies through her textual and artistic works by suggesting a feminist approach towards urbanization and metropolitan city spaces.

Historian Miranda Hickman defines Dismorr's attachments with the masculinist artistic spaces as "countered effects of 'Prettiness' that suggested feminine weakness and inferior artistry" (2013, p. 122). As Hickman also suggests, the Vorticist ideology offers Dismorr "the free navigation of such city spaces, at this time marked masculine. . . through gestures, perspectives and qualities associated with its masculinity" (Hickman, 2013, p. 121).

There are two well-known abstract paintings by Dismorr that have survived from that period: *Abstract Composition* (1915) and *Related Forms*. (1937). It is thought that her other artworks were destroyed after her suicidal death in 1939 because they were thought to have reflected the artist's sanity. *Abstract Composition* is the most notable one, reproduced in Figure 2:

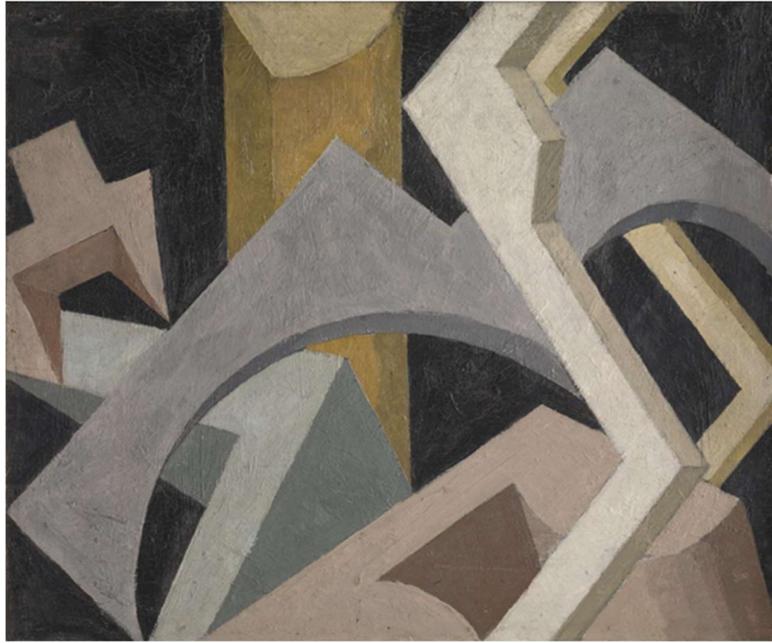


Figure 2. *Abstract Composition* by Jessica Dismorr (c.1915).

Abstract Composition is a three-dimensional piece. It features a series of pastel-coloured geometric forms, evoking architectural components. The sharp-edged nested forms are set against a black background. The dark yellow triangular prism with an arched-side provides a vertical focus, the vortex, and divides the composition into two sections. At first, it evokes Futurist and Cubist works, but it is different. The nested geometric forms neither touch each other nor are separated, which gives a sense of compressed motion. The forms are floating in non-gravitational space. The architectural fragments create a sense of the illusion of depth and movement. Thus, Dismorr portrays us an imaginary and boundless space, outside the man-made comfort zone.

Dismorr's textual works problematize the dynamic connection between abstraction and materiality. In her poetic works, she introduces abstraction as a strong tool to reconceptualize the connection of art to the material world. While her narrators direct us to think of the modern cities and urbanization within the abstract process of thinking, she dramatizes the masculinist landscape architecture in London. As Brandon Truett suggests:

Dismorr endeavors to represent the abstract as though it were material. She crafts figures of permeability and excess through which the ostensibly antithetical ideas of the material and the abstract intersect, in this way posing abstraction as a powerful tool to reconceptualize art's relation to the material world. (Truett, 2021, p. 191)

In her later abstract painting *Related Forms*, the pastel-coloured geometric forms are illustrated in different shapes as if they are completing one another, reproduced in Figure 3:

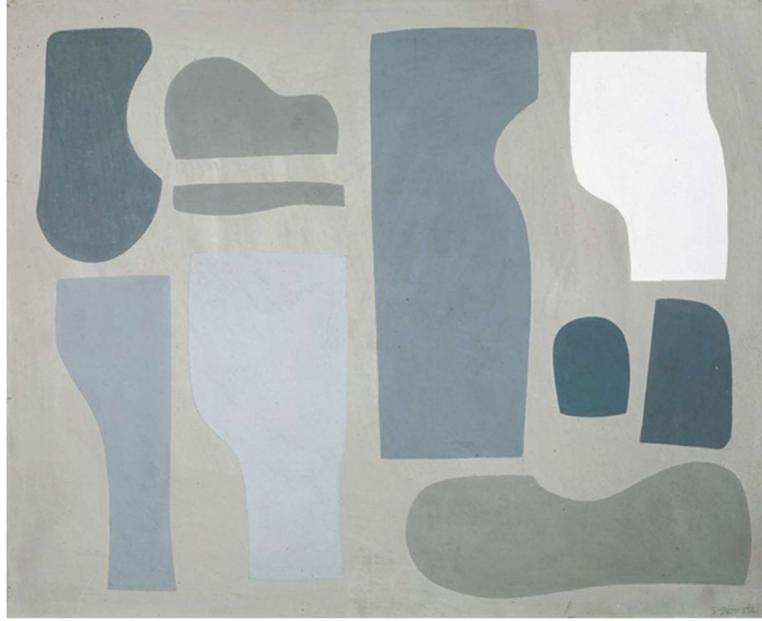


Figure 3. *Related Forms* by Jessica Dismorr (1937).

In *Related Forms*, the shades of blues and browns and the white color represent abstract forms in different but similar shapes. The geometric shapes have feminine-looking forms, floating freely on a lighter brown background. Both artistic works have hints of buildings, architectural structures, and metropolitan city spaces of the modern world, which can be intertextually connected to Dismorr's two prose poems, "June Night" and "London Notes."

4. Female Vorticism in Dismorr's Prose Poetry

As a founding female member of Vorticism, Dismorr contributed to the movement with not only aesthetic, but also textual works, which disentangles her from her contemporaries. She contributed to the second issue of *Blast*, the "War Number," published in July 1915, with her six prose-poems and a number of illustrations in the "Poems and Notes."¹³ Dismorr's prose poems "June Night" and "London Notes," published in that issue, are composed in the form of a short narrative like a vignette.

4.1. A Woman's Night-Time Freedom in "June Night"

"June Night" recounts the female narrator's bus ride through London. The narrator depicts the perilous atmosphere of the metropolis from the top of a crowded bus in London. The text opens with these words:

¹³ See the cover page and the full content of *Blast* "War Number," June 1915, including Dismorr's six poems in "Poems and Notes," pp. 65-69, at https://monoskop.org/images/c/c1/Blast_2.pdf "June Night" is on pp. 67-68 and "London Notes" pp. 66.

“Rodengo calls for me at my little dark villa. I am waiting with happiness and amiability tucked up in my bosom like two darling lap-dogs” (lines 1-2). The female narrator is picked up and accompanied by a man, Rodengo, who is soon to be dismissed. What is intriguing in the opening lines is the intertextual analogy to what Kate Lechmere, who did not sign the manifesto, commented on the two female signatories to the Art Historian Richard Cork. Lechmere describes Dismorr and Saunders as “little lapdogs who wanted to be Lewis’ slaves and do everything for him” (Lechmere, as cited in Peppin, “Women that a Movement Forgot: The Vorticists I, 2011, para. 1). Here, the narrator satirically refers to Lechmere’s disrespectful epithet through graphic descriptions to critique the perception of society towards Vorticist female artists.

Dismorr’s narrator rejects the romantic and protecting male accompaniment by saying “you are too conspicuous for day-light,” (line 6) and “you are an indispensable adjunct of the scenery” (lines 7-8). With her satirical words, “Your blindness, my friend, Rodengo, is your most intelligent attribute” (line 14), she ridicules her male partner’s intellectuality. In her words, “No 43 bus” “float[ing] towards [her] like a luminous balloon” (lines 9-10), the word “float” can be metaphorically associated with both the Vorticists’ idea of velocity and Dismorr’s two arts works, *Abstract Composition* and *Related Forms* as the tableau in these paintings also looks as if floating. Likewise, her words “Swiftness at least is exquisite” (line 12) satirically and metonymically represent the Vorticists’ idea of motion. She wants to escape from both the crowd of the modern city and her partner’s tedious romanticism, saying “I want to escape. . . [Rodengo] will not stop warbling his infuriating lovesongs” (lines 23-24). Rodengo says: “Che, che, la donna” (line 30),¹⁴ which connotes that Rodengo is probably an Italian singer. Here, the narrator might be satirically referring to Italian Futurism by choosing an Italian partner.

Bored of his company (“you bore me,” line 31), the narrator says, “Surely I have had enough of romanticism” (line 15). She wants to take a risk and discover the city’s hidden and mysterious places by using expressions such as “mews and by-ways” (line 38), “the unplumbable depths” (line 50) and “widening circles of alarm” (line 51). She imagines herself as an independent woman in the modern urban city and is in search of her identity. She defines herself as a “strayed Bohemian” (line 52), “half-sordid” (line 52) and “half-fantastic” (lines 52-53). She wants to “wander in the precincts of stately urban houses” (lines 42-43). Finally, in the concluding stanza of the text, the narrator repudiates the protecting and romantic male figure and abandons him, saying “Rodengo, you have long disappeared” (line 56) and abandons her chaperon by saying “I am not returning that way” (line 59). Her feminist denial of the Vorticist masculinity appears as a lone, flaneur and liberated woman in the metropolitan spaces of London. Her words, “At the next arret I leave you my friends” (lines 35-36) represent Dismorr’s split from her Vorticist male contemporaries and their masculinist ideas. Then, she leaves the bus and discards Rodengo by saying “I leave you Rodengo with the rose in your ear I escape from the unmannerly throbbing vehicle” (lines 36-37).

From the aesthetic perspective, an intriguing analogy to “June Night” is its intertextual connection to her artwork *Related Forms*. The vocal narrator’s words, “I seek the profoundest teachings of the emotion. I feel the emotion of related shapes” (lines 54-55) evoke her painting *Related Forms*. From the stylistic manner, the sentences are written without internal punctuation and with textual gaps, which represents the feminine-looking floating objects in the artwork. In addition, the narrator satirizes the “discipline of ordered plasters and porticoes” (lines 47-48) to draw attention to the abstract art. In this

¹⁴ The lyrics “Che, che la donna” is Italian meaning “That woman.”

context, the narrator's "related shapes" also evoke Dismorr's *Abstract Composition*. The objects are floating in non-gravitational space, which creates a sense of liberation for women.

From the intertextual aspect, another aesthetic analogy depicting women's liberation is Dismorr's *Izidora*,¹⁵ a 1911 illustration published in *Rhythm*. In this work, Dismorr portrays Isadora Duncan, an American dancer and a pioneer of modern expressive dance, whose performances helped to free ballet from its conventional restrictions. The image depicts modern dance with liberated rhythms by alternating black and white colours, as reproduced in Figure 4:



Figure 4. *Izidora* by Jessica Dismorr (1911).

As a reaction to the common idea, which Yılmaz, in her article, "Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*: Carnivalization of Gender Spaces," also notes, "a woman can never be free in a world that is constructed according to the masculine values" (Yılmaz, 2021, p. 104), Dismorr illustrates *Izidora* to depict a female image seeking for a space where she can be free corporeally and mentally in a patriarchal world. This argument evokes the narrator of "June Night," who looks for a liberated space in London's masculinist urban public spaces.

The narrator's lone experience of this night-time freedom on the London streets sounds surreal, enthusiastic and evolutionary; it brings her an identity reformation with a heightened level of consciousness, and makes her more powerful in the society she lives in; she breaks her boundaries, challenging the patriarchal logic of perception against women.

4.2. Feminist Urbanization in "London Notes"

Dismorr's prose poem "London Notes" was published as the second poem in the same section of *Blast 2* in 1915. It is a chorographical map that portrays London's metropolitan city spaces. The text consists of seven fragmentary sections, each of which charts a notable landmark in London. Thus, on the surface,

¹⁵ The illustration *Izidora* was published in *Rhythm, Art, Music, Literature Quarterly*, p. 20, London: The Saint Catherine Press, Autumn 1911. Modernist Journal Project, modjourn.org, https://www.flashpointmag.com/Jessica_Dismorr_writings.htm

the text is a chorographical description of London that graphically maps the urban public spaces. It also gives the sense of an urban satire based on the observations and experiences of the female narrator on London metropolis. The fragmentary sections are consecutively, "In Park Lane," "Hyde Park," "British Museum," "Egyptian Gallery," "Reading-Room," "Piccadilly," and "Fleet Street." However, from a deeper perspective, the text is not only a guide; it is a satirical critique of the British literary and artistic ideologies of that time, which exclude women from society and the avant-garde circle. Through the depictions of the landmarks of London, the narrative voice repositions a feminine masculinity for the public spaces, often perceived as masculine. Thus, the text stands out as a response to the avant-garde urbanization that is often associated with men. The narrator depicts these particular landmarks from a feminine perspective; she illustrates the buildings and architectural zones by both feminizing and from time to time anonymizing them in order to save them from their masculine outfit.

The poem begins with the portrayal of a feminized image of a male figure: "Long necked feminine structures support almost without grimacing the elegant discomfort of restricted elbows" ("In Park Lane," lines 1-2). Against the perception of the city as a masculine sculpture, even a Cubist construction, the narrator depicts a duality of gender by juxtaposing the masculine and the feminine to ironize the machine-like urban landscapes and feminizes them. Analogously, the phrase "delicate fingers" ("Piccadilly," line 3) highlights the feminist perception of the narrator. Here, the narrator's aim is to stress the view that art and architecture have no gender. Rejecting the traditional notions of masculinity and patriarchy, she suggests a feminine urbanization. The arguments in this poem could also be connected to *Related Forms*, which looks feminine in terms of shades and shapes and the soft tones of the colours. The female narrator satirizes masculine-looking Futurist-Cubist architectural and urban elements by depicting them with fancy words: "Gigantic cubes of iron rock" ("British Museum," "line 1), "angular volatile shapes" ("British Museum," line 3) and "Monstrous human heads"¹⁶ ("Egyptian Gallery," line 3). Dismorr's narrator's drift from "Park Lane" to "Fleet Street" portrays a satirical feminist survey and observation on the masculine-looking buildings and architectural structures in the male-dominated metropolitan city spaces of London.

Conclusion

The pre-WW I period led to major changes in the fields of art and literature. The catastrophic effects of war caused many artists and writers to reshape the understanding of architecture, industrialization, mechanization and urbanization. In such a special panorama, Jessica Dismorr stands out as a progressive writer and artist of the early 20th century. She occupies a unique place in literature and art of the avant-garde circle. As a female Vorticist, Dismorr contributes to the movement with her poetry and artworks, challenging the masculinist traditions of that time. Through her close engagement with the avant-garde ambiance, she synthesizes Futurism and Cubism with Vorticism and reconceptualizes Vorticist ideas from a feminist perspective, developing a philosophy to transform masculinist ideologies in metropolitan cities and public spaces of London. Taking Vorticism one step further, Dismorr suggests a new form: Female Vorticism, which disengages her from her male contemporaries.

While Dismorr's textual works feature untraditional narrative structures with unusual typography and non-standard punctuation and spacing patterns as well as an idiosyncratic narration style embedded

¹⁶ The "Monstrous human heads" evokes the Belgium artist Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's vorticist sculpture *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound*. See the sculpture at <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/henri-gaudier-brzeska-hieratic-head-of-ezra-pound>

with illustrations and drawings, her abstract and semi-abstract paintings as well as her drawings that are placed alongside poems in the avant-garde publications mirror the spirit of the era.

Dismorr's *Abstract Composition* and *Related Forms* intertextually represent the visual analogies of her two prose poems, "June Night" and "London Notes." In this study, I would argue that Dismorr's textual and artistic narrators, giving an example of London's male-dominated city and public spaces, wander an imaginary space where women can gain their autonomy to be independent both in the urban spaces, and from a wider perspective, within the literary and artistic canons outside of the gender-based norms of society. Her literary and artistic works illuminate the fact that art and architecture have no gender and that the presence of women cannot be ignored in the new modern world.

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