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Of trUction eraNts: On Benito Mussolini and Ezra Pound

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Bard

Of trUction eraNts:
On Benito Mussolini and Ezra Pound

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
Andrew Durbin

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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My study of Pound, Mussolini, and the Classics wouldn't have been possible without the unshakeable support of my advisor, Benjamin Stevens. Throughout this project he pushed me to explore, interrogate, and think through this history and poetics in ways I couldn't have done alone. He, more than any other professor at Bard, has supported all of my academic and extra-curricular endeavors, and for that I owe him many, many thanks. I would also like to thank the entire Classics department, but especially Carolyn Dewald and Bill Mullen, for always allowing me to do what I do, whatever that is.

The title of my senior project is from a line of Jackson Mac Low's procedural erasure of the *Cantos*, *Words nd Ends for Ez*, a book I discuss in the last chapter. Mac Low's chance procedure erased the original meaning (and shape) of Pound's words, leaving only fragments unloosed from their parent word and forced to hug the left-margin. I chose this title precisely because the two key words in it lack any obvious meaning, because they only make sense when the reader's imagination attempts to restore them to their original sense-context. Guesswork. I like that "truction" suggests both "destruction" and "construction," but also the sonic elision of "of structon" into "obstruction." Anyone who's read Pound before understands the associations. "Erants" suggests both "errancy" and "errantry." Erring Ezra, Ezra-Errant, ends of construction or destruction. All these possibilities in quasi-etymologies, ghosts of words haunting their original text. They ask that you put them back. I want to try.

Mr. Owen Young made a mistake, he said the only thing he wished his son to have was the power of clearly expressing his ideas. Not at all. It is not clarity that is desirable but force.

—Gertrude Stein, *Henry James*

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(Figure 1)

Where does Rome go after Rome? It's almost like the lyric of a song, only one none of us would ever think to sing. Renovations begin when the building falls into disrepair, or when those who live inside the building decide that the building must not fall into disrepair. Some of us are living in Europe. There are many ruins around us, and they remind us of ourselves when we were not around to see them before they needed renovation. It is 1922. Can you tell me the difference between then and now? I sit in my room staring at my computer screen, reading about how, in the most recent presidential debate, the candidates discussed whether or not the government should be allowed to mandate life-saving vaccinations. The debate is not about preventive medicine. It is not 1922 because that would be saying too much. Perhaps it is 1921. I have just written a poem about myself and it ends with the lines, "This is how narratives build, / and this is

exactly how they built me.” Sometimes it is obvious that things never change, other times it is obvious that they are only ever changing. You can’t step into the same river once, let alone twice. Is that what we mean? It is 2011. I sit in my room staring at my computer screen, and write the following sentence: “She gets up, moves to the front of the theater to get a better view, and sits down.” She did not mean to go to the movies to see her lover on the screen, and yet there he is—the new prime minister of Italy. What name would you give him? I have just written a poem about you and it ends with the line, “History repeats itself and asks for your money.” There are always questions, and they knock on my door: Have you finished, and if so, have you finished as you’d planned? Tomorrow morning it will be winter. What is the state of Europe? Ezra Pound writes his poem on toilet paper, and some people sympathize with him. I am trying to sympathize with him. Many of his friends are dead, including those who knew him best. Yes, they are alive and can have those colors. Yesterday I got up, went out for coffee, and came back to read Jackson Mac Low. I can’t read Jackson Mac Low. My friend Paul is trying to reconstruct the *Cantos* using only the references parsed in Terrell’s *Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound*. He calls it translation. It is hard for me to tell him that I can’t read his poems because I feel “too close” to their ostensible subject, though I recognize that the one titled “Enter the Void” is OK. There aren’t any clouds in the sky today. The river generally flows from north to south. There is a portrait of Mussolini in one of my notebooks. It is 1883. The first hydroelectric plant has opened in Italy. This is what we might call the beginning, unless you remember that the beginning always begins with Rome. It is easy to travel up the Via Nazionale in the coffin of Anita Garibaldi. It is not easy to get out.

I

A Difficult Fusion

Marco Bellocchio's *Vincere* (2009)—a film about Benito Mussolini's little-known mistress (and possible additional wife), Ida Dalser and her eventual death in a mental institution—has received an averaged score of 92% among critics on Rotten Tomatoes, a movie database that aggregates a wide-range of movie reviews throughout the United States and England.¹ Tom Long of the *Detroit News* writes in his representative review that the film is “a passionate, bold look at power, paranoia and betrayal in a little-known corner of history[.] *Vincere* is steamy, sad and so Italian it feels like an opera.” While praise among English-language critics has been generally very good, many have qualified their praise of the film. Jonathan Richards, a contributor to Film.com, writes in his full review (complete reviews are hyperlinked on the site) that the movie “is a wild ride of a movie, operatic in theme and style, sometimes flamboyant, often murky, occasionally vaulting ecstatically into camp, and more than occasionally turning incomprehensible as it scatters time frames and shuffles reality and illusion.”

Incoherence of style. is one of the most common criticisms made by critics of the film. Jonathan Kiefer of the *Sacramento News & Review* writes, “It’s all a grand and flashy affair—but also weirdly prone to the incoherence, redundancy and bullying dehumanization that characterized the political history it presumes to critique.” The apparent “incoherence” of the plot is probably due to its subtle shifts in time and imagery, which Bellocchio achieves by splicing in newsreels from the 1920s and 30s. Neither Rotten Tomatoes nor Metacritic (a similar website) account for Italian reviews of the

¹ Among users of the site, the film has received a 61%.

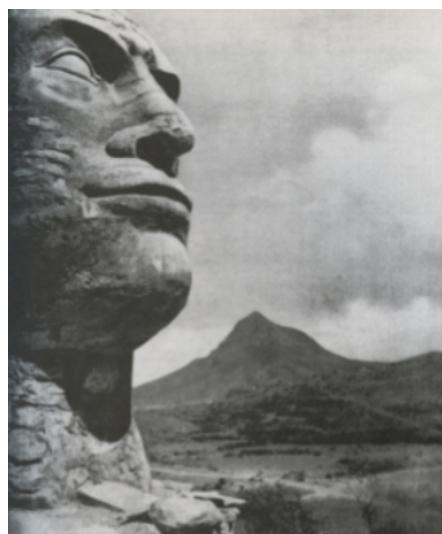
film, but enthusiasm for the film in continental Europe and Italy has been somewhat similar to that in the U.S. In *La Stampa*, critic Lietta Tornabuoni praises the film for its dynamic style and the actors' performances: "un gran film diverso da tutti, innovativo, dinamico, affascinante." Although Gabriella Gallozi, writing in *Unit*, refers to the film's attempt to bridge its own images with historical footage as "una difficoltosa fusione," she does praise the film's cinematographic and emotional complexities. *Vincere* was featured at the 2009 Cannes film festival and was nominated for the Palme d'Or, which it didn't win. That award went to Michael Haneke's *The White Ribbon* (2009), a film that deals with the late adolescence of the generation that would fight in the Second World War. While *Vincere* isn't a very impressive film, it makes some incidentally provocative points on the problems of representing a figure like Mussolini, problems which were present even in his contemporary moment.

Vincere is "weirdly prone to incoherence" for a number of reasons, few of which the film seems to fully understand. While most critics were bothered by the confusing elision of styles, especially of realism and opera, as well as its unclear commitment to linear narrative (for the most part its arc is linear, only to occasionally dip into the past), virtually no one has commented on the problem *representation* of Mussolini poses in the first place. Most critics offered praise for Giovanna Mezzogiorno's performance as Ida Dalser,² but remained fairly silent on Filippo Timi's role as both Mussolini and Mussolini's son with Dalser.³ This is an interesting omission because the central problem of the film for me seems to be Timi's role as Mussolini and his son, and what it ultimately

² She was considered for the Prix d'interprétation féminine, but the award went to Charlotte Gainsbourg for her performance in Lars von Trier's *Antichrist*.

³ Half way through the film Timi-Mussolini is replaced by newsreel footage of *Il Duce*.

says about fictionalizing Mussolini. But there are a number of factors that might explain this silence on the part of critics. For one, Timi looks nothing like Mussolini: his body doesn't match the dictator's Napoleonic squareness nor does his face look anything like Mussolini's iconic one. Timi lacks the geometric symmetry and the physical robustness of Mussolini's features that made the image of *Il Duce* such an immediate, potent symbol of Italian power—and Modernity. The sculptural quality of Mussolini's features, which simultaneously referenced the post-war art of the Italian avant-garde and its busy revival of classicism as well as classical images of Roman emperors, and visually reinforced the strength of Italy by providing a singular, physical analog to the country's imperialist ambitions. All of the referential qualities were articulated by fascist propaganda, and were used to ensure Mussolini's ubiquitous presence as political and cultural leader, much like the Roman emperors he partially modeled his dictatorship after, especially Caesar Augustus. For example, in conquered North Africa, the fascists carved a large bust of Mussolini's face in Algeria, suggesting not only his importance as the head of Italian government (*Il Capo*, as Pound calls him in the Pisan Cantos), but also the imagistic power of his features.



Timi's face is one of the crucial flaws in the film's representation of Mussolini, one that it complicates by replacing him half-way through the film with newsreel footage of Mussolini. From thereon, documentary footage functions to represent the character of Mussolini in the film. (At one point a crowd even "reacts" to the footage as though he were there.) The film seems to hope that this stylistic decision will enact on screen the historical transformation of Mussolini from the socialist to the militaristic nationalist by replacing the Timi of softer, Technicolor features with the historic black and white footage of the real Mussolini.



(Figure 2)



(Figure 3)

While this may be one part of the film's point, the move is dissonant, and renders its representative attempts somewhat flaccid. Instead of underscoring the powerful shift in Mussolini, it draws attention to (through the contrast of original with documentary footage) the inability of the film to portray Mussolini in as effective a manner as the original footage does.⁴ The operatic quality of the film underscores its own fictiveness in trying to assimilate the documentary. The images of Mussolini easily overpower Timi, and not only because they benefit from historical, non-fictive veracity, but because Mussolini's performance of himself is simply more captivating than Timi's, who lacks the simultaneous control and effortlessness of the real *Il Duce*. Mussolini's physical theatricality, which draws hyper-consciously on the popular images of national heroes (of the Risorgimento and earlier), Roman emperors, and an Italian popular culture that he was in part defining,⁵ is simply beyond Timi's abilities to replicate. Timi refers only to a limited set of stereotyped behavioral ticks (the jutting chin, the clenched fists, the

⁴ By effective I don't necessarily mean an "exact," "historically accurate" performance by an actor who looks identical to Mussolini, I mean rather an approach to this moment in history, to the development of fascism, that fully addresses the psychological, historical, and cultural realities that produced the conditions of the World War II. In this sense, Haneke's film, though it takes place before World War I, is a much more accurate portrait of fascism's career in power because its nuanced, psychological analysis of the adolescence of those who would be responsible for the war doesn't seek to imitate the historical realities as such, but to approximate their conditions. This is a tricky argument to make, especially with such limited space, but I hope that my paper's exploration of the complexities of Mussolini underscores my point that a direct, Hollywood-oriented biographical representation of him is inadequate.

⁵ A defining trait, as a series of massive, multi-valiant cultural acts carried out across numerous media, generated what the historian Marla Stone refers to as the "hyperbolic iconography" (209) of the fascist treatment of history, and in turn influenced much of Mussolini's performative readings of history. Stone also writes that what began as a rhetorical strategy for legitimizing the fascist program into the national history quickly transformed into an overwhelming kitsch—of art, architecture, film, and parades—by the end of the fascist era.

operatic aggression), and in this sense, Timi performs a performance, whereas Mussolini simply performs.⁶ More importantly, Bellocchio's attempt to exploit the interplay between his film's own fictiveness and its use of documentary footage falls flat: the mix of styles, the confusion of linear narrative, the literal play of shadows and light is so overly cinematic that it is more or less rendered comical, its fictiveness is exposed in the face of the real Mussolini, who is not only himself—historical and “real”—but a self *more* adept at the use of these techniques than the film is. Mussolini is already a more coherent interplay between modes of representation and discourse than the film, and the film's attempt to flatten him out ruptures the power of its own narrative. It is unable to sustain itself as a coherent fiction, as a biographical, mostly realist “true” portrait of Mussolini, because in its occasional attempts to de-fictionalize itself (and/or edge toward the non-fictional) through the use of documentary footage it only draws the viewer's attention to the curious inadequacy of the film to realize its own project. Bellocchio seeks to reinforce the quality of the “horror” and “revulsion” one feels at watching Mussolini emotionally torture Dalser and rise to power *because it happened*. But precisely *because it happened*, and because the film makes so much of the reality of its subject by way of the subject himself, *Vincere* seems so curiously impotent. It remains *just a movie*, whereas Mussolini remains, always, an historical fact, a fact in the lives of millions of individuals.

⁶ It might be more helpful to think of the two performances as readings. Timi *reads* the image of Mussolini and performs it, while Mussolini *reads* the “historic imaginary” of Italy (in Claudio Fogu's terms) in order to perform it. This is something that my thesis will touch on later: Mussolini's *reading* of Italian culture, and the ways a performance of that reading shapes him both politically and culturally.

In one early scene, Giovanna Mezzogiorno as Ida Dalser sits in a movie theater, watching newsreel footage of the real Mussolini. The scene takes place shortly after Mussolini has been asked by King Victor Emmanuel III on 29 October 1922 to form a new government following the final collapse of the leftist government. After a summer of deep internal division and brutal pressures from fascist gangs the left collapsed. The rise of Mussolini and fascism culminated in the famous “March on Rome” on the day of inauguration as prime minister, finalizing both symbolic and actual fascist rule. The left lost its popular support, and many leftist activists were jailed, killed, or coerced into political inactivity (Sprigge 204). In the film, the camera is first trained on Mezzogiorno as she sits in a dark theater. Within seconds her face is obscured by men who have suddenly stood up. She gets up, moves to the front of the theater to get a better view, and sits down. The scene is switched to an angle behind the audience, all of whom have raised their hands in fascist salute to an unclear black and white film in the background. The camera returns to Mezzogiorno, who stands and turns around, the camera following her, to face the audience. Immediately behind her, with the camera pointed up from somewhere around her waist, looms the enormous movie screen with the film of Mussolini. In the footage, Mussolini stands in a crowd with King Emmanuel III, though quickly that film switches to a close-up of *Il Duce*'s head. Mezzogiorno is overshadowed in the right-hand corner of the screen while the real Mussolini surveys whatever scene lies before him. His enormous head and the intensity of his features—especially his strong jawline, slightly protruding mouth, enormous Roman nose, and deep-set eyes—stand in stark contrast to Mezzogiorno.



(Figure 4)

The effect of this scene is chilling, as it signals the shift in *the medium* of Dalser's interactions with her lover. She is no longer permitted to see him in a way that would allow her to touch him, and Fillipo Timi switches from playing Mussolini to Mussolini's son, completing the film's own estrangement from its subject. The film drops the fictiveness of Timi's performance as soon as it introduces historical footage of *Il Duce*. *Vincere* forgoes its own authority to perform and interpret history in the face of the reality it attempts to replicate. But this shift, problematic as it is for the film's coherency, isn't so much a surrender as it is an (incidental/accidental?—it's unclear) recognition of the primacy of the image of Mussolini in the first place, the inability of any secondary source to reproduce it. Perhaps Bellocchio recognizes the complex system of symbols and meanings that developed around Mussolini and his film's inability to adequately contain this multitude of meanings, as Mussolini was essentially *programmed* to be irreducible. The ubiquity of his face and the fascist liturgy that enshrined and organized around him, if only symbolically, essentially restricts access to definition—to the act of

defining. The films, literature, visual arts, museums, parades, academies, and architecture of fascist Italy—from before *anno uno*⁷ to Mussolini’s downfall in 1943—created a matrix of historical references, suggestions, meanings, and gestures around Mussolini, partially orchestrated by Mussolini himself, so replete with variegated meanings that it essentially created both an opportunity to select an image of *Il Duce* and an overly-complex trap for those who attempted to represent the whole of him. The image of *Il Duce* legitimized itself by borrowing from the potent symbolism of the ancient past of Rome and the nineteenth century popular unification movement, the Risorgimento, a symbolism that was already predicated on skewed, politically convenient interpretations in order to quickly normalize both fascism and Mussolini into the national history, and exclude all outside attempts, like that of non-state endorsed artists, to participate in the process of interpretation and the manufacture of meaning. *Vincere*, in its uneasy and ultimately self-negating use of found footage, raises this question as to *what* makes Mussolini such a complex figure, and what that complexity means for any attempt to categorize him.

Mussolini not only appeared *at* the intersections of hundreds of meanings, but was constituted *by* the intersection itself. While the development of this system of meanings unfolded across many media, discourses, and locations, its central aesthetic object gained particular traction in the arts largely because Mussolini so actively sought to make himself the center of Italian Modernism. As a Modernist-Futurist, he was the platform the West could use to launch into the mechanized future of F.T. Marinetti (before Marinetti

⁷ In 1927, the Fascists created a new calendar that identified October 29th as the start of the New Year. Nineteen twenty-two was also renamed year one (Falasca-Zampoli 1). The various newspapers at the time ran the two measurements of time alongside one another.

became disillusioned by the dictator's commitment to antiquity⁸). As an image of Classical power, he was the most substantial bridge to the past for the art critic Margherita Sarfatti. For Antonio Monti and many other Italians, the renowned curator of the Museum of Risorgimento in Milan, he was *Il Duce taumaturgo*—the leader who would finish the Risorgimento (a narrative seized and reinvented by fascism in the 1920's and 30's) and heal the country after its pyrrhic victory in World War I. The difficulty of representing Mussolini has been treated by a number of Italian filmmakers, especially Federico Fellini, whose autobiographical films often address the mercurial, but ubiquitous presence of Mussolini in Italian life. But perhaps the artist who most significantly "fell for"—and even contributed to—the complex image system that surrounded Mussolini was the American poet Ezra Pound, who devoted much of his energies in the 1920's and 30's to Italian fascism as a cultural figure, theorist, radio broadcaster, and poet, especially in his long, refractory poem, *The Cantos*, which features Mussolini as one of its heroes for much of the first half of the poem. For Ezra Pound he was the virtuous Confucian leader capable of reorganizing corrupted contemporary society in an orderly utopia, the anti-thesis to a system of banking and government geared toward endless war, an analog to Jefferson, and an epic hero with countless historical antecedents. In a word, the symbolic potency of Mussolini, the *field of* (as opposed to *individual of*) visual and textual discourse that he became, yielded countless significant,

⁸ Kenneth E. Silver writes in his essay "A More Durable Self:" "Although his bellicose, nationalist avant-garde movement had much that was congenial to the Fascists, [Marinetti's] stance against what he considered Italy's cult of the past—'the annoying memory of Roman greatness,' as he wrote—condemned Futurism to history"(31). Generally the Futurists opposed the fascist appropriation of the Rome of antiquity. Emilio Settimelli dismissed Mussolini's Roman ambitions as "an act of restoration of plagiarism" (Settimelli 274). See also the writings of Giuseppe Prezzolini, whose book *Fascism I will return to later.*

culturally generative responses—positive, negative, or ambivalent—during the fascist “moment” and later. And as Bellocchio’s film demonstrates, the question of representation of Mussolini remains important today, especially in Italy, where politicians like (recently ousted) prime minister Silvio Berlusconi continue to draw on the authoritative image of Mussolini in constructing their own.

Many of these artists and thinkers, especially Ezra Pound, found it difficult to represent Mussolini, to participate in the discourse of power without estranging themselves from the center of power. In *Vincere*, from the movie theater scene onward, Bellucchio mixes his film with the documentary footage: as Benito Albino (Mussolini’s son), Timi “attends” a rally of Mussolini’s where the dictator screams various invocations to the power of Italy and its rightful place as successor to the Roman Empire; later Albino is committed to psychiatric hospital, like his mother, and Bellucchio interweaves images of Albino imitating his father with those of the actual Mussolini as an attempt to criticize Mussolini’s public persona as mad, but also as, I think, a comment on the film’s tortured attempt at representation. Finally, the film ends by returning to the opening scene in which Dalser watches Mussolini “confront” the authority of God in a public debate in a small town (Timi isn’t shown). The final shot of the film is of found footage of a bust of Mussolini being crushed by a machine. The estrangement the film enacts—the recognition of its failure to provide a Mussolini as powerful as the original (if *because* of its fictiveness)—is at the center of Ezra Pound’s relationship to Mussolini in *The Cantos*, and his desire to gain access to the symbolic histories and imaginary Mussolini patrolled. The estrangement is essential to how Pound conceived of Mussolini in his poem, and perhaps even shaped, re-shaped, and directed the form of the poem, exploded its political,

philosophical, and poetical concerns beyond what Pound initially conceived in the first drafts. In this thesis I will trace some of these developments.

The uneven relationship between Pound and Mussolini can be understood, in part, as an uneven relationship between Pound's poem and Mussolini's symbolic self. While it is popular among Pound critics to separate the man from his poem, and to further parcel out the fascist from the non-fascist elements, this critical approach creates both an escape from the ethical quandary of reading, appreciating, and criticizing Pound and distracts from the dimensionality of the poem. The fascist question in Pound is, for me, a formal one: to what extent do the *Cantos*, which take fascist political ideology as at least *one* starting point, reflect in their poetics the environment that produced them? To perform a reading of Pound that recuperates, repudiates, or re-imagines Pound's fascism as divisible from other parts of the work or the man says less about Pound than it does about the reader. In fact, much of the Pound industry (especially in Hugh Kenner and Carroll Terrell) is about the expiation of Pound's sins rather than an exploration of them and their causes. This is also true for readings that simply dismiss him *because* he was a fascist—a less common, but nevertheless occasional approach to his work. The critic and Language poet Bob Perelman, whose book *Trouble with Genius* was one of the points of origin for this essay, probably comes close to falling under this category. But the extent to which Pound's fascism reflects a formal interest has been underexplored, and I think it is in this locus, at the intersection of Pound's historical-poetic-cultural interests with fascism's, that we can come to a better understanding of Pound as an individual *thinking through* a perceived ethical and historical dilemma, rather than as an as a poet divisible from his compromised ethics.

Before I draw out the dimensionality of Mussolini in Pound, I want to first suggest a revision in how I've written about Mussolini in the previous paragraphs. For one, I want to drop any discussion of Mussolini as a "man," that is, as an individual of flesh and blood, one with personal, psychological motives (the Mussolini of Bellocchio) in favor of the Mussolini as the intersection of visual and textual discourse, as a symbolic imaginary, that he became for his follows and the fascist movement—and for Pound himself. In a word, I am interested in *Il Duce*, in a man whose primary presence in his country's mind was not as an individual or an individual leader, but as a text, a living hypertext, a text composed purely of linkages, of reference and gesture to multiple Italian histories, to both Classical and avant-garde arts, to Augustus as well as the four heroes of the Risorgimento. This is not to fully discredit the importance of Mussolini's biography and its influence on his politics, but to table them as essentially unimportant in their influence on Pound. What matters for the *Cantos* is the *image* of *Il Duce*, and how Pound worked from that, however much he claims to "know" Mussolini. The formal principles that underwrite Pound's poem—the all inclusive, revision of multiple histories that are occurring at once—are similar to *Il Duce*'s, and reflect, in part, Mussolini himself. Like *Il Duce*, Pound is primarily interested in the re-interpretation of history in order to construct a new image of it, to not only include history and its particulars, but to revise it into a coherent narrative that proposes a better future. Pound places Mussolini at the center of the first half of his *Cantos* as one epic hero, and uses the poem to idealize and enact Giovanni Gentile's Actualism of making the past "present" in contemporary Italy *in language* and poetry. If *Il Duce* was a living hypertext, then Pound's *Cantos* is the textual analog.

By conducting much of cultural discourse from the late nineteen-teens to 1943, from patronage of the arts and museums to the numerous parades and speeches he gave during his tenure as prime minister, Mussolini as a living hypertext, as *Il Duce*, enabled his listeners and viewers to access histories and traditions of their choosing in their reading of him. For some he was a Futurist symbol of the mechanized future, for others a Roman emperor. For Pound, he was an epic hero capable of reshaping history, of enacting the historicist vision of Gentile of a leader who could make *action* and *thought* one. Pound's poem reflects a similar interest, and I don't think it's an accident that the poem we have was revised from an earlier, somewhat different project after he met the fascists. It wasn't until after Pound encountered the fascists that the ambitious, poem including history began to take shape in Pound's mind. Nor do I think that Pound's need to re-strategize his compositional practice after the Pisan Cantos, when his poem's living analog was no longer alive, is an accident. Pound writes in *Guide to Kulchur*, "The history of a culture is the history of ideas going into action" (GK 40). I'm interested in the ways in which Mussolini was, like Pound's history of a culture, a set of ideas going to into action, and how that plays out as a formal influence on Pound's criticism and poems from the 1920's to the 40's. The trace that links them is not tenuous, nor is it obvious, which is in keeping with Pound's general elliptical tribute to influence and animus. In the following chapters, I hope to meditate on fascism, the way it constructed (and deconstructed) history, transformed Mussolini from a political leader to a cult-literary object, and how this influenced Pound's poetics in the *Cantos*. Through this study, I also hope to draw some loose, but nevertheless present connections between the ancient past and its political, cultural, and aesthetic context that so strongly influenced the political

and cultural movements of the early 20th century. Neither Pound nor Mussolini could have existed or worked in the world without the Classical tradition to draw on, re-interpret, and revise.

II

Mussolini Rising:
Reading *Il Duce* as Hypertext

In order to understand Mussolini as a living hypertext interpenetrated by numerous cultural, political, and historical discourses, the animus of the political context that produced him must be first traced back to the early 1880s. It is important to stress the degree to which Mussolini didn't emerge out of thin air, but rather arrived at a moment that was very much the culmination of nearly a century of political strife. Though the origins of fascism reach farther than the nineteenth century, I am primarily interested in the immediate history that preceded Italian fascism, because it was the history it directly responded to, even if many of its philosophical tenants began in Rome. However, the degree to which this era propagandized itself as a revival of the Rome of antiquity is important to the way Mussolini and the fascists figured themselves as rulers. In many ways, this narrative became extremely important in their attempts to normalize fascism in Italian history, and lead directly to Mussolini's transcendent status as an intersection of discourse.

For fascism to rise, socialism had to first decline, a narrative which begins with the industrialization of Italy at the end of the 19th century. While fascist ideology can be traced well-before the Industrial revolution, the most immediate historical crux that allowed for the cultural conditions that eventually allowed it to emerge as the dominant political force in the newly united Italian state can be traced back to the 1880s. Northern Italy, where the political right was located, rapidly embraced the industrial technologies and modes of production already popular and successful in Western Europe, starting with

Milan in 1883 with the opening of the first hydro-electric plant in Italy.⁹ The left, based largely in the south, was sluggish to acclimate to the cultural, financial, and mechanical transformation of the country, and struggled throughout the nineteen-teens to remain relevant in national politics, especially as it continued to be relatively rural and artisanal. By the end of the first decade of the century, the inhabitants of the teeming industrial cities of the north boasted a 26% increase in wages and shorter work hours while the rest of the country saw only a 16% rise, broadening the divide between the two halves of the country. (Forgacs 30-31.)

By 1899, with the opening of the first Fiat plant, and continuing into the first decade of the twentieth century, northern Italy became a center for automobile production. Other industries, like steel, sugar, arms, textiles, and banking quickly industrialized, and in doing so, expanded their influence on Italian culture and politics. Crucially, the industrialization process tightened the relationship between emergent big business and the Italian financial system, which in turn increased and broadened the political activities of many of the major industrialists. Whereas before industrialization the Italian market was largely localized and independent of major financial structures, the Italy of the early twentieth-century reorganized production such that it became increasingly dependent on the state and the rest of Europe. Because the right favored big business in legislation, these activities leaned mostly to right-wing causes. David Forgacs writes in his study on Italy during the Industrial era,

The convergences between industry and finance also involved a tightening of links with the political system. This was both because the state became involved in the expansion of modern sectors of the economy,

⁹ It is no accident that Milan, which continued to lead the industrial revolution in Italy, produced both the Futurists and Mussolini.

given that a large domestic market did not exist, and also because politicians were linked to particular banks ..., particular sectors of industry..., and the particular economic policy orientations. (31)

The industrialization of other major sectors of Italian life, especially the newspapers, book publishing, and the theater (as transformed into/by the cinema), also increased the political activities of the (primarily) right wing industrialists. Unlike the previous political and financial elite, this new set did not necessarily emerge out of the ruling aristocratic class, which had been mostly supportive of the socialist rule of Giovanni Giolitti. In fact, one of the most significant transformations industrialization produced in Italian culture, and one that had arguably the most immediate impact on the support structures of both the right and left, was the newspaper industry, an industry that had formerly supported the socialists.

The influence of industry through newspapers was felt locally at first, but substantially. By the early part of the century, most papers operated at a loss, facing “spiraling costs and continued low returns” (Forgacs 24). Seeing an opportunity for raising public support for industrialization, major industrialists gained considerable political leverage by financing and revitalizing the local newspapers.¹⁰ By providing

¹⁰ The Italian newspaper production and distribution system was largely based on local efforts, which meant that most papers did not have significant political power outside their localities. No Italian paper except perhaps *Il Corriere della Sera*, which underwent tremendous financial and political renovations at the hands of cotton industrialist Benigno Crespi, was distributed outside of the city it was produced in. Until the 1980s, Italian newspapers also had considerably lower subscription rates when compared to Western Europe and the United States, due in part to low literacy rates. Because of the small reading public, papers before industrialization made little effort to appeal to constituencies other than the cultural and political elite. This made them into much more lucrative investment opportunities for the major industrialists, who saw the papers as the perfect site for closed-door political activism. See David Forgacs helpful table of the shareholding interests of the major newspapers [39] to observe the extent to which industry had controlling interests in the medium.

capital to these struggling papers, industrialists were able to gain considerable control over editorial policies. Under this modernization and revitalization process of the papers, the industries expanded their political clout and raised local interest in promoting industrial interests. Mussolini's extremely popular and pro-war paper *Il Popolo d'Italia*, for example, raised its start capital in part through the efforts of several industrialists who would have (and did) benefit from the First World War (Forgacs 36), Mussolini started the paper after he was expelled from the Socialist party, and used it as a platform for launching his political career as well as the fascist movement. After several papers reversed their support of the left (most notably *Il Resto del Carlino*), the socialists opened an official inquiry into the funding behind several papers in an effort to increase financial transparency. But this new public light did nothing to slow the political transformation of the papers. Rather, all efforts to halt the right's industrial-financial gains only further stultified support for the left, as most Italians began to see them as opposed to progress and therefore economic parity with Western Europe. Unlike socialism, "Fascism, despite ideological contradictions within it as a movement, ultimately appeared to guarantee a protective political framework for the dominant classes, who therefore transferred their support of it" (Forgacs 53). Even the lower classes of northern Italy saw increased benefits under the fascist-support industrialization process, with increased wages and fewer work hours, thus effecting a similar, widespread political shift in the northern lower classes. The crippling factory strikes of the late nineteen-teens only further diminished the appeal of socialism.

The First World War, which the right supported and the left was incapable of preventing, proved more financially costly and emotionally taxing than anticipated, even

by those who opposed it in the first place. In domestic politics, confidence in a leftist government diminished in the fallout of the pyrrhic and somewhat embarrassing victory of the Italians. Although the left voiced the greatest opposition to the war, it struggled to “spin” the outcome of the complicated, unsatisfying victory. The right (lead in part by Mussolini) on the other hand immediately transferred blame for the various humiliations that accompanied the war on the left, largely through the newspapers. Support for the socialists among veterans—a crucial and vocal demographic after the war—never recovered. Mussolini’s successful repackaging of the dramatic defeat at Caporetto as a result of socialist malfunction could perhaps be seen as the final assurance of the death of an effective non-fascist or right-wing political framework in Italy until after the Allied occupation.

The 1917 battle and subsequent defeat at Caporetto, a city that lies along the northern border of the country, created within Italian national culture a crisis of identity that lead directly to the ascent of fascism—and Mussolini. The battle was fought between the allied forces of Germany and Austria-Hungary and the second Italian army, and lasted from October 24 to November 19 of that year. The German and Austria-Hungarian offensive was relentless in its use of poison gas, and the second Italian army, already considerably weakened by previous engagements with the Central Powers, collapsed, leaving Italy open to a total invasion. Logistical failures on the part of the Central Powers prevented them from entering Italy, and a war of attrition ensued until they retreated back to the Piave river, where they were later turned back in the Battle of Vittorio Veneto. (Clark 223-4.) Regardless of the later success, the battle took on an enormous character in the Italian popular imagination. Quoting the scholar Elvio Fachinelli, Claudio Fogu, who

I have found to be one of the most insightful thinkers on the philosophical tenants that underwrite Italian fascism, argues that this event was fundamental “in the formation and early mass appeal of fascist ideology,” largely because it was viewed as a failure of socialism to protect a homeland only recently stitched together after centuries of conflict. He writes, “[D]uring the three months of retreat that followed the defeat at Caporetto, there rose an ‘image of an endangered fatherland, dead or under deadly threat,’ which spread rapidly throughout the home front” (Fogu 44). This image persisted well into the post-war, and became a defining feature of Italian popular consciousness—and the right quickly propagandized it as a failure of the left in order to undermine socialist authority and popularity.

This particular threat—of the loss of a unified Italy—was especially dramatic after the Risorgimento (the “Resurgence”) of the nineteenth century that had finally unified Italy. This popular movement, which I’ll return to momentarily, was a source of considerable national pride, and functioned as a rallying point for most Italians, as many saw it as a restoration of their culture to its rightful place in Europe. The success of the Central Powers’ relatively brief offensive threatened to expose old wounds and, more importantly, to render the century of conflict and pain entirely pointless. This moment also produced in the populace a desire for a much stronger national defense and government structure, one that could fend off the threats of its northern neighbors and compete with them economically. Immediately following the war, Italians began to look to their own national history and character for the source of this new Italy.¹¹ While

¹¹ In his *Anatomy of Fascism*, Robert O. Paxton lists “a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solutions” as the first of his “mobilizing passions” beyond fascist movements (Paxton 41). And indeed, no traditional solution was the fix

victory enabled Italy to cling to some hope that this was possible, victory alone could not assuage the public fear that Italy was unprotected and exposed. As the fascists (and their predecessors, the Futurists) believed, Italy would require an ideological and cultural shift in order to secure its national borders and, by extension, its culture. The war produced a need for a new philosophy of history and a new kind of Italian leader. Mussolini, who was both politically agile and conscious of the cultural vulnerabilities that emerged in the public space after the war, would eventually emerge as this new leader, *Il Duce*—Futurist, philosopher, Roman emperor, artist, work of art, hypertext: a figure not only representative of the power of the state, but of its culture. A figure around which culture could swarm, and re-orient itself. For a country recently made vulnerable by a newly mechanized Europe, Mussolini was a blank slate upon which they could write any hope for a stronger Italy. Adrian Lyttelton writes in his essay “Italian Fascism,”

[Mussolini’s] complex and contradictory personality, and his instability of aim allowed a variety of different groups to project their hopes upon him[, even though he] had little capacity for long-range planning, and for all his brilliance as a political tactician in the really serious crises of his political career, he often proved himself hesitant and vacillating. (147).

While I wouldn’t necessarily characterize Mussolini’s actions as “vacillating,” a word which suggests too much accidence and indecisiveness, I would argue that his actions could be seen as “oscillating,” a verb that seems to suggest more, though still limited agency. As a figure in Italian politics, Mussolini consciously oscillated between actions in order to appear as *so much to so many—at once*. In this regard, the Italian people and those who supported him, like Pound, could graph their various political ideologies and

precisely because the traditional solution—a unified Italy—was itself at the center of the crisis. Instead, Italians sought a blend of the new, the Modernist, and the old, the classical.

interests onto his, and even ascribe to him any number of motives. Mussolini realized this in part through a conscious activation of certain histories within Italy. But before *Il Duce* could emerge, a philosophical groundwork had to be set in place.



(Figure 5. Mussolini speaks to a crowd)

In response to the historian Benedetto Croce, the philosopher Giovanni Gentile proposed a philosophical program of historiography that would prove especially attractive to the fascists and Mussolini at this time: that history can be retrieved from the past and made “present.” For Gentile, any act can potentially be invested with a historical character, can have consequences such that history is re-oriented toward it, made *actual* in the present—a philosophical wager he called Actualism.¹² As Claudio Fogu writes in his book *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy*,

¹² There are echoes of this kind of thinking in T.S. Eliot’s near-contemporary essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” Focusing on the way the present can be used to re-orient history, Eliot argues a somewhat similar view of literary history. Eliot writes, “The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of

From the point of view of [A]ctualism, reading a history book, a historical document, or a historic event were all activities belonging to the transtemporal presence of experience. Because we can never transport ourselves to the past, we can always make that *pas attuale* (actual) by thinking its content within ‘our present awareness of thinking ourselves thinking the object.’ (38)

In his Actualist manifesto, Gentile includes the central maxim of the intellectual movement: “L’atto del pensare come atto puro”—*the act of thinking as a pure act*. Gentile’s philosophy was primarily interested in the translation of thought into action through reading, a theory he later revised to include engagement with the performance or spectacle of history—a tacit sanction of Mussolini’s public performance of the histories of Rome in his various commemorations, speeches, and parades. In his book *Fascism*, Giuseppe Prezzolini, an Italian writer who lived through the period, quotes from some of Gentile’s writings on Actualism written after the March on Rome, a period which privileges a mystical presence of history in the subject: “Let us quit the books, then, and consider the spirit of the deeds which throughout history have meant so much more to us than any expounded doctrines” (F 99). For Gentile, historical consciousness could be “performed” publically. Further clarifying Gentile’s position on history, Fogu writes,

Actualism [is] the syntactical subjectification of objects, or the semantic contamination of philosophical and religious language, or the translation of rhetorical analogy into catastrophe, or the grammatical activation of select nouns into predicates: from ‘fact’ to ‘acting,’ from ‘philosophy’ to ‘filosofare’ (to do philosophy). At the root of the [A]ctualist imaginary we

novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature, will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (38). Because of the importance of this essay to the development of literary Modernism, and the possible influence Pound had on Eliot’s thinking, I will return to a discussion of this passage and others in the next chapter.

thus find the quintessentially modernist utopia of a self-generating *actant* (Fogu 46).

Actualism was a phenomenon in historiography that pretended to have real-world consequences. With Actualism, Gentile responded to the emergence of both Futurism, with its call for Europe to embrace the technologies of war as an avenue to the future, as well as the ancient past. Gentile, like other fascists, saw in Italian culture an enormous discontinuity between Rome and contemporary Italy, and he attempted to straddle the dividing line between the Futurists and Rome by developing a historiography (and eventually a cultural) practice that could resuscitate Rome and transport it to the fascist moment. For Gentile, Fogu writes, the moment of reading acts as site for the absorption of historical particulars that could reshape and reorient one to the other, enacting at that moment a shift within the subject that enables him/her to bring history within them, dissolving “the medium of representation between thinking and writing into a historical self-generation” (39). This, in turns, creates subjects who are thinking about their daily life in a fascist context in terms of a transcendent history, like that of ancient Rome, creating for Mussolini a convenient space to define much of his government’s actions in terms of the Roman Empire. This philosophy of history was also a more generally convenient tool for fascism because it proposed a philosophical and historicizing praxis that could be used to normalize fascism in Italian history through its public spectacles.

According to Gentile’s Actualism, fascism’s performance of its power was generated *out of history itself*, and therefore “more legitimate” than the left, which over-relied on contemporary (and therefore transient), self-interested in politics.

The somewhat hidden, but crucial relationship between Gentile’s Actualism and Mussolini’s fascism is especially obvious in the image of the two provided by the *Italian*

Encyclopedias, which was compiled by fascist intellectuals in 1932. The entry on “Fascism” was signed by Mussolini (and was later expanded “by” Mussolini as an essay titled “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism”), but it was written by Gentile. The entry is arguably the most important of his writings because it reveals the way in which power (=Mussolini) appropriated Actualism in its self-definition for a large, public audience. Central to this fiction was fascism’s own mythos, and the way it used that mythos to construct itself as a fundamentally Italian political phenomenon. Fascism was not exclusively the culmination of an intellectual tradition, rather it was a tradition (extending back to Rome) inherent in the Italian political system. Fascism was *always* there, it only needed to be fully realized by Mussolini and his allies. In fact, for the fascists fascism was never an ideology, rather it was a political system more directly related to reality than any other before it. Gentile writes in the entry, “Fascism was not the nursling of a doctrine worked out beforehand with detailed elaboration; it was born of the need for action and it was itself from the beginning practical rather than theoretical” (Gentile 288). Like the Risorgimento and Rome, which were Italian “moments” rather than ideologies (or, in the least, so large and wide-ranging as to be seen as beyond ideology), fascism was the next phase of Italian history, one so important that it required a reset of the calendar. In the 1930s, the Italians adopted a new calendar. While it was semi-optional (most newspapers chose to run the date beside the Gregorian calendar, and many private citizens (including Ezra Pound on occasion) used the date in their letters. The new system remained in place until 1943.

Gentile was one of the leading thinkers at the time, and his suggestion that Rome—the ultimate and most potent symbol of Italian strength—could be brought into

modernity was aimed precisely at inviting fascist appropriation of his ideas, especially as Mussolini and the fascists began to participate in the broad culture of Classicism that attended European Modernism. For Gentile, Rome was a symbol of pure action, one that could be integrated into the fascist image after the war and used for political leverage against the left. The end of the war, and the decline of the left, became the perfect outlet for massive political and intellectual change in Italy. Fogu writes, “Quite literally, Gentile read the Italian victory in the Great War as the historical sign of a collective reorientation of the historical imagination toward history belonging to the present” (Fogu 42). But as far as a larger philosophical project, one that could be developed within media across the spectrum of Italian culture, Gentile and the fascists were only interested in select histories, specifically that of Rome of the Caesars and the Risorgimento, and even more specifically in their own selective readings of history. For the emergent fascist movement, the negotiation of these two symbolic, overlapping histories of the Italian state was central to broadening the appeal of their movement, and for transforming Mussolini from politician into the central junction in culture at which the numerous symbols, histories, and images of the Italy of the past and present were attached, manipulated, reinterpreted, assaulted, redefined, and remade. While an enormous amount of agency can be ascribed to Mussolini, his ability to emerge as a living hypertext, as someone with such a central, privileged access to power, its representation, and its ability to represent, was largely due to the extent to which Italian culture was frayed and destabilized by the war, and the left’s political fortunes ruined by industrialization.

While ascent can be credited in part to Mussolini’s negotiation of the Italian imaginary through an Actualist mode of historiography (and historical engagement),

especially in the wake of the postwar, the conditions of the fascist rise were not entirely grounded in philosophical discontent. The rise of Italian fascism in both political and national life was extremely quick, especially once a figure capable of uniting its different, widespread, and at times contradictory factions—Mussolini, *Il Duce*—emerged. The fascist movement gained traction as a quasi-national movement at the end of the nineteen-teens when Mussolini militarized his supporters (Paxton 58) in the face of ongoing socialist workers strikes, though its influence was still predominately limited to the industrialized north. Although most of the fascist gains that were made at the expense of the socialists came out of a brutal ethic of intimidation, their ability to cripple the socialist apparatus was certainly helped by their clever manipulation of history following the war. The permanence of the fascist political capital was insured by their interest in the narrative of their movement and its place in Italian history, and Mussolini took an active role in narrating his political achievements as a necessary next step in Italian history. In fact, central to the fascist revolution was the revolution *in narrative*, one that rewrote much of the history that preceded it.

The trauma of war produced in Italian culture a widespread desire for a new leadership that could “heal” its wounds—and for, as was made explicit in much of the propaganda at the time, a *pharmacón* to fix Italy. The future curator of the Museum of the Risorgimento in Milan, one of the most important sites for reconciling the fascist present with the Risorgimento past, Antonio Monti, first expressed this “collective expectations” in April 1920, when he anonymously wrote an article, “Museums of Suffering,” calling for anti-war “museums of suffering” to commemorate the war dead (Fogu 52). This article was about a scarred war veteran boarding a tram car, and the subsequent bourgeois

disgust at his appearance. While no such museums were ever constructed, the scope of the Museum of the Risorgimento was expanded (after much internal debate) to include the First World War. Monti's curatorship at the Risorgimento Museum crucially elevated his place in the construction of the fascist narrative, and instantly made him an asset to the fascist party. In his curatorship, Monti was responsible for (re)constructing (through various exhibits) the Risorgimento for popular consumption, and was extremely important in presenting fascism as an extension of the unification movement. This involved exhibits, the arrangement and collection of material, the establishment of the criteria for what constitutes an artifact of Risorgimento history, and documents detailing the history of the movement—and, operating after Gentile, this collection stressed the *presentness* of history, focusing on personal documents to chronicle the 19th century that were familiar and tactile. The narrative was mostly told through soldiers' letters and small, personal objects. As one of the nation's authority on the Risorgimento, Monti's support of Mussolini was crucial—and helped to initiate his transformation into icon, hero, and centerpiece of the Italian imaginary. In 1930 Monti revised the image of the wounded veteran in a second open letter to include the very *pharmacón* the country had been seeking: Mussolini. In the (signed) article, "Mussolini's Caress to the War Archive," the wounded veteran is no longer the object of scorn, but rather the subject of Mussolini's loving and healing caress during his 1923 visit to Milan as prime minister (Fogu 53). The soldiers weeps tears of gratitude. This image is especially important because it stresses the degree to which a focus on the renewal of Italian life became a focus on Mussolini, and the extent to which that focus was transformed by, and transformed, *Il Duce*.

This first Mussolini, *Il Duce taumaturgo*, as Fogu describes him, appealed so firstly because it “foregrounds the crucial role that Catholic imagery played in encoding these expectations” in the great healer in Italy.¹³ More importantly, *Il Duce taumaturgo* became a salient image that “pointed explicitly to the founding interaction between the formation of fascist historic imaginary and the popular cult of Mussolini.” This Mussolini was newly resilient, an image of resistance against the forces opposed to Italy and to its own inner weaknesses. The left, led by Giolitti, was incapable of producing a figure of similar mass appeal who could also successively generate the symbolic linkages between the various factors of Italian life required in the post-war. Giolitti and the socialists appeared slow, resistant to change, or worse, opposed to it, and therefore to a strong Italy. (Fogu 54-55.) They also lacked the charisma that was so essential to Mussolini’s appeal. In fact, the most significant opposition Mussolini faced came from within the fascist movement itself. Gabriele D’Annunzio, who was initially much more famous than Mussolini, and had a wider support base in the party. But D’Annunzio, who was known for his decadence, lyric poetry, and dandyism, was easily branded as too-nineteenth century to lead a post-war Italy. After flubbing the occupation at Fiume, D’Annunzio quickly lost the support of both the fascists and of Giolitti’s government. After 1922, when he was pushed from a window in an apparent assassination attempt, D’Annunzio’s retired from politics to Vittoriale, near Salò, where he continued to write poetry until his death in 1938 (Bosworth 146).

¹³ Until the mid-1920s, the Catholic Church was reluctant to participate in fascism on an official level (though most Catholic publications had already backed Mussolini and the fascists, seeing, in part, the potential for him as a figure of reconciliation in the aftermath of the war). However, by 1926 Church officials realigned the church to the fascist state, maintaining a complicit relationship with Mussolini until the collapse of his regime. Of course, within the Church structure there was a tremendous amount of dissent.

After D'Annunzio's political fortunes were ruined nationally and within the fascist movement, Mussolini emerged unopposed as a national figure capable of healing the wounds of a hemorrhaging Italy. In 1920 and 1921, Mussolini and the fascists quickly consolidated their power and began to spread across Italy. In the Po valley, Tuscany, and Umbria, Mussolini's socialist rivals unsuccessfully occupied a number of factories in protest for better working conditions. Their inability to secure popular support made socialists vulnerable to fascist takeovers in local governments. This shift was most dramatic in Ferrara and Bologna, once-centers of northern socialism with enormous union member counts.¹⁴ However, as Bosworth writes, the workers were "poorly instructed in union principles and practices" (150), and therefore prone to rifts, especially in the wake of the failed factory takeovers. These internal divisions fractured the movement and made them particularly susceptible to fascist intimidations—and to the local propaganda machines, like the newspapers. By 1921 socialist power in the Po collapsed in the wake of violent fascist antagonisms, and was replaced immediately by local fascist governments and unions. With the fascist political union apparatus in place, its most ambitious leader, Italo Balbo, began to encourage squads to march on cities north of Ferrara, to Ravenna (where they assembled at a statue of Dante) and Venice. Balbo would later become second to Mussolini as the Commander-in-Chief of Italian Africa until 1940, when Italians mistook his plane for a British one and shot him down over Tobruk, Libya.¹⁵ These marches successfully turned back any socialist or leftist dissent.

¹⁴ "In August 1920, [the union] *Federterra* claimed 74,000 members in Ferrara province alone, the highest tally in Italy (Bologna came next with 73,000)" (Bosworth 150).

¹⁵ In an obituary in their 22 July 1940 issue, *Life* magazine un-ironically referred to Balbo as "the best type of Italian adventurer."

Internal divisions in Giovanni Giolitti's coalition government led to its collapse in June 1921. By July, Mussolini renounced fascist violence, writing in a party paper that recent converts had misinterpreted the political program as "based on violence in order to be violent" (Bosworth 158). In his article, Mussolini also made explicit his opposition to anti-Semitism, a pronounced point of disagreement between the Italian fascists and the German National Socialists that would later take on greater weight and urgency when the Nazis started to push for the Italian fascists to deport its Jews.¹⁶ Mussolini made agreements with the weakened (but, by the inertia of the state, technically still in power) socialists, adopting a conciliatory and moderate tone in his writings. However, Mussolini remilitarized his position in December, calling for a "military-style review" (Bosworth 162) of the roving gangs in order to strengthen their effectiveness. Mussolini had become increasingly dissatisfied with the "agrarian slavery" fascism had come to mean (Paxton 62), and pushed for expansion into urban areas—with Rome as the ultimate end-point. Within the party, there was still some reluctance to full embrace urbanity, which meant an assimilation of the high cultural apparatuses of the cities that Mussolini found so appealing. In fact, Antonio Gramsci, one of the most significant Italian philosophers of the twentieth century (and who was later jailed until the end of his life for his opposition to Mussolini and the fascists), distinguished by 1921 a difference between "two

¹⁶ But Mussolini's rhetoric did not represent Italian Fascist thinking on the Jews. In the 1920s, the editor of the popular Fascist journal *La Vita Italiana*, Giovanni Preziosi, ran an article claiming that British Prime Minister David Lloyd George was of Jewish origin and that both French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau and American President Woodrow Wilson were complicit in a Jewish "conspiracy" (Feinstein 202). Preziosi also translated the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*—a fraudulent text purporting to be a Jewish handbook for global domination that originated in Russia in the early twentieth century—into Italian.

fascisms”—the agrarian and the urban (Lyttelton 133). Fascism, for Mussolini, had focused too strongly on renovations of the farm labor systems, and not enough on national politics. But in the February of the following year, the fascist program spread to the university system, where the movement was already quite popular, with the establishment of an administrative body in Bologna that could coordinate student groups throughout the country (Bosworth 163). The inclusion of students and professors deepened fascist roots in Italian culture, especially as the university system began to articulate fascism as more than ideology, but as an emergent, Italian paradigm that could strengthen and protect the state (Clark 295).

Still, despite how far the fascists reached into Italian culture, their political rule remained limited to the north. Mussolini's status as a national figure was checked by the limitations of his political power, but by early 1922, with Giolitti's coalition in a shambles, these limitations seemed increasingly ready to expire, paving the way for his rise to (and eventual transcendence of) prime minister. By the summer of 1922, following the collapse of the Italian government and its replacement with a caretaker government, northern Italy was almost completely fascist, with little to no opposition to violence against leftists and non-Italians by government police forces. Southern Italy, on the other hand, was unimpressed by fascist control or politics in the north, and felt largely unthreatened by Mussolini. However, little opposition to the fascists was mobilized a national scale, and the fascists continued to push for better representation in the government and did everything in their power to disrupt leftist efforts to form a coalition government. Their efforts were ultimately successful.

On 22 October King Victor Emmanuel III phoned Mussolini to invite him to form a coalition government, which he promptly agreed to do (Bosworth 168). That evening Mussolini boarded an 8:30 train to Rome. He arrived fourteen hours later, and “marched” on Rome with the 300,000 militarized fascists who had been camped one hundred miles outside the city. As the Italian historian Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi has written on this moment in his *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy*, Mussolini’s ascent to Prime Minister was, despite its vague democratic appearances, a coup, realized through years of endless intimidation of democratic forces by both physical and non-physical means. Not only did the fascist gangs harm the socialists by targeting them and their families, they also engaged in a propaganda war that remade the left into a “faceless” body of usurpers who should be purged from Italian politics so that the “real” Italians (read the fascists) could emerge to lead. In his new government, Mussolini was not only prime minister, but also the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of the Interior. This third role fortified Mussolini’s position as de-facto military and police commander of the state. Bosworth writes that Mussolini as Interior Minister, controlled the most significant zones of national governance, the funds separate from any budget, the access to telephone taps, the ability to act covertly. Except from 1924 to 1926 and during the Salò Republic, Mussolini retained this ministry throughout his regime. (177)

From 1922 to 1943, Mussolini’s rule went largely uninterrupted, and was secured by endless intimidation of dissent elements, control of the Church, and a cultural and philosophical program that placed Mussolini at the center of Italian life. The fascist project remained the dominant, totalizing cultural, political, and historical force in Italian life, and it extended its rule and influence in nearly all media, but perhaps most noticeably in the arts. The rapid ascent of the fascists, and the consequential vice-grip

they were able to keep around Italy, was achieved through the control of the two central narratives underlying Italian life in the early twentieth-century: the Risorgimento and the Rome of the Caesars.

The Risorgimento was the first of these Italian narratives that the fascists co-opted into their own. This movement lasted throughout most of the 19th century, and saw the unification of Italy through a number of violent struggles, culminating in the Franco-Prussian War, though the unification was completed during World War I with the annexation of Trieste and Trento. The Risorgimento gave birth to four central figures that became enormously powerful in the Italian imaginary by the late nineteenth century: Giuseppe Garibaldi, Victor Emmanuel, Camillo Benso, and Giuseppe Mazzini. For the fascists, Garibaldi was the essential hero of the Risorgimento, in part because he stifled the Republicanism of Mazzini when he swore his allegiance to the king in a brief letter that read, “I obey.” The allegiance was of interest to the fascists only because it correlated somewhat to their allegiance to Emmanuel’s grandson, the king of Italy, and provided a symbolic commitment that could conceal the illusion of their obedience. In truth, the king was mostly powerless against Mussolini, and the fascist government operated independently of him. Mussolini was by far a much more potent symbol of the power structure, and the cult of personality that attended to him was more widespread than support for the King. More importantly, Garibaldi’s effortless elision of his military and political life into a single career that dominated Italy for much of the second half of the nineteenth century appealed to Mussolini. By the 1920s, assimilation of the “Garibaldian tradition” became a central effort of the fascist program, especially because he remained by far the most popular of the Risorgimento heroes, and (for Fogu) was a

proto-Mussolini figure, part political leader, part mythic hero, part movie star. Adopting a Garibaldian political mode was crucial to Mussolini's rise, and he made every effort to resemble him.

In October 1922, the *New York Tribune* (glowingly) wondered aloud in its editorial pages whether Mussolini was the next Garibaldi or Caesar. Nearly a month later, on 3 November 1922, the *New York Herald* editorialized that Mussolini *was* the next Garibaldi. Other newspapers around the world echoed the sentiment (Falasca-Zamponi 51). Mussolini spent part of the decade attempting to absorb Garibaldi into his own identity through public declarations of his admiration, self-conscious comparisons between himself and Garibaldi, and (in a move that finalized the appropriation of Garibaldi into the image of Mussolini) a ritual celebration surrounding the reburial of his wife Anita Garibaldi. In the construction of the monument that would be unveiled at her final resting place after a nineteenth-century style funeral parade, Mussolini engaged in a thorough "aesthetic policing" that asserted his own reading of the history of Italy, fascism's place in it, ultimately celebrating "the symbolic representation of the coming-into-being of the fascist movement" (Fogu 91).¹⁷ Every detail, from the statue's artist, mode of representation (classical over modernist), who was invited to the celebration, to the two parades (the first in Genoa, the second in Rome) reflected a conscious decision, designed largely to assert the symbolic authority of Mussolini as a *maker* of culture. Mussolini had been using these various ceremonies to construct himself as a bridge between the contemporary moment and the past. These efforts, as Fogu points out,

¹⁷ Mussolini also used the statue as an occasion to articulate the image of the fascist ideal of the woman. Anita, in the statue, is both a warrior and a mother, clinging to gun and child. But the scope of this paper prevents me from going further into how Mussolini reconfigured the ideal woman in the Italian imaginary.

culminated in the second parade in the Anita Garibaldi reburial, in what he calls the “Roman Apotheosis” of the Anita Garibaldi reburial. This second, more modern parade stood in sharp contrast to the first, with its somber airs of the nineteenth century. The Roman parade was, on the contrary, a fascist event like many before it, transforming the crowds into a single, fascist subject. *La Tribuna*’s 3 June 1932 issue coverage even metaphorized the crowds as a single river and a “continuous wave” (Fogu 92) with Mussolini at its head. With a Gentilean historical consciousness, Mussolini’s Roman parade,

rather than stressing the symbolic distance between present and past earlier codified in the Genoese parade [for Anita], the Roman parade was solely concerned with representing the abolition of this distance in the development of fascism from ‘movement’ to ‘regime,’ and in the development of its collective subject from ‘fascist subject’ to ‘fascist mass subject.’ (Fogu 93)

By the time of the parade, there was never any question, in public or party mind, as to who was managing this abolition. Mussolini was undoubtedly *the* symbol of power, around which Italian culture amassed. The moment was not only a “Roman Apotheosis,” it was the Risorgimento Apotheosis for Mussolini, ensuring that, in the minds of the Roman people, he would be linked to the movement as not only an extension of Garibaldi, but as its fifth hero.



(Figure 6. Mussolini speaking to a crowd in Rome in the late 1930s)

With the Anita Garibaldi event and others like it (including the famous birthday celebrations for Dante, Virgil, and Rome especially), all of which privileged Mussolini at their center, Mussolini performed and publicized his reading of history as the dominant cultural mode. Heather Hyde Minor has written how which Mussolini redesigned Rome to accommodate his spectacles of fascist power, especially the Via dei Fori Imperiali which, like the Via Nazionale, were key sites that stood at the “complex interplay of urban planning, state ceremony, ritual and public art” (Minor 149) that constellated around Mussolini. The statue of Anita and subsequent cross-country celebration was one of the first, most dramatic examples of this complex interplay that Mussolini directed and oriented ultimately *toward himself*, creating a dualism to every celebration: while ostensibly each celebration was “for” a particular individual or event of Italian history, they were always “about” Mussolini. Every celebration was predicated on, and was directed at, the audience’s ability to read *Il Duce*’s visual articulation of his and his

government's power. The reburial of Anita constituted only one (large) part of an official culture of spectacle¹⁸ that included numerous parades demonstrating the *fascist* emphasis on the history of Italy as directed toward a realization of the fascist moment.



(Figure 7. This collage stresses the crowd's role
in the “composition” of Mussolini.
Note the use of both the Western and fascist year date)

The accumulation of these various political and cultural successes eventually transformed Mussolini into the central fact of fascist culture. By the mid-1920s and continuing throughout his tenure as prime minister, Mussolini was the central figure of Italian life—nearly every division of culture was attentive to him. The journalist, writer, editor-in-chief of *La Voce*, and contemporary to Mussolini, Giuseppe Prezzolini, writes in his book *Fascism* (first translated into English in 1926) that by the mid-20s, Mussolini

¹⁸ The fascists had already relied heavily on the spectacle—or performance—of their power, beginning with the violent, public assertions of their authority and coming to its maturity with the March on Rome. The filmmaker Federico Fellini, who came of age during Mussolini's rule, sometimes parodies this fascist impulse in his work, but especially in his autobiographical film *Amarcord* (1973). One of the more memorable scenes features a parade of young boys in front of a massive head of Mussolini made of flowers.

was a *Will*—"All his faculties are bent upon the attainment of his ends" (62)—and a *Force* "[that] must be acknowledged as a simple, elementary and indisputable fact" (63). For Prezzolini, who was living and writing in Italy at the time, Mussolini was the most significant culture maker ("a force which, hurled into the very centre of Italy's body, took command of the organs and set them functioning" [64]) in living memory, and one that could appeal to those around the world. For Prezzolini, Mussolini is the correction of the failures of Wilson and Lenin, a figure of the Italian imagination as well as that of all nations, a leader capable of reforming the country "even if it should involve the renunciation of certain liberties" (65) for the greater good. In many ways Prezzolini's description of Mussolini suggests more an idea than a figure. But this image of an undemocratic, but nevertheless popular leader (=emperor) is very much in keeping with the classicist side of the fascist cultural program.

The second Italian narrative Mussolini co-opted was that of ancient Rome. While the fascists made every effort to emphasize the continuity of their political program to a heavily edited nineteenth-century, their nebulous connection to ancient Rome, and the culture of *romanità* that emerged from it, held an equal sway in the Italian imaginary. Quoted in Fogu, the scholar Piergiorgio Zunino writes that the Roman past provided "a sea in which anyone could fish out anything for any occasion: a reminder, a justification, a title of whatsoever nobility" (Fogu 24). Much of this interest in resurrecting Rome in fascist ideology was underwritten by Benedetto Croce and Gentile. As I wrote earlier, Gentile had an especially forceful influence on the construction of the Roman narrative. He writes in his essay "The Philosophic Basis of Fascism" that the state is not "a material presupposition," but rather a living "creation of the mind" (Gentile 263) that is generated

when the individual (and especially the individual in a crowd) actively makes history a present action. It isn't difficult to imagine this argument, with its emphasis on the existence of the Italian state as a function of both reading and thinking, leading toward an attempt to revive Augustan Rome in the present, especially in the wake of the crippling insecurities the First World War produced. For the fascists, Augustan Rome could be revived, and this revival became central to the fascist conception of the security and imperialist ambitions of the state. As Mussolini declared in a speech in 1922, Rome was the ghost animating the fascist state: "Rome is our point of departure and our point of reference: it is our symbol, or if you will, our myth" (Stone 205). And not only was Rome their point of departure, in many ways it was their point of arrival. This narrative was used for the most part to legitimize Mussolini's absolute power as a continuation of an eternal Italian history. It was also used to promote the invasion of North Africa as historically justified.

For the fascists, Rome was the perfect site to situate their own political program in, especially as they strove to normalize themselves in the historical imagination of Italy. The *image* of Rome, with its strength, centralized leadership, and robust culture, was a fertile symbolic code out of which the fascists, especially Mussolini, could derive images of their own power. Italy's Gentilean interest in reviving the ancient past produced a widespread culture of *romanità* that influenced and was influenced by a general interest in classicism across Europe. Marla Stone writes in her essay "A Flexible Rome: Fascism and the cult of *romanità*,"

Romanità, the quality of Romanness, for the Fascists , meant a profound spiritual and historical destiny to be made real through Fascism. [...] Rome gave form to ideological constructs such as economic autarchy,

Italian military prowess, imperial destiny, demographic urgency, the cult of the leader, national culture and Fascism's civilizing mission. (205-206.)

For Stone, Rome made the fascist program cohere, providing ample space for interpretation of a vast array of symbols—the fasces, for one¹⁹—that could cloak their “renovations” of Italian culture in a “revival” of one of the most powerful empire in world history. The state funded countless projects to restore ancient monuments (most notably the Ara Pacis, only recently completed) around Rome, numerous mural projects that depicted classical scenes, and initiated a patronage program that favored Classicist art—one of the key programs that attracted Pound to Mussolini. The fascists configured their ideological position as one interested in renewing Italy through a return to an eternal ideal of Rome, sloughing off the self-defeating, anti-Italian socialist reforms of the nineteenth century. The fascists drew a line between the un-Italian, faceless left and the real Italians, the inheritors of the Roman empire who'd spent centuries split from one another and from power, a line the entire cultural milieu enforced through constant iterations of faithfulness to Mussolini and the fascist government. The collective experience of *romanità*, of a new Italian culture directed toward making the power of antiquity present propelled the fascist program into every aspect of Italian culture.

¹⁹ Kenneth E. Silver writes in his essay “A More Durable Self,” “Beginning with the fasces, the axe-head projecting from a bundle of elm or birch rods tied with a red leather strap that gave the movement its name—an old Roman symbol of strength in unity and suggestive of the penal power of the state—Mussolini’s government was extremely conscious of building a consensus through propaganda, visual and aural (the power of radio, as the new means to reach the masses, was recognized from early on). ‘Eagles, Roman standards, and she-wolves,’ as curator Simonetta Fraquelli writes, ‘gradually infiltrated many aspects of everyday life in Italy from advertising to textbooks, even to SPQR inscriptions on drain covers’” (30).

Within this “cult,” as Stone refers to it, a stronger personality cult developed around Mussolini, one which added yet another layer to the symbolic character of *Il Duce*—that of Caesar Augustus. Stone writes that, by the mid-1930s, the fascist party installed cultural structures that could diffuse the cult of Mussolini and construe it as the reign of Augustus. This diffusion was achieved through a re-orientation in the arts toward classicism, which I will touch on momentarily, and public spectacles on par with that of the reburial of Anita Garibaldi. The fascists celebrated many national heroes and histories in order to claim them for themselves, to determine what of Virgil or Dante would be celebrated, and how. In 1937, Mussolini absorbed the image of Augustus within his own with the celebration of his 2000th birthday. Stone writes,

The most extensive mobilization of Romanness in Fascist official culture was the 1937 celebration of the bi-millennium of the birth of the emperor Augustus, the *Mostra augustea della Romania* (Augustan exhibition). This exhibition observed the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Augustus as the occasion for a vast archaeologically focused exhibition celebrating the Roman empire at its apex. With the *Mostra augustea della Romania*, Fascism represented itself as the inexorable culmination of Italian history. The Augustan exhibition, held in the heart of Rome, was a vast extravaganza which revivified the ‘historic’ Rome of Augustus through an empiricist discourse of Roman superiority. (215)

The inauguration of this exhibit, and of the Fascist Revolution Museum only an hour later, by Mussolini himself reinforced Fascism’s “imperial/militarist and now backward-looking self-image” (Stone 216). This self-image, reformulated after the 1920s to construe Mussolini as Augustus, was quite successful, and achieved in part by a general move toward the aestheticization (read Romanization) of politics. For Walter Benjamin, these *aesthetic* cults of *Il Duce* and Rome emerged to instill in the proletariat a post-individualist “mass sense” that thrived on continuous collective experience of the state, experience achieved not only by grand political spectacles, like the March on Rome or

the Augustan exhibition, but also by war, thereby ensuring a kind of extreme faith in the actions of the state that would ultimately gear it toward war. These spectacles, written by Mussolini into the Italian imagination, formed what (as I quoted earlier) Marla Stone refers to as a kitsch, “hyperbolic iconography” (209) that graphed the ancient past over the modern, programming the culture with a need for violence similar to that of Rome.²⁰ In fact, Benjamin writes that fascism itself *is* an anesthetization of politics predicated on a desire for violence,²¹ the “consummation of ‘l’art pour l’art’” in which politics function as a self-generating system of representation that can only satisfy itself with itself. He writes in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” “[Mankind’s] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order” (Benjamin 242). He writes that the motto of Fascism should be “*Fiat ars pereat mundus*”: Let art be made even if the world should perish. Fascist Italy was not merely a re-imagined politics of the state, it was a *political aesthetic* of empire configured as a new totalizing culture, one that could be exported around the globe—beginning with northern Africa. This aestheticization was often in a Modernist/Classicist mode. For example, when the fascist government commemorated the Italian victory over Ethiopia, the state commissioned a statue of Athena by the

²⁰ For Mussolini, the masses themselves represented an aesthetic object that required both interpretation and sculpting by a creative genius. In an interview, Mussolini described his role as leader: “What would the masses do if they did not have their own interpreter who was expressed by the spirit of the populace, and what would the poet do if he did not have the material to forge?” (Falasca-Zamponi 23).

²¹ Russell A. Berman writes *Modern Culture and Critical Theory: Art, Politics, and the Legacy of the Avant-garde* that this was directly opposed to a progressive “politicization of the arts” he proposes that, unlike fascism, “would convene a collective recipient (‘the masses’) endowed with an active and *critical character*” (Berman 39, emphasis mine).

sculptor Arturo Martini. The state, in a sense, *expressed itself* through art and spectacle, both of which were configured to give that expression classical form.

The aesthetic, fascist state, with its emphasis on the politician as artist, hypertextualized Mussolini, especially as the cult of *Il Duce* grew in the late 1920s and evolved into a cult of Mussolini as Garibaldi and Augustus. In fact, Mussolini consciously shaped this process as much as he passively accepted it, articulating himself as *both* artist and masterpiece, author and text—much in the same way Augustus figured himself as both ruler and maker. This is a threat Pound takes up in *Guide to Kulchur*—something I will return to in the next chapter. Like Mussolini, Augustus put himself at the center of the arts (through patronage) and at the architectural and cultural renovation of Rome. While these numerous faces of Mussolini (Modernist, agrarian activist, Risorgimento hero, artist, *Il Duce*, Roman emperor) were often contradictory, their variety of audiences helped to ensure that Mussolini's appeal was maximized across the country. When the journalist Emil Ludwig asked Mussolini how he reconciled the theatricality of his life with his interest in the health of the public, he responded, “The interest of the populace is a dramatic thing. Since I serve it, I multiply myself.” Once again, the stress is on the multiplicity of Mussolinis available to the populace. Statecraft was as much a public service as it was a private one for Mussolini. Mussolini considered himself “the creative soul of the nation,” and explained himself as an artist exclusively interested in the production of beauty—“the artificer of a ‘beautiful’ system and a ‘beautiful’ doctrine,” as he describes himself in that same interview (Falasca-Zamponi 16). These multiple artificers created a vortex at the center of Italian culture—to borrow an image from Pound—that directed all the focus of the arts inward, toward him. To

paraphrase Lyttleton, Mussolini was everything for everyone at once. Falasca-Zamponi writes that Mussolini's engagement with the arts created a "reciprocity between reality and representation, [in which] the myth of Mussolini continued to expand, developing independently of the regime" (56). This proliferation of Mussolini(s) was achieved largely through a robust arts culture in both the public and private spheres—a culture that, like the fascists, was explicitly interested in reviving antiquity.

The 2010 Guggenheim exhibit "Chaos & Classicism: Art in France, Italy, and Germany, 1918-1936," which was the original inspiration for this essay, exhaustively showcased the extent to which fascism was figured as a continuation of the political and cultural regimes of the ancient past. After the First World War, across Europe, in public, in mainstream and avant-garde art, classicism was revived as the dominant mode of expression—gradually moving away from frenetic representation, like Cubism, toward a solider one.²² In his introductory essay to the Guggenheim catalog,²³ art critic Kenneth Silver argues that classical form represented an alternative to the terrifying, chaotic,

²² Picasso, for example, turned toward French classicism in the 20's with paintings like *Large Bather* (1921) and *The Source* (1921). Like the other arts, architecture moved in a similar direction. Le Corbusier *explicitly* reacted against Cubism in favor of Classicism in his manifesto "Après le cubisme." He argues for the arts to provide an antidote to the mess of the war. "Here [in post-Cubist art], only order and purity illuminate and orient life; [...] To the same extent that [yesterday] was troubled, uncertain of its path, that which is beginning is lucid and clear" (Silver 20). Stanislaus van Moos writes in his *Le Corbusier, Elements of a Synthesis* that Le Corbusier, like other intellectuals of the time, argued that Cubism was an "elitist escape" and an "esoteric game with ornamental forms" (Van Moos 48). Classicism, on the other hand, was a purer form, linked to an eternal past of cleanliness and coherence.

²³ Studies in this art are relatively new, and the Guggenheim exhibit organized by Silver represents the most public display of this kind of work. Before him, the most famous essay on the subject is Benjamin H.D. Buchloh's "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return to Representation in European Painting" in *October* magazine. But unlike Silver, Buchloh treats all returns to "order" as the same across Europe, thereby erasing the meaningful differences between the many fascisms and classicisms that Silver emphasizes.

fragmented world of the war, and much of its appeal (like the appeal of fascism) came from its explicit desire to return to order after the troubling realities of war in the industrialized world. He writes,

the postwar culture of self-conscious forgetting rather than recollection, in which sublimation rather than frank confrontation with unpleasant facts determined the most significant new art forms. All the postwar talk about life being too frenetic—and the need to rein it in—was really not about life, but about how not to look death in the face. (19)

The art of this period sought to oppose, and correct, the “eternally fragmented and ragged lives” of European with an “image of something totally finished and complete,” as the German critic Franz Roh wrote. “Someday man too will be able to recreate himself in the perfection of his idea” (Silver 27).²⁴ The reintroduction of formal cleanliness—of a Classical formalism, howbeit restored from its fragments in museums to completion—was one method for reorganizing and reconstituting a Europe devastated by war. The subjectivist realities of the art movements of the latter half of the nineteenth century, especially Impressionism and post-Impressionism, could no longer be counted on as images for the European environment. Sculpture, for example, with its *solidness* became an important “touchstone” for the other arts, especially painting, “as both the symbol of an ancient heritage and the correction for unreliable, contingent, perishable life” (Silver 17). Sculpture was one of the primary modes of expression (along with painting and

²⁴ This now seems like a curious position. After all, it was the *idea* of man, the perfection of his creative faculties, of the technologies of communication, warfare, and travel, that had so fundamentally “let down” dream of a war-free Europe in the first place. And following the First World War, these technologies continued to accelerate, expand, and prolong war rather than facilitate the technocratic-utopian visions of early twentieth century inventors and politicians (who, it should be remembered, *outlawed* war with the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1929).

mural²⁵) for Mussolini's government, and for the cult of *Il Duce*—and was a central influence on major modernist painters, Picasso, Braque, and Matisse.

Classicism became a perfect outlet for the fascist state, as it provided an enormous field of discourse in which the artist, the traditionalist, the peasant, and the historian could mine for inspiration. The fragmentary, loose narrative of Rome and its artifacts, like the de-contextualized African masks the Cubists seized in the earlier part of the century, provided the fascists a historically-grounded, but open space in which they could center their own ideological program. Marla Stone quotes C.E. Oppo, the Secretary General of the Roman Quadriennale and “advocate of the modern,” who called for a modern classicism to be integrated into the fascist state: “Fascism … must have the courage to bear the weighty crown … of our great artistic heritage with the ease of an old gentleman wearing a monocle … In Italy there can be no neo-classicism simply because classicism has never grown old. In Italy one is either a classicist or nothing” (210). Classicist or nothing, much in the same way that one was either fascist or nothing. As Stone argues, classicism was an ideological construct that didn't seek to revitalize the contemporary with classical knowledge, rather it was a teleological effort to remake the ancient past into the fascist past. Points of similarity (like the cult of the leader) enabled for cultural intersections to develop, and allow for the contemporary and the past to meet as the fascist present.

Countless other fascists publically supported the classicist state and its arts, discrediting, ultimately, competitive movements within the avant-garde, like Futurism.

²⁵ Muralists received an extra boost from the state with the passage of the Two-Percent Law, which ordered 2% of all spending on public works to be used for decoration. Much of this spending was used for classicist murals of everyday citizens. (Stone 211-12).

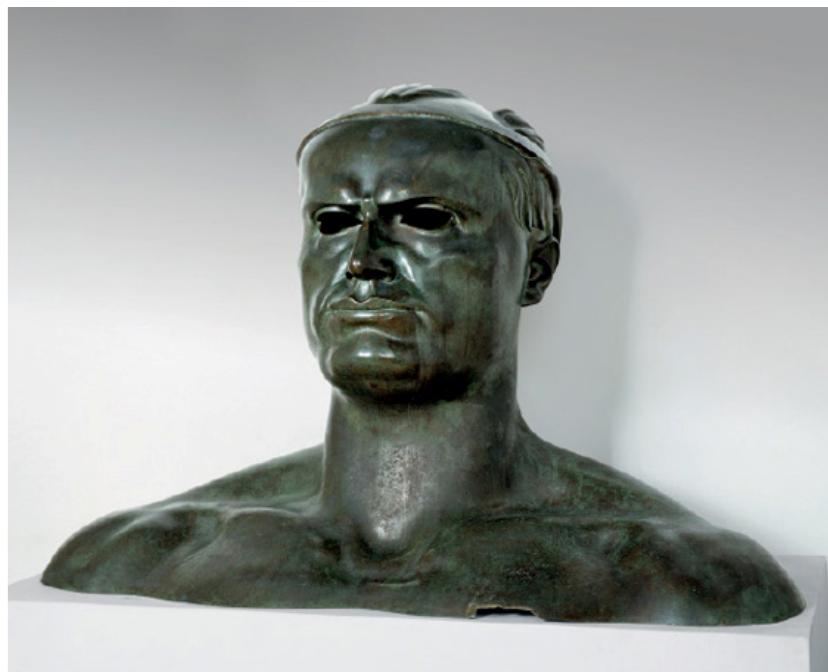
The Futurists mostly opposed the fascists' classicism. For Emilio Settimelli, the "antisocialist, anticlerical, anti-traditional" regime of "genius, art, force, unequalism, beauty, mind, elegance, originality, color, fantasy" could not be reconciled with classicism. The Italian empire must be *Italian*, he writes, "for a Roman empire would be an act of restoration or plagiarism" (Settimelli 274). However, the extremely influential art critic and mistress of Mussolini, Margherita Sarfatti, was a leading advocate of the classicist revival, and used her position to discredit Marinetti and the other Futurists.

Silver writes,

Her taste for an art at once old and new, virile yet sensitive, modern but tempered by the 'constructive' principles of the past, deeply Italian but not parochial—in short, a new classicism—put her at odds with her only real competition for cultural dominance in the Fascist Party, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, a friend and early supporter of Mussolini. In the years just before World War I, Marinetti's Futurism [...] finally put Italy on the international contemporary-art map—no mean feat—but his extremism was now outmoded. Although his bellicose, nationalist avant-garde movement had much that was congenial to the Fascists, his stance against what he considered Italy's cult of the past—"the annoying memory of Roman greatness," as he wrote—condemned Futurism to history. (31)

Sarfatti's aesthetic vision appealed to the state, and therefore won out. Those artists, many of whom are now forgotten, were also most willing to make use of the preferred political position of the artist: subservient to the state, responsible for representing the idealized Italian citizen. Other critics joined her in condemning Futurism, including Prezzolini, who argued (in response to G.K. Chesterton's conflation of both Futurism and fascism) that fascism, unlike Futurism, tried "to restore all our moral values" (FA 276). Marinetti's influence was quickly dispatched, and opposition to classicism as the dominant mode became negligible.

Mussolini's patronage programs and general interest in the arts made him a centerpiece of classicist arts. Many artists who worked at the time, particularly sculptors, saw in Mussolini's features (both physically and philosophically) numerous strains of Italian culture, from Futurist to Modernist to Classical. In many cases, the emphasis was on all three at once. Adolfo Wildt's *Portrait of Benito Mussolini* (ca. 1925) is one example of the use of Mussolini to stress his classical, Augustan personality. The bust, while consciously recalling those of the Roman emperors, mixes a Modernist realism (dynamic, expressive features) with a Classical idealism: the bust is not so much of Mussolini as it is of power, much in the way busts and statues of Roman emperors most frequently represented them when they were young and virile, and therefore at the heights of their physical, if not political, power. The exclusion of the eyes also recalls most ancient bronze busts, the eyes of which have been lost.



(Figure 8)

This bust stresses the different choices artists faced when representing Mussolini, and the degree to which they could pick and choose influences in order to emphasize different characteristics of his public personality. Wildt's *Portrait* is large, bronze, and recalls the imperial power of Mussolini. It does not stress the futurist *Il Duce*, the figure accelerating into the mechanized future that Marinetti found so compelling, nor does it stress the more painterly Risorgimento history. The bust is a chilly fragment of an ancient past recently reinvented, or better: *rewritten*. Wildt's bust of Mussolini recalls a visual tradition and its politics that both existed and didn't. This particular bust is representative of much of fascism's project: the drive to bring into being a past that can simultaneously exist as independent of and dependent on the present moment. Wildt, who has been mostly forgotten, articulates the fascist desire to make Mussolini both the symbol of his own power and the symbol of ancient power, of fascism and of Augustus.

The representational possibilities of Mussolini were endless. The countless traditions, discourses, and symbols that linked to him, and thereby constituted him, provided hundreds of images to draw upon in the construction of an original image of power. Mussolini could exist in abstract, Modernist form, as in the case of Thayaht's *Il Duce with Milestone* (1929, left), or in Futurist eternal motion, like in Renato Bertelli's *Continuous Profile of Mussolini* (1933, right):



(Figure 9)



(Figure 10)

At the Guggenheim's exhibit all three of these busts were lined up together, commenting, I think, on the nexus of representational opportunities that were made available to artists under the fascist regime. While Marinetti's futurism lost its state-endorsement, its representational mode proved helpful to the regime, especially as it geared the public for another world war. Like the Risorgimento and Rome, it too was absorbed into the cult of Mussolini, and became a generative site for representation in service of the state.

Like the various artists that represented Mussolini, the Italian spectator could pick and choose from the various representational modes that Mussolini made available to him or her through his appropriation of the various conversations that figured him. Each aspect of Mussolini's career in power was linked back to a discourse, and every reader of Mussolini's events and life were invited to refer back to that discourse in order to "read into" him whatever satisfied their criteria for a capable leader. As I argued before, Mussolini functioned more like a hypertextual site than a traditional leader, as a coherent

text that constantly redirects the inquiring reader to source material in order to disclose its intellectual origins. As a political tactic, this didn't make Mussolini more transparent, rather it enabled him to distract his readers with the various histories and personalities he claimed were his own. The obvious, present form was never very clear, but always stood out in the crowd as a refractory hall of mirrors, never *exactly* reflecting the view, but rather what the viewer expected to see.

For Pound, whose own poetry frequently adopted or impersonated historical modes of composition (in translation and imitation of the works of Chinese poets, troubadours, Old English writers, and the Classical authors), Mussolini must have appealed because he was such a nexus of disparate meanings and traditions brought together by one man. Like much of Pound's own work, and especially the *Cantos*, which has been frequently referred to as hypertextual (and has even been partially made into one on the Internet), Mussolini contained history, and in containing it cherry-picked, imagined, and revised the threads of historical inquiries and narratives he sought and bound together into an authoritative image of history—much in the way the fasces, once it binds together the sticks that beforehand had no symbolic power, becomes the authoritative image of power. As I'll discuss in the next chapter, the *Cantos* are a kind of literary analog to Mussolini: both are formally interested in impersonation, reanimation, and revision of historical particulars into a new narrative that propose themselves as the tool to decipher the secret meaning of the narratives they construct.

III

Ideas Going Into Action: Mussolini in Pound

For is what I have made be only salvage?
—Clark Coolidge

The difficulty of Pound begins with how *he* reads. The following chapter will not be able to fully engage his reading practice, entirely understand it, or disentangle it; the wily spirit of Pound designed its receptacles, particularly *Guide to Kulchur* and *Cantos*, so that any attempt to full unravel the knot will only frustrate your efforts. This isn't to say that Pound's intelligence is such that he escapes comprehension, but that comprehension wasn't always the motivating force behind him—rather, it is an underlying sense of contradiction and accident, of imitation and renewal that propels much of Pound's work. Pound's poetry and (less often) his prose stand in direct opposition to any attempt to parse it out fully: the range of details that have accumulated into his work come from everywhere, often lack citation, and any attempt to account for them all would be futile (even if *most* can be)—and this, for Robert Duncan in *The H.D. Book* at least, was the motivating power behind his “impersonating genius.” Pound comes from everywhere, from research and exploration as well as error, and he doesn't always want you to know where everywhere is. Hugh Kenner points out in his essay “Notes on Amateur Emendations” that some of those most mysterious and enigmatic moments in Pound come straight from *printing mistakes*. For example, Canto 13 ends with a repeated line, and an erroneous quotation mark. Why? Kenner, when he proposed to anthologize the poem to Pound, asked him. He received the following reply: “Repeat in 13 sanctioned by time and the author, or rather first by the author, who never objects to the typesetter making improvements” (Kenner 26). My first impulse here is to write an exclamation

point and leave it at that. Rather than correct the typesetter's superfluous addition to the text, Pound leaves it, and allows his poem to absorb a new emphasis that wasn't present before. As Kenner points out, there are hundreds more *known* errors such as this one, but it's anyone's guess as to number of the *unknown*. Many of the known errors originate in typesetting errors in the Greek and Chinese. Others, including the unknown, come from Pound's sources—including his concise Liddell and Scott Greek lexicon. While Pound's Greek is famously wonky, a misprint in the lexicon led him to an erroneous title in *Lustra*. But in Pound, error can turn into knowledge as much as any fact can: history is full of errors, and yet we continue to read and write it. While history is a source of enormous anxiety for Pound, especially because it can be so easily manipulated to exclude or conceal the truth, it is also a site of enormous potential for new paths out of the contemporary moment. Even if most of normative history might be a conspiracy against the truth, that never means that history itself can't be used for the better. One of Europe's many problems was usury, but it didn't matter that Pound couldn't always locate all the facts or that there were holes in his theory because he *felt*, based on his analyses of *some* histories and sources, that it was true, that history had been intentionally obscured by agents of usury. In this regard, the absence of a fact becomes the evidence of its existence. The flaw in this history-writing model is obvious, and Pound's teleological search for a league of corrupting Jews in the banks, and therefore in the Western machine ("JEW/nation," he describes the United States in one of his radio speeches), lead him to disastrous conclusions about *who* causes war.

But this chapter will not focus too much on Pound's anti-Semitism. I don't want to suggest that it isn't an important issue, or one that isn't crucial to a full understanding

of Pound's economics and poetics, but Pound's anti-Semitism poses a number of problems, many of which do not relate directly to his fascism. Pound wasn't led to fascism because of its apparent anti-Semitism, but because it proposed, in part, a correction to capitalism—one centered around an eternal, truer *Roman* history, and a fairer economic model. The image of the Jew in Pound reflects less his fascism than it does his poor economics, which Pound developed out of his flawed research into history and his confused reading of the enablers of the present capitalism system. As Jean-Paul Sarte writes (quoted in Paul Morrison's *Poetics of Fascism*),

The anti-Semite has a fundamental incomprehension of the various forms of modern property: money, securities, etc. They are abstractions [...] The anti-Semite can conceive only of a type of primitive ownership of land based on a veritable magical rapport, in which the thing possessed and its possessor are united by a bond of mystical participation; he is the poet of real property . . . (Morrison 52)

Anyone who has read through Pound's fascist writings, including those in *Machine Art* and the radio speeches, has immediately registered Pound's teleological, prejudiced approach to history. It's not only bad, it's mostly non-sense. For Pound the Jew is a Maxwell's demon, the invisible mediator that makes the system he opposes function.²⁶ Naturally there is no such thing, or at least no such conspiratorial, racial thing, but in an effort to locate it Pound generated an enormous mythology to back up his accusations. The Jews control the banks, the newspapers, the governments, exchange rates, art,

²⁶ Paul Morrison writes in introduction to *Poetics of Fascism*, "Modernism (for the Other People)": "The Jew remains in the discourse of poststructuralism no less than in Pound, the privileged figure for figuration, the paradoxical (non)referent for a semiotic order, at once linguistic and economic, which eludes referentiality. And while this is (emphatically) not to impute anti-Semitic motives, conscious or otherwise, to poststructuralism, it is to insist that the poststructuralist identification of the Jew with the nonteleological, nonreferential play of language unwittingly serves to naturalize the traditional (and traditionally disastrous) association of the Jew with the closed semiotics, the infinitely deferred finalities, of capitalist economies" (Morrison 10).

religion, everything. The Jew in Pound, the ghost in the war machine, is not only a sign of usury, but, as Bob Perelman points out in his book *Trouble with Genius*, is a sign of the *moral decay* of Western civilization (Perelman 66), a kind of symbolic catch-all.²⁷

I can't account for everything in Pound—*his* reading list far exceeds the scope of this paper. He is both elusive and allusive, sometimes choosing to reveal the rules of the complex language/compositional game of his poetics, sometimes not. I don't want to over-rely on the metaphor, but the image of the game is helpful for understanding Pound's elliptical work: the extent to which the play of references, of histories and fictions, seems designed in part to activate a game-sense in the reader, one that requires thinking *through* as much as it does thinking *about* the language. The system of particulars that generate meaning in the *Cantos* is not arranged in such a way that the reader will immediately, or even with much time, understand what's “going on” in the narrative or syntactical sense of the work. In this paper I will not only draw some conclusions on the ethics that underscore this compositional practice, but also trace some of the origins of this practice *outside* it that have not been explored in much depth by

²⁷ For Pound not every Jew is usurious, the Jewish race is predisposed to greedy utilitarianism and self-interestedness. In a 1955 letter to Louis Zukofsky (a Jewish poet and friend of Pound's), Pound writes, “The statement that NO jew will ever do anything useful, cannot be sustained / [economist Alexander] Del Mar did a whale of a LOT that was and is useful. It might be asked: under what circs/ will a jew do anything useful to anyone but himself, OR to anyone but himself when not considering the ultimate utility in reflex” (*P/Z* 211). Even after the war, when Pound had supposedly “recanted” his anti-Semitism and fascist support, Pound can't help but frame the Jew in terms of a stereotyped half-knowledge. Pound didn't need evidence to back his claims that the Jews ran the banks and started the wars, he *felt* it—even if the outcome of a conflict like World War Two so obviously opposed any theory that the Jews wanted a war that would very nearly eliminate them. I don't have time for this aspect of Pound, though I recognize its central presence in much of his writings. Thankfully, numerous critics—and friends of Pound—have criticized him and his work, parsing as best they can the sources, motivations, and mistakes that compose his anti-Semitism.

Pound's critics. Pound's poem has often been compared to a hypertext, and parts of it have even been made into one online, but the degree to which that hypertext is a mirror of the living hypertext I proposed in the previous chapter has been underexplored. In this chapter I will attempt to establish some link between Gentile/Mussolini and Pound/*Cantos*: not a perfect mirror image of one another, but certainly an image of occasional, shared glances, fragments that bear a family resemblance, mutual interests, and related conclusions.

Gentile's argument for the integration of the past into present consciousness is echoed in the contemporaneous aesthetic program developed by T.S. Eliot (as I referenced earlier in this essay) and Pound. Whether Gentile was on Pound's mind when he began to develop this program is somewhat unclear; it is very likely that he read him, or was in some way familiar with his ideas, especially while he was living in Italy. His interest in Italian culture, in museum culture, and in Futurism and fascism would certainly have brought him within close proximity of Gentile's arguments. In any case, his argument in the "Praelatio" section of the *Spirit of Romance* (1910) certainly anticipates Gentile:

It is dawn at Jerusalem while midnight hovers above the Pillars of Hercules. All ages are contemporaneous. It is B.C., let us say, in Morocco. The Middle Ages are in Russia. The future stirs already in the minds of the few. This is especially true of literature, where the real time is independent of the apparent, and where many dead men are our grandchildren's contemporaries, while many of our contemporaries have already been gathered into Abraham's bosom, or some more fitting receptacle. (SR VI.)

But Pound's argument isn't *quite* Gentile's. He seems more interested in (1) the relative development of societies (and therefore in discrediting the facile view of linear history based on progress) and in (2) an auratic or spiritual trans-historical *quality* of literature.

However, Pound is *certainly* beginning an argument that would eventually evolve into a Gentilean poetics for agency in historiography, a revisionary poetics based on representation of historical data and narratives within a new, present mode, like in the elision of Sigismondo and other epic heroes with Mussolini in the early cantos, which I'll return to later in this chapter. Pound, surveying the industrialization of various geographical locations around the planet, draws a conclusion on the function of history: that the narrative of progress imposed by the West, which he seems to implicitly condone, operates at relative speed. This observation leads him to develop a poetics that levels literary history as a horizontal field upon which writers of any age can sync up with one another. Rather than conceive of an unattainable past, Pound begins in the *Spirit of Romance* to think about a poetics that frees him from contemporary restraints and allows him to enter into a dialectical conversation with the writers of the previous eras.

Pound's proto-Gentilean argument—that “All ages are contemporaneous”—is more fully developed by T.S. Eliot in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” the thinking of which Jean-Michel Rabaté argues was likely inspired by the “Praelatio” of *The Spirit of Romance* (Rabaté 214). There is no concrete evidence that this is true, but in all likelihood conversation and collaboration with Pound, in addition to reading his criticism, led Eliot to his conclusions in “Tradition.” Modifying Rabaté, I would also argue that “Tradition” emerges out of Eliot’s temporary conversion to Bergsonism (later revised in his thesis on F.H. Bradley) and his philosophy of history while he studied at Harvard. However, the critical program that jointly forms (and informs) the two writers is owed in large part to their friendship. Eliot certainly articulates a view of history that seems to

have been on Pound's mind in 1910, and later becomes central to his poetics in the *Cantos*. Eliot suggests tradition is a history that operates as

a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. (Tradition)

For Eliot, history is a series of continuously developing patterns recorded as tradition.

Timothy Materer writes in his essay "T.S. Eliot and his critical program" that "Eliot becomes convinced that no experience is 'real nor any 'fact' valid unless it fits into a pattern or system of relations that gives it meaning—even though this meaning can never be final since the pattern is always changing and the system always developing." (51) G. Douglas Atkins, in his critical study of Eliot's criticism, *T.S. Eliot and the Essay*, agrees: In "Tradition," "pattern or structure emerges as most important, and Eliot will spend his career honoring that sense of the prevailing and revealing pattern." (54) In Eliot's view, this pattern is crucial not only because it informs the present but because the present informs (=alters) it, ascribing to those who participate in the weaving of tradition an enormous agency, similar to Gentile's reader of history as present. Both argue for an increased agency in the reader, and the way that reader's participation in tradition (or historiography) can construct and reconstruct its narrative as a present.

However, there isn't any real evidence that Eliot had much knowledge of Gentile—he very likely had never heard of him at the time he was writing "Tradition"—nor can the fascist tendencies in Eliot's writings be credited to the Italians. Eliot's fascistic Europeanism, which he explicitly argued for in his essays in the *Criterion*, was based mostly on his interest in Charles Maurras and the *L'action Française* of the 1920's.

And Eliot, as Peter Dale Scott writes, ultimately rejected fascism out of Christian opposition to its materialism (65). Cleo Kearns agrees, writing that Eliot located in Christianity the only ethics that could oppose the “untrammeled operations of modern finance and the assumption in both domestic and foreign affairs of [...] *real-politik*” (Kearns 91). Although both Eliot and Pound disagreed on a fundamental political level, both developed, and sought, an ethics and poetics that could propose an alternative to capitalism. In any case, Eliot’s flirtation with Charles Maurras was not really one with fascism, and any resemblance his ideas might bear to Gentile’s can probably be traced to a similar, but common reading list.²⁸ Like Gentile, who expanded his program to extend beyond historiography, Eliot later expanded the critical program of “Tradition and the Individual Talent” by broadening his definition of “tradition” in the 1933 lectures that would become *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy*. Tradition, for Eliot, is not only the accumulation of texts and compositional practice, it is, as Materer writes, “a variety of customs—including everything from greeting a stranger to participating in a religious rite—which are dependent on a stable society and a unified religious background” (57). Leaving aside Eliot’s religious beliefs (which is quite difficult, but nevertheless necessitated by the scope of this paper),²⁹ Eliot’s theory that the present and

²⁸ Eliot’s prejudices and their family resemblance to fascism (particularly his anti-semitism) merit attention, but this isn’t the focus of this paper. Peter Dale Scott writes that Eliot’s prejudices were not limited to him, but to “culture he adopted.” Eliot participated “in processes of rationalization and denial”—particularly in an anonymously written article in the *Criterion* that dismisses an early exposé of Nazi genocidal practices as “sensationalist”—“for which we may better seek psychological than logical explanations” (66). I’m not so certain of this, but again the scope of this paper limits my ability to investigate further.

²⁹ Eliot eventually developed a Christian metaphysics that made Christianity the site of transcendence of history. Pound, whose religious feelings are knotted, opaque, and changing are decidedly unlike Eliot’s. For one, Pound found the Christian use of the Old

past can alter one another through individual present action certainly must have appealed to Pound, if only because it so clearly reflected his own thinking.

Pound's thinking on history before the war culminated in *Guide to Kulchur*, his 1938 "guidebook" for Paideuma, or "the new thinking." This new thinking is, for Pound, Confucian at its basis: "a type of perception,"³⁰ a kind of transmission of knowledge obtainable only from such concrete manifestation" (*GK* 28)—an *Anschauung* of history that privileges intuition over than book knowledge. In Pound's reading of the Analects and the Odes, Confucian knowledge, which is a knowledge more directly related to the world than most of Western thinking, has "no syllogistic connection" between historical data points because those connections are beside the point, and if any exist, are likely borne out of misperception. But Pound's argument on intuitive knowledge in *Guide to Kulchur* is problematic precisely because it presupposes a previous knowledge of history and texts, but nevertheless argues that any intellectual work, including the trans-historical connections between writers and ideas, is intuitive—the foundation of Pound's privileged *understanding*, the immediate grasping of the fact of things and their meanings. While knowledge "may be necessary to understanding," "it weighs as nothing against [it] ... once you understand process" (*GK* 50). Pound's prose is often clipped, and rarely goes into greater depth in arguing his more complicated ideas and proposals. Instead he often the line that others have *already* explained what he means and the reader should refer to

Testament extremely problematic and likely the source of Europe's "spiritual bankruptcy" via usury (*MA* 133). For Pound, Christianity's Roman elements—Catholicism's quasi-polytheism in the Holy Trinity (*MA* 143)—was the only appealing aspect of Christianity. The absolute monotheism of Protestants represented a Jewish corruption ("that pest of the Occident" [*MA* 133]) of Roman Europe. Christ, in Poundian philosophy, is nothing more than an "irresponsible protagonist" (*GK* 38).

³⁰ cf. Eliot's use of "perception" in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," especially in the sections quoted earlier.

those writers and professors. For Pound, his understanding, which he holds to be superior (consider how many “guidebooks” he wrote) to that of the general reader, a reader who he imagines has been waylaid by a general cultural malaise and backwardness, is always just out of reach. The reader of Pound’s work is often asked to be “patient”—but rarely does Pound’s criticism ever culminate in a justification of the reader’s patience through full explication. In the opening of *Guide to Kulchur* he assures the reader that he has a list of “perfectly good ideas … thirty feet from where I am sitting,” but he never makes very clear what those ideas are, only giving the reader brief, vague glimpses into his own insight on various world cultures, languages, and thinking.

Eliot’s argument about tradition, and Pound’s own argument in the “Praelatio,” is recapitulated in *Guide to Kulchur*, but with an even stronger literary sense:

It is quite foolish to suppose that Heraclitus, after the quite H. Jamesian precisions of the *Odyssey*, and before the Shakespearian humour of Plato’s character drawing, merely said “Everything flows,” or that any one abstract statement wd. have made him his reputation. (*GK* 31)

Here, and elsewhere, Pound operates with the assumption that’s history’s flow is non-linear, and that a central mistake of historical thinking is to think of its flow as chronologically episodic rather than happening relative to a culture. “We do NOT know the past in chronological sequence,” Pound writes, implicitly arguing for the his approach to history in the *Cantos*, rather “what we know we know by ripples and spirals eddying from us and from our own time” (*GK* 60). Like Eliot, Pound’s position on history is that it can be influenced as much as it can influence. And for Pound, like Gentile, history is not a set of ideas, but a set of “ideas going into action” (*GK* 44)—a decidedly Roman, rather than Greek, glory for both thinkers. Echoing Gentile and the fascists, Pound’s explicitly favors Rome over other Western historical moments, arguing that the Romans

tried, like Confucius, “to work out an orderly system, a modus vivendi for vast multitudes of mankind” (GK 40). The Greeks, on the other hand, resorted to escape mechanisms (e.g. Homer) that ultimately crippled the civilization and lead to their defeat and enslavement. Unfortunately, the progress made by Justinian and Constantine was interrupted by the twin influences of Jewish and Christian monotheism, which in turn produced “an age of usury” that devolved Western governments into financially-motivated, corrupt corporate nations. Pound was opposed to the usurious practices of banks and their colluding Western governments, and isolated the collapse of Rome as one of the beginnings of the watering down of the West through financial malpractice. But for Pound there is an antidote to usury, the practice that muddles definition (and also dissent against the system): Totalitarianism: “the sorting out, the *rappel à l'ordre*” (GK 95). This fact has been distressing for many critics throughout the long reception history of Pound’s works, and a number of critical strategies have emerged in response to the obvious “problem” of Pound’s politics. Before I can directly treat the *Cantos* and their relationship to Mussolini, I think it’s important to first understand how Pound (as poet and/or fascist) and the *Cantos* have been thought about in selected criticism since Hugh Kenner.

Over a spaghetti dinner in Rapallo in 1928, W.B. Yeats, Pound’s friend and mentor, asked Richard Aldington: “How do you account for Ezra? Here is a man who produces the most distinguished work and yet in himself is the most undistinguished of men” (Carr). Aldington had no response, but perhaps because there is no answer to Yeats’ somewhat fallacious, but common observation, one that reflects an impulse in many of Pound’s readers to “divide” him and his works. How can it be done? For critics

and lovers of Pound's work, Pound's fascism has been an enormous headache, and one that is often enough avoided or dealt with strangely. Bob Perelman rightly argues in his essay "Pound and the Language of Genius" that Pound must be viewed as a whole, even if it's an incoherent and troubling whole. While his works can obviously be graded on a sliding scale of vitriol, the underlying, evolving poetics cannot, and regardless of the political content within each work, they *are* of the same whole. Most often critics have avoided the fascist question by mentioning it as a biographical detail that temporarily seized his poetics, only to later be recanted. This strategy has most often taken the form of a separation between Pound the man and Pound the poet, a schematic approach that has the two only occasionally overlapping. It was probably first articulated by one of Pound's greatest champions, Hugh Kenner, who spent his life promoting and apologizing for Pound, especially in his seminal (and valuable) book *The Pound Era*.

Kenner's work is doubtlessly an essential tool for understanding Pound's poetry, criticism, and life. His friendship and correspondence allowed him insight that is crucial to understanding Pound's compositional practices, and the ways accident featured into Pound's poetics. However, his criticism's excuse of Pound's fascism gave license to numerous critics and poets that followed him to avoid or cordon off Pound's toxic politics as secondary to his poetics. In Kenner, Pound's anti-Semitism is a semantic mistake, rather than a racial one (Perelman 42). And like Kenner, Carroll Terrell, who wrote *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound*, goes to extraordinary lengths to parse Pound's anti-Semitism as a mask for his economic criticism. In Poundian terms, the Jew is code for usurer, and Pound's use (and therefore his anti-Semitism) should not be confused as real anti-Semitism, but rather as anti-usury marked by an empty racism.

Because of its importance to understanding how people think about Pound's anti-Semitism, a deep prejudice significant to his fascism, I will quote in full Terrell's definition of Pound's meaning of "kikery." It is representative of the lengths critics have gone to redefine Pound's fascism, and its attendant racism, as problematic but misunderstood. Note that Terrell (and Kenner, who he quotes from) never identifies the term as a racial epithet, except perhaps in the use of the word "opprobrious." In fact, Terrell quickly moves away from the meaning of the actual word:

55. *kikery*: An opprobrious epithet Pound applies to usurers and financiers—who foster wars and depressions to make money—as well as to intellectuals in universities and the publishing world who appear to support them. Once, when asked how he could say he was not anti-Semitic when he used words such as "kike" and "kikery," he replied with some feeling: "There are Jew kikes and non-Jew kikes." Pound marks the passage in italics to be set in a somewhat smaller type: "carattere un poco piu piccolo" [MB, *Trace*, 296]. The passage is intended to rhyme with the 4 lines in *The Divine Comedy* where, at the summit of Paradise, St. Peter castigates "him who usurps my seat on earth" and says, "he has made of my burial place a cloaca of blood and filth" [Par. XXVII, 22-26]. Because there was no clear thought about the way divinity manifested in the world, such people as those listed allowed the inciting causes of WWI to operate in 1913. Marx and Freud need no glosses, but less the reader jump to the wrong conclusion, see the index to *SP*, where Marx is listed 18 times and Freud 4. If one reads all Pound has said about Freud over the years, one concludes he has less quarrel with Freud than he does with Freudians, a rhyme with Christ and Christians or the Buddha and Buddhists [99:25]. Pound said: "People treated by Freudians, etc. get steadily more and more interested in their own footling interiors, and ... less interesting to anyone else ... They are at the nadir from Spinoza's sane and hearty: the more perfect a thing is the more it acts and the less it suffers [NEW May 2 1935]. N.B.: The functional words in the 8 lines are, "no clear thought about holiness." A parallel to the unhappy custom of using racial epithet is found in Joyce's Leopold Bloom who, enraged by a money-lender named Dodd, said: "Now he's what you call a dirty Jew." Dodd in fact wasn't a Jew and Bloom was [HK].

But I might add that I think Bloom's anti-Semitism represents a self-oppressive impulse, not merely a loose economic condemnation, one that Joyce noted in the Irish and

analogized in his Jewish protagonist. Fictional Bloom's response to fictional Dodd is not the same as non-fictional Pound's to non-fictional interlocutor. This example of Terrell's aversion to noting the racial dimension of Pound's politics ignores a significant amount his writing, including the radio speeches, where Pound makes it explicit that the *Jews* are *inherently* usurious, and are responsible for European wars.

The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound, arguably the most widely available source of contemporary Pound criticism, takes a similar approach. Pound's critics in the essays stick his fascism in the biographical cage, avoiding its influence on his poetics. For example, Daniel Albright's essay "Early Cantos I-XLI" and Ian F. A. Bell's "Middle Cantos XLII-LXXI"—which cover the Malatesta cantos and those written while Pound was living in Mussolini's Italy—make no mention of fascism or Mussolini, even when the connection is obvious, as in the case of Pound's hero Sigismundo, a figure I'll return to shortly. Ronald Bush's essay on the late cantos, the cantos in which fascism is *explicitly* dealt with, mostly avoids the question, too. Bush limits his analysis of the political context of the *Pisan Cantos* to Pound's "farewell" to Mussolini in the final canto in an analytical approach that fails to account for the other passages in the cantos in which Pound writes about Mussolini. Bush assumes a linearity to the work that simply doesn't exist, and bases his central claim on a dubious reading of the Greek "Xaire" at the end of the poem—a claim I will return to at the end of this chapter. Tim Redman's essay "Pound's politics and economics" amazingly does no better a job at interpreting the politics of Pound's poetics, though he was likely selected because much of his writing on Pound has dealt with Pound's politics.

Redman's book *Ezra Pound and Fascism*, one of the most recent direct treatments of Pound's fascism in book form, fails along similar lines as his essay for the *Cambridge Companion* does. Redman struggles to negotiate his criticism of Pound with his appreciation of the poetry. But rather than try to understand Pound's politics, the economic, intellectual, and social crucible in which they formed, Redman attempts to excuse them as weak and only half-hearted. This simply isn't true or fair to Pound. Redman's struggle to discredit Pound's political positions seems to emerge out of a misunderstanding of Pound's fascism in the first place, and likely relies on popular images (and distaste) for fascism that elides Italian fascism with National Socialism.³¹ Redman downplays Pound's anti-Semitism as "unconvincing," but his argument is nonsensical, as is most of his virtually useless book on Pound. He argues that Pound's anti-Semitism was mild, and reflected, as Terrell wrote before him, an uncomfortable vocabulary rather than actual racial prejudice. And yet Pound's fascist period produced the radio speeches, the essays collected as *Machine Art*, and little known essays like "Jews and the War," "The Jew: Pathology Incarnate", and "Anglo-Israel" (three essays that Redman himself mentions, but avoids any discussion of)—documents that are hardly "unconvincing" testaments to Pound's anti-Semitism and pro-fascism (Redman 256). Any ethical reader of Pound's letters at this time, especially those written to the composer Gerhart Munch, would be hard-pressed to characterize his endless rants against the "kikes" and their "kikery" as mild. But Redman is so averse to any criticism Pound's anti-Semitism that he regularly falls into contradiction, going so far as to say excuse Pound's numerous recorded recommendations of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* because they aren't fanatical

³¹ This is not to say that one is better or worse, but to say that they are different, and both have a different relationship to Europe and the Jews.

enough, and are therefore evidence of Pound's suspicion of the text. For Redman, the fact that Pound's copy isn't marked as much as his other books suggests that Pound wasn't convinced by its argument. While it is certainly true that Pound recognized the fallaciousness of the fictional document, he nevertheless appreciated it enough to recommend it in the first place.

Credo: Pound was a fascist, and thoroughly believed in the Mussolini's regime. While he was an anti-Semite, his anti-Semitism was mostly incidental to his fascism (he's certainly more prejudiced against the Jews than Mussolini was), and this was largely borne out of a belief that Jews controlled the banks and the banks made war. For Pound, Mussolini was the best hope to clean up a capitalist system he believed was designed to bring about war in order to fatten the wallets of a select few. That he named those few the "Jews" or "kikes" is one of the most significant moral failings of any poet of the twentieth century, but his anti-Semitism should not be confused with his fascism, even though it can't be disentangled from it. I suspect that most critics' discomfort with Pound's politics comes from an inability to unstick themselves from the popular image of fascism—an image of National Socialism and "Hiterlian yawping," as Pound wrote of it in *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini*, rather than its very different relative, Italian fascism. I don't want to excuse Pound's fascism or Italian fascism generally as benevolent—they most certainly were not. However, it is worth noting, if only to go some way of recuperating Pound from his critics, that Pound's central issue with Western economics, and therefore of Western government, is usury, the banking practice of levying a charge "for the use of purchasing power [...] without regard to production" (C 230), which he credits as the single biggest opposition to progress and peace in the world. Somewhat

strangely, Pound's racism and fascism emerge from a pacifist desire for peace. This is most explicit in *Guide to Kulchur* (GK 61) as well as the *Cantos*, including one of the most famous cantos, "XLV":

With *Usura*
With usura hath no man a house of good stone
each block cut smooth and well fitting
that design might cover their face,
with usura
hath no man a painted paradise on his church wall

(C.XLV.230)

The image of a "painted paradise" is complex, and doesn't simply refer to a false or artificial image, like one might assume, but rather (as he writes in the later *Cantos*) is an image of hope, of a better future than the present that must be necessarily artificial because it doesn't exist yet. In the value of the "painted paradise," Pound centers the poet and artist, the individual capable of creating an image of a better future out of a terrible past. Pound continues with a litany of beautiful things that usury prevents, including churches, productivity, craftsmanship, "the child in the womb," love, sex. Usury, for Pound, is "CONTRA NATURAM"—"Corpses are set to banquet / at behest of usura." Usury doesn't only stand in the way of peace, it stands against the right way of things—generating enormous confusion in simple things. This confusion necessitates definition, and definition, in Pound, necessitates fascism. Pound frequently writes about how so few people can see through the murk of usury, which produces both bad government and economic disenfranchisement:

and when bad government prevailed, like an arrow,
fog rose from the marshland
 bringing claustrophobia of the mist
beyond the stockade there is chaos and nothingness

(C.LXXX.520)

In Poundian political philosophy, totalitarianism (=Mussolini), defines this confusion and clears up its muck.

The question in thinking about the formal connections between Mussolini as hypertext and Pound's *Cantos* is, What about *Il Duce* appealed to him? As he writes in *Guide to Kulchur*, perhaps the most widely read of Pound's critical writings from the late 30's, when he was living in fascist Italy full-time, Italian totalitarianism provides order. Pound's theory of government is based on his interpretation of Confucian principles, which in themselves could be seen as proto-fascist in their focus on defining good government as a leader's total (but ethical) control of his nation. Pound opens his *Guide* with a digest of the Confucian analects, and closes his earlier, explicitly fascist book of criticism—*Jefferson And/Or Mussolini*—with a similar, but shorter digestion. The focus in *Jefferson* is on the ways Jefferson and Mussolini, two leaders who Pound sees as analogous to one another (howbeit with some crucial differences), achieve supreme order. He ends the book: "Towards which I assert again my own firm belief that the Duce will not stand with despots and the lovers of power but with the lovers of / ORDER / τὸ καλὸν" (J/M 128). Pound throughout the book makes a distinction between leaders who are driven by power, and those driven by order. In the second bracket he lists Lenin, Mussolini, and Jefferson, and sees them as leaders who act based on "facts" and who, in a Gentilean mode,³² can *immediately* transform those facts into action.

³² In his writing, Pound never references Gentile, though twice in *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini* he obscurely references an Italian thinker named "G" whose arguments bear resemblance to Gentile's. No direct link can be established between the two, other than to say that, as I demonstrated in the second chapter, by virtue of Gentile's power and ubiquity in the Mussolini regime, Pound must have encountered his ideas. But Pound's forgoing any acknowledgement of Gentile is keeping with his citational practices—except for a few intellectuals, friends, and historical figures, he only occasionally cites

The FACT is the essential item in Pound's reading of history and its impact on the present, but most facts are obscured by preconceptions. "It takes a genius charged with some form of dynamite, mental or material, to blast [the common man] out of these preconceptions." And for Pound, as Perelman's essay points out, the genius is the rare individual who can achieve a Confucian utopia, who can instantly perceive "the unassailable formula, the exact distribution" of the economics that will make this utopia possible (*J/M* 26). Mussolini is this *creative* genius, capable of instant perception of facts and subsequent action; Mussolini is not only a political leader, not only a world-maker, but an artist: "Treat him as artifex and all the details fall into place. Take him as anything save the artist and you will get muddled with contradictions" (*J/M* 34). And Mussolini as artifex is also a DEBUNKER, a virtual superhuman who discredits 500 lies a morning, and who continues to drive things—*res publica*—into order: "The secret of the Duce is possibly the capacity to pick out the element of immediate and major importance in any tangle; or, in the case of a man, to go straight to the centre, for the fellow's major interest." (*J/M* 66). In Pound's writing, Mussolini is the same multi-purpose, multi-valiant, demi-god seated at the intersection of multiple discourses the fascist regime sought to construct in its propaganda, as I made clear in the previous chapter. He is an artist, historian, leader, economist, even scientist, because scientists, like fascists, "are interested in the WORK being done and the work TO DO, and not in personal considerations, personal petty vanities and so on" (*J/M* 68). The textual figure inter-penetrated by, and inter-penetrating, the variegated strains of Italian and world history in

anyone by name, usually referring to them by a letter or by a vague description of them as a famous person. It is a formal move on Pound's part, I think, that enables him to seem less indebted to the ideas of others', especially those he perhaps only half-agrees with, as I suspect is the case of Gentile.

Pound is in near total agreement with fascist propaganda. When he writes in *Guide to Kulchur*

Mussolini [is] a great man, demonstrably in his effects on event, unadvisedly so in the swiftness of mind, in the speed with which his real emotion is shown in his face, so that only a crooked man cd. misinterpret his meaning and his basic intention[,]

fascist propaganda and Pound's writing are nearly identical. Like the fascists, Pound writes that Italy was in a crisis of system, rather than of politics, and Mussolini was the only "genius ... to see and repeatedly affirm" the fact of it (GK 186). And as a genius, as an artifex (and, I might add, as an *artifice*), only Mussolini could construct and be constructed as the solution to this crisis.

The degree to which Pound's fascism is transcribed into his poetics is clearest when he valorizes poetry as better than prose because "there is MORE in and on two pages of poetry than in or on ten pages of any prose save the few books that rise above classification as anything save exceptions" (GK 121). In this passage, Pound writes that poetry *is* totalitarian, and in this regard resembles (or can resemble) Mussolini's political project. Not only is Mussolini a superhuman, he is a poem, a mode of discourse, one that Pound explicitly analogizes to his own creative work. Pound writes in *Jefferson* that Mussolini affected not only physical accomplishments, like the drainage of the swamps in the south, but was also "AN AWAKENED INTELLIGENCE in the nation and a new LANGUAGE in the debates in the chamber" (J/M 73). Mussolini is both the tale of the tribe and the tribe itself. He is a language. He is the writer who writes a living poem out of a population, a totalitarian poetics not limited to written and spoken language, but nonetheless constituting a text—a thing to be read, a set of meanings to be *solved* in equations Mussolini himself could rapidly *understand*:

... it was exhilarating to talk to him, as it would be exhilarating to be in a cage full of leopards. As he is not initially either a writer or a painter this has often been hard to explain. He was the first man I ever met who seemed to me to have ANY capacity for dealing with abstract ideas, or, still better, his mind moved instantly from a given phenomenon to the general equation under which one would ultimately have to group it. (J/M 92).

Pound couldn't have known that his "talks" with Mussolini, however imaginative and brief the one most scholars have confirmed was, would eventually lead him to an actual cage, and yet Pound intuited that support for Mussolini was an extremely dangerous trap when he metaphorized his experience in zoological terms. Despite Pound's own brilliance, which he often emphasized in his professorly criticism, for him Mussolini's own intelligence is superior to everyone. But *Il Duce* was not exhilarated by Pound, even though Pound was exhilarated by *Il Duce*.

Pound implicitly agrees with fascist propaganda when he figures Mussolini as not simply a man, but rather as a text—an individual to be read and heard; interpreted for literal and symbolic meaning, much like a book. In the opening of *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini*, Pound criticizes Dante for his famous tiered system of meaning (the literal, the allegorical, the tropological, and the anagogical), but perhaps that very poetics Pound mocks could be viewed as an analog to the ways he and the fascists interpreted *Il Duce*. Mussolini literally drained the swamps, but allegorically he drained the metaphysical abscess that had built up in Italy since the Middle Ages; tropologically he cleared the moral morass out of Italian consciousness, accumulated from years of fiscal and social watering down of the Roman heritage; and anagogically Mussolini gave birth to a new world order. Il Duce's *actions*, which are always the instant results of his understanding of facts, suggests also a knowledge-component for Pound and the fascists, a two-part

meaning that requires a four-part interpretative apparatus to grasp. And in this image of Mussolini, one that reflects his status as a figure interpenetrated by variegated media and histories, and one that in turn acted on those same media and histories, Pound found both an artist and a work of art. Bob Perelman agrees,

Seen through the lens of Pound's faith, Mussolini the *artifex*, the artist of the State, was a genius—a union of utter acuity and irresistible force who perceived multiple perspectives instantly and had only to pronounce his clear and powerful word to create social value, a new language, and a new world (Perelman 29).

This Mussolini, *Il Duce* as the artist of history, is first present in Canto XLI, which opens with his response to *A Draft of XXX Cantos*. Pound takes the Boss's³³ glance at the poems and quick response ("this is entertaining") as evidence of his supreme genius, not as his simple ignorance of English or ambivalence to Pound's work. Pound moves quickly from Mussolini's reaction to the *Cantos* to the drainage of the swamps,

MA QVESTO,"
 said the Boss, "è divertente."
 catching the point before the aesthetes had got
 there;
 Having drained off the muck by Vada
 from the marshes, by Cicero, where no one else wd. have
 drained it.
 Waited 2000 years, ate grain from the marshes;
 Water supply for ten million, another one million "*vani*"
 that is rooms for people to live in.
 XI of our era.

Having defeated the land, Mussolini faces the equally difficult challenge of fending off "the potbellies" seeking their share of the financial gain:

That they were to have a consortium
 and one of the potbellies says:
 will come in for 12 million"

³³ The "Boss" was one of Pound's favorite nicknames for Mussolini.

And another: three millyum for my cut,³⁴
 And another: we will take eight;
 And the Boss said: but what will you
 DO with that money?"

The argument continues, and Mussolini stands by his question a second time, adding:

"You won't really need all that money / because you are for the *confine*." And so, as

Perelman has glossed, action and language combined in a single spoken word (*confine*), and the men are pushed out of the frame of the poem, confined to the nothingness of the space outside the poem—"magically quarantined" (Perelman 71).

Pound's Mussolini functions similarly to Gentile's, occupying a central place in Italian culture, interpenetrated and penetrating its various discourses. And Mussolini as this figure of discourse, like the others that people the poem, remains a thread (however thinned) until the end, even though the epic-focus of the poem shifts after the Pisan Cantos. In one of the last cantos, Pound, who no longer places Mussolini as emblematic of good government, still privileges the totalitarian leader, the individual genius dominating and making culture, as the source of good government: "The whole tribe is from one man's body, / what other way can you think of it?" (C 99). Taken with Pound's characterization of the *Cantos* as "the tale of the tribe," these two lines elide him with

³⁴ Pound most frequently uses dialect to condescend. Moneylenders, Jews, idiot Americans and their World War II allies often speak in dialect, while Mussolini and Kung and other "heroes" of the poem speak with both clarity and calm. Perelman, who is especially sensitive to Pound's use of dialect (much more so than any other commentator I've read), writes, "As the *Cantos* progresses, accent, especially if 'Jewish,' will be a sign of moral decay" (Perelman 66). As with the case of the famous "pull down thy vanity" passage in Canto LXXXI, Morrison writes that Pound's dialect and address is often misunderstood. In his reading, the "thy" doesn't refer to Pound, as is often argued, but to the blacks soldiers guarding him. Morrison thoroughly parses the various lines as a complex system of puns that is, in fact, critical of the racially integrated U.S. army (Morrison 42-43).

Mussolini, Sigismundo, Kung, Adams, all of the heroes of the *Cantos*—emphasizing the individual capable of making and remaking civil society in his image and his language.

And the Poundian hero, as Perelman writes, is always half between action and words, a figure whose speech “is a punctual (puncturing) act, not a discourse” (Perelman 61).

Numerous individuals appear in the *Cantos* as capable of this kind of puncturing act, but Sigismundo is the hero who most obviously resembles Mussolini, and in many ways who reflects Pound’s idealized image of *Il Duce*.

The eighth canto is the first to feature Sigismundo Malatesta, the mercenary ruler of Rimini (1417 – 1468) who built the Tempio Malatesta, and who then figures as the poem’s hero for much of the first thirty cantos (Terrell 37). Pound’s interest in Sigismundo begins with his patronage program, which he hoped Mussolini would recycle—and, in fact, the character of Sigismundo is modeled after Mussolini. Perelman writes: “Malatesta is a forerunner of the Boss with all the proper attributes: he has daring, panache, and a passion for construction; he treats artists well and is ‘a male of the species,’ as Pound said of Mussolini” (Perelman 34). Sigismuno was appointed by the Pope, after a long series of conflicts that installed him as one of the most powerful leaders in northern Italy. Pound first visited Rimini in 1922, five months before the publication of Eliot’s *Waste Land*, which Pound references in the opening line of the poem, and saw the Tempio Malatestiano, a cathedral Sigismundo spent his life funding. It was at this time that Pound first encountered the Fascists, whose rule was still limited to Northern Italy. In addition to being a powerful autocrat with a strong patronage program, Sigismundo was a poet, and canto eight quotes some fragmentary verse (translated by Pound) in praise of his mistress (Terrell 38). Importantly, Pound’s image of an ideal

leader always involves his patronage of the arts, and stresses Pound's own conviction that statecraft could only be perfected in a society with a healthy arts culture in place.

Sigismundo, like Mussolini in 1922, is a creative leader who faces enormous opposition ("With the church against him, / With the Medici bank for itself") who nevertheless overcomes the forces standing in the way of progress in order to not only create good government, but to create a culture of masterful art—emblematized in the Tempio, the construction of which is the subject of the ninth canto.

Lawrence Rainey writes in his essay "All I Want to Do Is to Follow the Orders": History, Faith, and Fascism in the Early Cantos" that Sigismundo became a paradigmatic model for Pound's other heroes. This *slightly* oversimplifies Sigismundo and his peers in the poem, but Rainey's argument is helpful in that it proposes a reading of the early Renaissance dictator as a hypertextual figure, much like Mussolini. Pound, in Sigismundo, first tests his compositional strategy of introducing real life figures as epic heroes in order to explore examples of nearly virtuous governments and their leaders as an image for the present. Sigismundo differs from the others in that his abilities are slightly more supernatural, and, as Rainey argues, resemble less a governmental program based on abstract principles of managing human behavior (Kung) or realist responses to the political and natural wilderness of a new world (Adams), than a Roman augury:

Sigismondo reads [events] through the prism of history, interprets [their] significance for the present, and transforms [them] into a guide for conduct in the future, doing so in a way that lends interpretation a performative dimension within the 'present' of the text, turns it into a an exhortation to resolute action in the face of an overwhelmingly hostile reality. (Rainey 65)

Sigismundo is a leader much like Mussolini, Pound's boss, translating his understanding of events (most of which are occluded by preconception) into action that has a real

impact on the way the world functions. But as Pound's criticism stresses, Adams (and Jefferson) and Kung (a figure Morrison compares to Mussolini [37]) factor equally into Mussolini, whether—as Pound is careful to observe—Mussolini is aware of it or not. While aspects of Sigismundo resemble *Il Duce*, I think the more apt reading of the Renaissance ruler would be as a still-born Mussolini, one incapable of installing himself at the center of Italian culture (and world culture) because of too many external forces, including a divided peninsula. Mussolini, in Pound's writing, more resembles all three of the central figures of the early cantos: Adams, Kung, and Sigismundo, embodying the central characteristics of all of them—intelligence, strength against wilderness/disorder, and a natural propensity for good government. In this sense, *all* of the figures in the first half of the book join to form *Il Duce*.

It's no surprise that these heroes of the early cantos would resemble Mussolini: after all, Pound revised the opening of the poem after 1922 into what we have today (the originals were written in the 1910s, and published in 1917 in *Poetry*), and began to develop the project further as soon as Mussolini assumed power. While I don't want to overemphasize the degree to which Mussolini's rise revitalized Pound's poetic energies with regard to the *Cantos*, it certainly activated his political mind, a part of him that was inseparable from the poetical. After Mussolini became prime minister, Pound introduced the epic hero strategy, which uses figures and locations from history to conceptualize a potential for good government in the present, to make a "painted paradise" for readers—however complicated that image might be (as I will discuss more later). In many ways, Mussolini is not only a possible impetus behind the poem, he is a formal model—a figure penetrated and penetrating, punctured and puncturing discourse and history through

action, figuration, and language who is “read” much in the way one reads a book: a poem, in a sense, much like Pound’s *Cantos*. While Mussolini functioned as a living hypertext, Pound’s *Cantos* operate with a similar stress on its own position as central point at which numerous threads converge, unite, overwrite, and connect. (Pound’s *Cantos* are so much like a hypertext that several websites online provide various cantos as hyperlinked to the source material, historical and art data, that the poem refers to.) Like a hypertext, which highlights moments within a discourse and allows a viewer to temporarily (or not) defer and redirect their reading to another text, I argue that the *Cantos*, in privileging Mussolini via direct representation of him as *Il Duce* and as the other historical figures who are frequently (but not always) analogized to him, Pound demonstrates a formal interest in Mussolini—not as man or political leader, but as text: a poem to be read into/from history.

But the death of Mussolini, of one of the models of the *Cantos*, created a crisis in Pound’s composition practice. In addition to his imprisonment at the DTC, the possibility of execution as a traitor to the United States and the likelihood of imprisonment and public embarrassment precipitated a major emotional breakdown in Pound. Whether he went insane (as he said he did) or not is discussion beyond the scope of this paper (though Richard Sieburth provides a nice summary of the doctors’ reports in his introduction to the Pisan *Cantos*³⁵), but it can be said with some certainty that Pound began to seriously rethink his poetics in light of the end of the war. Pound wrote to William Carlos Williams on March 31st, 1946: “(of course here there has been no

³⁵ Sieburth: “Army psychiatrists argued that Pound displayed ‘no paranoia, delusions nor hallucinations,’ and there was ‘no evidence of psychosis, neurosis or psychopath,’ while Pound maintained that detention (which he referred to as a “lesion”) “had caused him a ‘violent terror and hysteria’ [that had] resulted in ‘a complete loss of memory’ (XIV).

cataclasm & there can be no understanding until a whole new means of communication is built up—neath which weight I am crushed = I mean need of creating it.)” (P/W 222).

Following the war, and the death of Mussolini, the LANGUAGE that had authored the previous two decades, and that had helped to author Pound’s poetics, was gone. The loss of *Il Duce* meant that Pound had to re-strategize his composition away from the epic hero-focus that privileged Mussolini and his government, but not before a meditation on loss in the Pisan Cantos. While those poems are sometimes read as an elegy for Mussolini, or an absolution of Pound’s faith in fascism, I would argue that the poems elegize themselves, lamenting not only the loss of Mussolini, but of their own formal directive. In the next few pages I hope to provide a cursory look into moments in the Pisan Cantos that showcase the degree to which Mussolini was affected by the death of Mussolini, and the ways this death impacted Pound’s thinking about his own poem’s direction.

Sieburth writes that the “myth” of the collapse of the poet’s mind and of Mussolini’s Italy is crucial to “an understanding of how the poem stages its theater of memory—and of forgetting” (Sieburth XV). The trauma of the “cataclasm”—of the loss of Mussolini and Pound’s own directive—is both dramatized and reenacted from the beginning of the sequence. Canto LXXIV opens with the image of an “enormous tragedy of the dream” slung over the back of a peasant, and progresses with jolts of language, reference, and mournfulness that underscore the cataclysmic loss. The elegiac quality of the sequence is first obvious when Pound writes: “Thus Ben and la Clara *a Milano* / by the heels at Milano,” referring to the execution and trampling of Mussolini and his wife by Milanese partisans. Having spent much of the past twenty years involved in

Mussolini's Italy, the brutality of their death must have shocked and horrified Pound. Not only did the world he had placed so much faith in collapse, but the author of that world did too. He invokes Eliot's "Hollow Men," but offers his own experience—and the world's—as a correction to Eliot's poem's end ("This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper"):

. . . but the twice crucified
 where in history will you find it?
yet say this to the Possum: a bang, not a whimper
 with a bang not with a whimper,
To build the city of Dioce whose terraces are the colour of stars.
(C LXXIV. 433)

The city of Dioce—Pound's idealized image of the city as utopia—will not be built in Europe, there will be no terraces "the colour of stars." The utopian possibilities have finally been destroyed. The potential for the West to swerve out from under capitalism had been removed. Pound's own poem has been turned on its head: whereas before he highlights the corrupted histories of the past in order to understand the present and offer a possible way out of it, now his poem is forced to contain, even be bludgeoned by the contemporary disaster of history. Power, rather than order, has won: "woe to them that conquer with armies / and whose only right is their power" (C LXXIV.483). The painted paradise is smashed.³⁶ For Pound the emergent future will not be any better than what the past has had to offer: "militarism progressing westward / im Westen nichts neues / and the Constitution in jeopardy / and that state of things not very new either[.]" Already the focus of the poem's historiographical praxis has shifted—away from cooler analysis of

³⁶ . For the rest of the *Cantos*, Pound expresses doubt as to whether or not a utopian project is possible in poetry, culminating in the final section, where he writes "The dreams clash / and are shattered—/ and that I tried to make a paradiso / terrestre" (C Notes for XXVII et seq.822).

cause and effect, to a near frantic fear that history is turning against Pound—"when the raft broke and the waters went over me" (C LXXX.533).

Even though a grander “larceny” than he expected had overrun Italy (C LXXIV.455), Pound remains defiant, and encodes his continuing hope for Dioce in the opening poem of the Pisan Cantos. The world he has placed his faith in has disappeared, but Pound’s refuses to give up on a utopian future

While Pound had expected the path to Dioce would begin with Mussolini, its removal from possibility doesn't necessarily exclude the potential for another to emerge. Pound continues to struggle with Mussolini's failure to stem the tide, and many of these poems vacillate between hope and despair for the future, creating an anxiety about the efficacy of poetry that ultimately forces him to change the direction of the poems, away from fascism and the historical figures that underwrite his image of Mussolini, to a more nuanced, fragmentary approach to history—to paradise.

Canto LXXIV, like others in the sequence, moves quickly through Pound's politics, history, personal experience, overheard speech,³⁷ and languages. Inside this

³⁷ The disembodied quality of the terse, colloquial language is jarring, as it must have been for Pound in his “gorilla cage.” Throughout the sequence this kind of speech—taunting, indifferent, comforting—cycles in, disrupting the flow of Pound’s voice with those who are imprisoning him. When the poems digress on history and other “outside” forces, they are returned to the cage, where Pound first began to draft the sequence. The prisoners’ speech is one way that Pound begins to bid goodbye to fascist Italy, buffering much of his political and historical flourishes. The language is often rough, spoken by

complex matrix of historical, political, and personal references, which often go unfinished or are cobbled together with other thoughts and parts of speech, Pound presents and reenacts the experience of living in the American DTC. After a brief passage commenting on Ugolino, opaque references to friends and historical figures, then Eliot, Pound writes: “I don’t know how humanity can stand it / with a painted paradise at the end of it / without a painted paradise at the end of it[.]” In the aftermath of the war, which so unseated Pound’s vision of the future, the possibility of both the availability and unavailability of the painted paradise is present in the poems. The presence is two-fold. As I wrote earlier, Pound seems to valorize “painted paradise” as positive. But there also seems to be a discomfort at the thought of an artificial image before humanity, and therefore an illusion. This must have been particularly difficult for a man animated by the urge to translate ideas into action, who’s poetic and critical career was designed in part to invoke action through artifice, hence Pound’s complex valorization of the artificial image of utopia seems to rupture in the Pisan Cantos, opening up the possibility of its existence and inexistence. If humanity were driven toward (and by) an artificial paradise (cosmic or utopian) that may or may not be there, the war would have been totally futile. Pound, who opposed war, supported Mussolini largely out of a hope that fascism would bring about a better, non-capitalist world. The loss of this world seems to throw Pound into serious doubt as to the effectiveness of poetry, and of challenging the capitalist system and its endless wars, even if he is certain of the rightness of his convictions. As he emphatically ends Canto LXXVIII: “there / are / no / righteous / wars.”

who seem as interested in teasing him as they are in helping him. Pound cruelly refers to them as “shades.”

While the collapse of the fascist world was unbearable for Pound, he nevertheless acknowledges the need to accept this end. However, the experience of the camp affects Pound such that he introduces a new, more deeply personal layer to the *Cantos*. In Canto 83, he writes in a near chant:

Nor can who has passed a month in the death cells
believe in capital punishment
No man who has passed a month in the death cells
believes in cages for beasts
(C LXXXIII.550)

This canto is noticeably calm, especially as it prepares the reader for the final poem in the sequence, where Pound salutes Mussolini and the other fascists. Its rhythmic flow is less interrupted, and stabilizes to a degree of serenity. He writes, “There is a fatigue as deep as the grave,” and later, following a digression on a peacock dinner in Sussex, “well those days are gone forever” (C LXXXIII.553-4). Pound’s poetic logic frequently reroutes the meaning of one digression to account for another, calling attention to historical likeness, similarity, or difference; here it is easy to imagine that “those days” refer to the pre-war, when Pound was most buoyant about the prospects of a better world, when a dinner of this kind could be enjoyed. In his cage, nothing could be farther away. Pound’s hypertextual impulse isn’t lost even as its living analog is, rather it shifts its focus toward elegy, constantly redirecting the reader to the immediate past, the causes of the destruction of fascist Italy (the poem is overwhelmed with names, quotes, and allusions to various Allied persons), and to Pound’s own experience of the end of the war.

The final poem of the sequence, Canto 84, bids farewell to Mussolini and the fascist world. The tone of the poems gradually shifts in the latter half of the Pisan Cantos; the calmness of defeat becomes an element of the sequence, until finally Canto LXXXIV,

in which Pound signals the end of his elegy for Mussolini by bidding him a complicated, multi-valiant farewell:

Under white clouds, cielo di Pisa
out of all this beauty something must come

O moon my pin-up,
chronometer
Wei, Chi and Pi-kan
Yin had these three men full of humanitas (blood)
or jēn²
Xaire Alessandro
Xaire Fernando, e il Capo,
Pierre, Vidkun,
Henriot
(C LXXIV.559)

“Il Capo”—“the head”—refers to Mussolini. Ronald Bush characterizes the moment as a “bitter farewell” (117), but he seems to miss the other potential meanings of Pound’s use of “xaire,” meanings I think he intended to be multiple and elusive. “Xaire” presents an interesting tripling of meaning, as it can refer to hello (which doesn’t seem to be Pound’s meaning), goodbye, and rejoice. Taking the last two as Pound’s intention, the defiance of the end is clearest: as Pound bids Mussolini goodbye, he rejoices in him, suggesting that these men were “full of humanitas (blood).” But this concluding celebratory farewell to Mussolini is brief. Pound, unlike many others, has survived, and must return to his own defeat, recording a conversation between Italians who discuss the Americans he heard “thru the barbed wire.” The conversation is notable because it suggests that Pound might beginning to soften his position toward his home country.³⁸ Pound approaches the conclusion of the poem by quoting the famous muckraker Lincoln Steffens. He begins

³⁸ “And then I said to the shepherdess of pigs: Are these Americans? Do they conduct themselves well? And she said: A Little. A Little, a little. And I said: Better than the Germans? And she said: Sort of.” (C LXXIV.560. Tr. Durbin).

with a conversation between Italians “you can, said Stef (Lincoln Steffens) / do nothing with revolutionaries / until they are at the end of their tether.” The question, for me, is how serious Pound’s tone is regarding Steffens. Pound has certainly demonstrated throughout the poems that he is “at the end of his tether,” but the question remains (for him, certainly) what that change will look like.

The death of Mussolini raises the question as to how Pound had to re-strategize his poem after the war. While the cantos that follow the Pisan Cantos aren’t totally dissimilar from those before them, there is a difference of approach that allows the book to be divided somewhat between the Mussolini cantos and the post-Mussolini cantos, especially as the poems move toward an increasingly fragmentary state. The historical perspective, and the stability of the various speakers, becomes increasingly jolting, until finally most of what Pound offers as a canto is broken language and Chinese characters. On the page, the poems are less crowded with language. Pound’s commitment to exploring the political and historical within the framework of poetry remains in tact, but much of the politics remains considerably less polemical—or, at least, less obviously disagreeable. The impulse to include (and refer back to) everything is the same, but the drive toward a specific end is less clear, and the poem eventually lacks a singular thesis. The hypertextual qualities of the poem no longer seem influenced by Mussolini, and the links between discourses, cultural milieu, other texts seem more tenuous or broken off. The focus, more generally, seems to be toward lyric beauty than a history of the world.

If this paper were longer, I would include an analysis of every book of the *Cantos* following the Pisan Cantos so as to fully test my theory, but space is limited. I hope the conclusions I draw about Mussolini and Pound suggest one possible reading of the

influence one had on the other, and how that influence impacted Pound's process and thinking in the *Cantos*. It seems that a sequel to this paper would be an analysis of the later cantos change their approach to history, and how the underlying praxis is affected by the death of Mussolini. Whether or not Pound consciously constructed the *Cantos* as a textual analog to Mussolini isn't very clear in Pound's writing, though I think there are tacit admissions of Pound's indebtedness throughout his work. While I certainly have thoughts on Section: Rock-Drill De Los Cantares, Thrones de los Cantares, and the final book, I hoped in this thesis to provide only a groundwork for later readings. My goal has been to raise questions among possibilities, and to investigate potential sites where these possibilities seem to be realized. I hope ending on a (brief) look at the Pisan Cantos, and the way Pound was dramatically impacted by the death of Mussolini, might raise the question as to how Pound's poetics changed after the devastating death of Mussolini. How does Pound rethink his praxis after its living analog is dead? The numerous ways in which they did seem obvious to me, but in a Poundian pedagogical move, I'll have to leave it to the reader to discover them his or herself.

IV

Ez nd Ends

Letter 1

Standing back of the line that divides you from me, I'm not sure if I want to extend my hand to you. When I read you, you were never there, or you were there in the shadows and refused to come out, only ever standing half in the light. Now that you've arrived, I don't know what to do, only what to say—even if in addressing you in front of a group of readers I've done nothing more than ask them to adjust their seat in the audience, to trade front row for the nosebleed, while you take their place and I remain on stage. Of course, as you might point out, that's not an entirely honest image of this final chapter, that a truer portrait would acknowledge that the Ezra Pound I'm writing to is not Ezra Pound the man or even Ezra Pound the poet, but rather is a distorted image of you, one I've twisted such that you now resemble me. The “you,” which you never took much interest in but has become an essential element of my own poetics, an isolated moment of “us” as group and individual elided into a singular linguistic character—a figure of individuals made to cohere as object an “I” addresses. For now I'll stand here as that “I,” and you'll sit there as “you,” and we can be individuated in language as such so as to make sense of this letter. But sooner or later, all of us will have to admit that there is no Ezra Pound here, there's only us, and the images of ourselves and others we've generated out of text, into text. But before that I might stick my hand in your pocket to pull out a poem I wrote. I might say to you, and to those sitting above us, “I don't think we've met before, but I recognize you.”

Your identity continuously complicated this project because you wanted, despite your endless assurances of your clarity of thought and direction, to be complicated, a figure *between, within*, and *as* a multitude of discourses—politics, poetics, histories, and geographies. Your escape any attempt to recognize you as an isolated element, but as one interconnected and interconnecting an indefinite series of other elements. I tried to pin you down, but no fixed point, or point moving between fixed points, would suit you. As poet in the afterlife of an epic tradition, reinventing a poetic model that *seemed* ill-suited to the war, interwar, and postwar chaos of the first half of the twentieth century. Homer wrote in order to explain the origins of their societies, the disparate threads that were made to cohere into a single national or cultural identity. Virgil complicated that model by introducing a degree of self-consciousness to the tradition, to the act of constructing a narrative at the request of power. You re-imagined the epic as many things, but importantly as a work that could realize the Homeric, the Virgilian, and the Catullan—a textual object that could construct (or correct) community as much as it could emerge out of it.

So what were you doing in Italy? Trying to find what out of your times? Having read the *Cantos* in full twice, and parts of it many more times, I'm still trying to understand what *what* is. The hard surface of the poem occasionally cracks, lets the light of it escape (a favorite metaphor of yours—one that the poet Bob Perelman, a poet I respect but whose writing seems fraught with too much personal disgust over the politics of his poetic lineage makes a great deal of in his book *Trouble with Genius*) and get into the eyes of the reader. It's gotten into my eyes, but I can't figure out what to do. I'm

trying to figure you out, Ezra. I think, having written and read you and about you, and the political context that produced you, I've come close.

Love,
Andrew

*

Example: I remember first hearing a recording of a selection of Jackson Mac Low's *Words nd Ends for Ez* in the late winter, when I'd just started this project, but had no idea what to write. In the unheated room I listened to Mac Low approximate Pound's voice through Pound's own words, reduce him to the most basic language, determined by a chance procedure that omits most words from the original text, except those that, once a letter is capitalized, spell out "Ezra Pound." It's a procedure that seems to me to be profoundly elegiac, a melancholy erasure of E.P.'s sense and its occasionally toxic poetics in favor of a fragmentary language that nevertheless spells him out. It's witchcraft, a counter-curse. A cure. I could see my breath as I sat still, waiting for the moment when the power of the performance would click. Twenty seconds: click. I don't think Mac Low is being esoteric or unfair to Pound, in fact he loved Pound, but in erasing him he performs an operation that simultaneously reduces Pound to his best and worst attributes: the enormous, uncontrolled ego that dominates his work in the repeated permutations of his name, and the crystalline lyricism that almost always, even when Pound is attempting a literalism, is fragmentary, abstract, and beautiful. *Words nd Ends for Ez* breaks Pound down, tells his work as language rather than politics, obfuscates the politics of the *Cantos* as *truly* secondary, even non-existent: What lies beneath but a shattered paradise that cannot cohere? Mac Low reforms the *Cantos* in the only way he can, not through an academic operation on intent, meaning,

and context (in and out of excuse or not), but through reduction, reviving him as a performance in language. Mac Low spoke across the computer speakers not as himself, but as Pound, or a vision of Pound, re:vision of practice that unhinged me, withdrew out of me my own version of Pound as a mirror image of my own ambitions: a poet I came to at eleven, wanted to be, and later rejected only to find that his work is absolutely essential to my own, and I too had to operate on him in order to rehabilitate him and isolate what's of him in me. The point, I realized, isn't to read *Words nd Ends*, which I'd tried in the past but found I couldn't "get into it," though of course reading works too, but to hear Mac Low read Pound, to generate out of such a fraught, yet demanding text another, one of fresher intent, a channel into the past. That's what we do when we write—and read. And through Mac Low I met Pound.

Zoom: Then there was Arthur Wood, who lives at the end of Downing St. in the Bedford-Stuyvesant, my old neighborhood in Brooklyn. On the red door of his building, which looks either like a church or castle made of wood, he's painted the words "Broken Angel." The building wasn't build to "code," and so the city, which has spent the past several decades gentrifying and normalizing the outer neighborhoods, has tried to condemn the building. It's almost impossible to imagine Broken Angel in the city, but it's there.



(Figure 11)

When my friend and I walked down the street, which stops at his place before making a left, it almost felt like the house wasn't there before we'd started walking toward it, but was sprung from the city spontaneously. A sign next to the door tells you to pull the rope hanging in front of it and to wait for Arthur. My friend who took me to visit him, but who had never seen him himself, had me pull the cord. Neither of us expected a man to emerge from a window overhead, but one did. He told us he'd come right down. When he came out of the house, he shook ours hands, introduced himself as Arthur, and told us about the various battles he'd fought and semi-won against city building codes, public officials, judges, lawyers, and mayors. He told us that only last week he'd spoken before the Obama administration at the United Nations, which had offered to take up his case before a world court. The room of mirrors at the top of the house was removed by the city, but the rest has been allowed to stay. Arthur described it to me as a place where you could go and see the city in all its angles. When an airplane flies overhead, it's projected all over the room, appearing as though it's going in multiple directions at once. I find this

room that no longer exists to be such an appealing image right now because it reminds me so much of the *Cantos*. Both appropriate images, refract them, project them into your space, and steep you in their curious, but confusing beauty. They both stand on top of a huge body of work, build by a single individual opposed to normative culture's standards of design, and both Wood and Pound struggle with invisible, but worldly conspirators.

Rimini, where the Tempio is, where Pound first met the fascists, and rethought the *Cantos* as Mutholini assumed power as prime minister.

and the front of the Tempio, Rimini
It will not take uth twenty yearth
to cwuth Mutholini
and the economic war has begun

35 via Balbo

For Pound, as I mentioned before, dialect is most often used to parody or humiliate the opposition. But this particular use has an added layer that is less common in Pound, and one that is suggestive of how he viewed Mussolini as himself a poet. Within the anonymous speaker, Pound couches a critique of *Il Duce*'s critics in Mussolini's name, approximating the dialect speech pattern of the critic with an obvious nod to the Greek word μῦθος, which can be parsed to mean myth, story, or narrative. Pound uses the anonymous speaker's dismissal of Mussolini against him or her, underscoring his earlier, complex pedagogical point in *Guide to Kulchur* that we can know anything instantly as soon as we remove the misperceptive faculties, those mental abilities that for Pound force ordinary citizens to misunderstand the world through false or teleological histories propagated by those interested in creating a false image of history. In this moment, misperception of a fact shows within the speech of the speaker his or her understanding,

even if s/he doesn't realize it. Mussolini *is* the tale of the tribe of everyone for Pound, and he emphasizes it by revising Mussolini's name to include the Greek for myth or story. Out of one man, the tribe. For me this is an amazingly virtuosic moment, one that showcases not only Pound's curious politics and his endless desire to outwit those who disagreed with him, but also, whatever my disagreement with his fascism, his unique approach to language as a thing unto itself, a mode of communication that itself is hypertextual: an Italian name spoken by an English speaker with a lisp revised to include a Greek word, a conglomeration that seems to point not only to the unified nature of the line or its meaning, but also to the meanings that it borrows, revises, and is composed of.

A

poetics begins in community: maybe.

A poetics begins with the individual in community: certainly.

A poetics begins in the Idaho Territory, continues to New York, Pennsylvania, London, Paris, Italy, DTC, through correspondence, interaction, jobs, poems, positioning, arguing, drinking, meeting, going in many directions—the wo/man of twists and turns.

A poetics begins with an “a” because it’s one of many, and if it doesn’t begin with community, it begins to be community. It is my letter written to you, or you reading my letter and writing back.

A poetics is an engagement, and we are always / must be engaged.

Projects, even senior projects, raise the point that there are no self-sufficient objects, individuals, or texts, and everything happens in sequence and, whether we emphasize the sequence or not, always refers in part to its interdependence on a variety of sources and antecedents. I wrote this project after reading Bob Perelman, who impressed me at first as a poet capable of writing about other poets with rigor of beauty against beauty, not beyond remonstrance to those who had so clearly influenced him: Modernism of bad politics. When I finally returned to him to write the previous chapter, I realized he's only half-right, his anger isn't as productive as I remembered, and sometimes even stands in the way of meaningful discourse on meaningful things. Language, especially the language of others, is an awful thing to waste, or make waste of without rigor of beauty for beauty, I'd say. We don't just take things apart, we put them together in a different way. Or else we go nowhere. So with Homer we don't just say No to his antiquity because it can be disagreeable or strange or unhelpful, we absorb it and begin again, "Then went down the ship," because nothing, even bad men, is not worth saving—or rehabilitated. There's a problem when that impulse is translated into a pitiful forgiveness or apologia, the palace of academic crystal's refusal to admit a crack is a very beautiful thing, and tells us who we are. So Pound is a fascist who did adore Mussolini, at least for a time, and perhaps even modeled his strategy of composition after the formal principles that underlie Mussolini as a textual figure, but that doesn't make his work worthwhile, even gorgeous, even when it's chilling.

Serenely in the crystal jet
as the bright ball that the fountain tosses
(Verlaine) as diamond clearness
How soft the wind under Taishan

where the sea is remembered
out of hell, the pit
out of the dust and glare evil

(C. LXXIV.469)

The ethical procedure is admittance, and revision of opinion that incorporates acknowledgement of Pound's wrong words for real events, a nod to the fight against the hurried capitalism that exploits the poor and seeks war to refund its staggering "progress," the problems of Pound's racist critique, and generate out of that acknowledgement a new ethical, or as Joan Retallack has called it "poethical," space for the work that promotes good out of bad, what I guess you could say is the right way for the complex, sometimes mean, work to emerge in the new world.

Out of what space, and into what new world? Charles Bernstein, Pierre Joris, Al Filreis, and Joan Retallack, in discussion at Bard on the Jackson Mac Low poem I listened to with them, argued through Mac Low arguing through Pound, generating out of the conversation a new, improvisatory space in which another, accommodating poetics could be proposed for Mac Low and Pound as well as those of us in the classroom. By procedurally erasing Pound's problematic politics in the *Cantos*, does Mac Low release Pound from them, draw attention to them through their absence, or create another work entirely? Probably a combination of the three. Whatever the outcome of the procedure, the impulse to do it in the first place is relatable. I too begin to think read Pound with love, but a complex, sometimes tiresome love; not only am I drawn to him in a kind of fundamental way as poet, I'm repelled by him—a combined feeling that I suspect Mac Low must have felt for Pound. The desire to erase him is just as strong as it is to write as him.

oZier's cuRve he wAll,
 Phin hOut exUltant
 seeN impiDity,
 Exultance,
 aZ loR r-
 leAf
 Paler rOck-
 layers at-
 Un e deNho ia
 "HaD Ever oZzaglio,
 e tRacchiolino
 iccArdo Psit,
 lOve blUer thaN oureD
 Euridices,
 yZance,
 a's Rest,
 use At P"
 n Of trUction eraNts
 faceD,
 E tZ
 e FRance
 is
 LAnnes Pire
 fOrces,
 a nUiSance,
 was Napoleon
 l 22nd.

Ery iZation."

deR ed TAlleyrand Political.

e, Orage id Up ter-
 Night al-
 AnD E yZantines
 m pRologo
 othAr.

(Mac Low 323)

What remains is a fragmentary poetry of a fragmentary politics, and the only coherent thread is the sequence of capitalized letters that spell out Pound's name, while most of the other words have been clipped or broken off so that they're meaning is no longer apparent except in a few cases. For me there is something profoundly melancholy about

Mac Low's Pound poems—to see the reduction of the massive *Cantos*, with all their referential, opaque power that almost always defers its meaning, reroutes itself, playing an allusive and elusive game with the reader reduced to a thin, almost spine-like column of text is haunting, almost spooky in its concision. All of the links are broken except one: EZRA POUND.

Under: *On Pound*. Or not exactly under, but between: *Between: On Pound*. Over *Pound*: epanalepsis, literally, “to take up over” but also to repeat for poignancy. Not again, but again again. Kenneth Koch, under Pound:

Then you shall return to this valley and teach eating
For who hath eaten phooey
Returneth not unto paradise
Dem mudder fuckers doan unnerstan me
Said the Princess Toy Ling A.D. 1922
Dey doan unnerstan nuttin but smut
That was the year the doves fell at Livorgno
(from “Canto CXIII”)

I cringe reading that poem. Maybe I could have been funnier in this project, but I don't certainly find Koch's parody very funny. Pound has already repeated his antecedents, or an approximation of antecedents, quoting source material, inventing/revising histories, incorporating overheard language (or language he writes to appear overheard) to be an Again, what historiography already does. To say a thing that's happen in such a way so as to emphasize its happened-ness. History is the same except it repeats everything you say. Kenneth Koch, between Pound and me. The problem with Koch's parody is that it only half-understands Pound, aping his poetry through stereotype: disjunctive lyricism matched with historical data and dialect, creating out of what's already such a hard surface a squishier one, a mattress thrown over concrete. I don't get it. It's not funny.

Mac Low, on the other hand, *enacts* a reading of Pound, doesn't parody him or approximate him. *Words nd Ends* revises Pound to articulate a position on him. For Mac Low, Pound is a writer who must be revised, not parodied. Koch's parody offers nothing NEW, while Mac Low's revision and repurposing does.

Non-linear history, OK. Once I was dating two people at once, just like Pound did, and when our mutual friend asked me what I thought about my triangulation, I told him I didn't think of it that way at all because triangulation suggests some kind of coherency to the geometry of my relationship. Coherency suggests a totalized system, one which refers to parts outside itself while maintaining its whole: what Pound sought his work, like everyone's, was curiously programmed against, and the painted paradise he made of it seems to me beautiful because it's obviousness only became such when illusion was dropped, and the world was revealed as a place without Pound at its center. The world is only itself at its center. So the concluding swerve of the *Cantos*, away from a categorizing impulse, a totalitarian drive toward the definition of the affairs of everything in every relation, is about re-centering the world, which is itself an incoherent system that privileges randomness and tension, even as it attempts to recycle its parts in a system that *appears* totalizing: Nature. But Nature, capital N, doesn't exist except in us: and Mt. Taishan is in Northern Italy in the *Cantos* not as fantasy but because, for Pound, it is. We affect, and are affected, by landscape, the endgame of which we've only just started to understand that we *can* destroy. The world is not a place of narrative—it doesn't care about your stories anymore than it cares about keeping everything that's happened to it straight. So what did Pound

find? He found the world in its emergent, non-linear, non-linguistic form. And then he took a vow of silence for ten years.

Own went the ship. And those of us onboard went with it. When I started this project, I had no concrete idea about what direction it would take me. I was interested in the ways antiquity influenced fascism, and in turn influenced Pound. I was inspired by the *Chaos & Classicism* exhibit at the Guggenheim in New York, and knew almost immediately that I wanted to write about this segment of history, an era in the arts mostly forgotten (in art history the study of many of the artists I briefly touch on at the end, and the many more who were displayed the Guggenheim, has only just begun). I was interested in, as Morrison titled the introductory chapter to his *Poetics of Fascism*, “Modernism for the other people.” What I didn’t anticipate while I spent the last year writing this paper was the extent to which the past, specifically the 1920’s and 1930’s, bears some resemblance to our own time, especially as extra-party elements in the American political system like the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements have become daily presences in my life. My adviser Ben Stevens saw similar connections and, more frequently than the essay reveals, those connections were a large part of the discussion during our weekly meetings. The question for me was always how to introduce these similarities (between, say, the coercive, nationalist rhetoric of the fascists and the Tea Party) without reducing my analysis to an alarmist elision of two very different political moments, one of which is ongoing. And yet, those ghosts of one time haunts my own in my mind: distinctions between “real” and “fake” Americans; the rhetoric of violence that ultimately lead to the attempted assassination of Representative Gabrielle Giffords; the numerous rallies against an imaginary “elite;” the appearance of a

foreign-born, “faceless left” in conservative discourse. This conversation, these fears, and these prejudices both pre-date, overlap, and continue beyond my project, but throughout the writing of this their presence was felt. The underlying question for me was always what to say here, on these pages, if anything. Is it my ethical obligation to comment? Or should I pass over it, either allowing the reader to observe the connections for his or herself? And regarding Pound, the largest question throughout was how, as poet, does one fit into the times? These are questions that I will continue to struggle with, and I can’t say I have an answer yet or will by the time of my board or after. But they are for me the ghosts that haunt my research, and every sentence of this project. And I can’t help but feel that I am almost always extending my hand to them at every turn, only to find they’ve turned away. I remain uncomfortable with the fact that they didn’t play a large role in the first three chapters, but as my own feelings (and my own expectations) of the outcomes of these movements, especially Occupy Wall Street, which I have invested some of my own time in, I am not certain I am ready to comment on them. But I hope that the connections, the rhymes between then and now, were obvious to my readers while they read through this essay.

*

Letter 2

27 September 1955
Brooklyn
91. ALS-3

“Useful”? alwus comes down “to whom”? I’m probably irreclaimable you would say—
And I’ll agree—in respects. Ain’t in my nature to circulate tho heaven nose Id like to
unite others in friendship, taking Baruch [Spinoza] to heart on honesty etc.

Louis Zukofsky to Pound

Ezra,

LZ's response to you gives me chills, because his respect for you came out of a deep unwillingness to attack the problem at its source. Being a Jew, and a Jew who felt such a profound love of your work, it was difficult (but not impossible) for LZ to reconcile himself to your anti-Semitism. Whatever attempt you made, and other writers promoted, to de-racialize your vocabulary's racist bent so that a word like "kike" isn't a racial epithet but an economic category, I think it failed. I don't believe it. The Jews, you wrote in the letter to Zukofsky I quoted earlier (his response is the epigraph to this letter, as you might remember), favor usefulness, operate always with a "utility reflex" in mind, by which you mean only what is of value is the value of a thing to promote at the expense of others. But Louis Zukofsky, and countless others, are the FACT that negates your racist politics—LZ who made no money, who was ghettoized by the establishment (by those, like Kenner, who spent their lives promoting your work) until Robert Creeley brought him out of the dark. You can't forget, Ezra, that fascism makes no sense now and did then only because the sense it made was self-made, no basis in reality except in things and their exchange as a system to *not be* capitalism. I salute the impulse to fight it, and today, in the time of Occupy Wall Street, limited or not, perhaps umbrella'd by the Arab Spring, this means a great deal to me. I only wish the causes you saw—greed and warlust—were not based on the West's stereotyped excuse for its own bad behavior, the exotic Jew from the East come to fuck shit up. The people who charge unfair rates on the exchange of monies, who take advantage the poor, and leverage politicians toward war, are not a race (and therefore, as the history of the world has shown, destroyable), but a class, one that has been a constant since antiquity. The solutions to the problem won't be

so easy to find or enact, and as you experienced, even in your wrongheadedness, and as OWS has experienced in the violent assault on the movement's peaceful supporters in Oakland, New York, and Atlanta, the one percent who benefit from the system at hand will not relent in their will to preserve it ninety-nine percent of the time. Hard to stomach. But nothing is permanent, and even the most powerful autocracy loses its ability to hold on, and when the next takes its place, it is then that we can act to reform the ways things are or unseat them before it's too late, promote a cycle of leadership by which we might all move in any direction we so choose, together at once. What do you think Pound? Does the future tell us anything about ourselves, or does it always slip past us, just out of reach to define itself as a potential we can never define? These are my questions. Write back when you have the time.

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Love,
Andrew

V

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