

LYRIC POETRY, CONSERVATIVE POETICS, AND THE RISE OF FASCISM

by

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Chet Lisiecki

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As fascist movements took hold across Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, there emerged a body of lyric poetry concerned with revolution, authority, heroism, sacrifice, community, heritage, and national identity. While the Nazi rise to power saw the deception, persecution, and brutalization of conservatives both in the Reichstag and in the streets, these themes resonated with fascists and conservatives alike, particularly in Germany. Whether they welcomed the new regime out of fear or opportunism, many conservative beneficiaries of National Socialism shared, and celebrated in poetry, the same ideological principles as the fascists.

Such thematic continuities have made it seem as though certain conservative writers, including T. S. Eliot, Stefan George, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, were proto-fascist, their work cohering around criteria consonant with fascist ideology. My dissertation, however, emphasizes the limits of such cohesion, arguing that fascist poetry rejects, whereas conservative poetry affirms, the possibility of indeterminacy and inadequacy. While the fascist poem blindly believes it can effect material political change, the conservative poem affirms the failure of its thematic content to correspond entirely to material political reality. It displays neither pure political commitment nor aesthetic autonomy, suspending these categories in an unresolved tension.

Paul de Man's work on allegory hinges on identifying a reading practice that

addresses this space between political commitment and aesthetic autonomy. His tendency to forget the immanence of history, however, is problematic in the context of fascism. Considering rhetorical formalism alongside dialectical materialism, in particular Adorno's essay "Lyric Poetry and Society," allows for a more rounded and ethical methodological approach. The poetic dramatization of the very indeterminacy that historically constituted conservative politics in late-Weimar Germany both distinguishes the conservative from the fascist poem while also accounting for its complicity. Fascism necessitated widespread and wild enthusiasm, but it also succeeded through the (unintentional) proliferation of political indifference as registered, for example, by the popularity of entertainment literature. While the work of certain conservative high modernists reflected critically on its own failures, such indeterminacy nonetheless resembles the failure to politically commit oneself against institutionalized violence and systematic oppression.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: WHY "FASCIST LITERARY MODERNISM" NOW?

In the introduction to the 1993 book *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde*, Andrew Hewitt poses the question, "why fascist modernism?" This question seems even more pressing for a study of fascism and modernism today, when the possibilities for thinking through the subject may seem exhausted, ranging from fascism as anti-modern (Nolte) to fascism as a form of modernism (Griffin) to fascism as reactionary modernism (Herf).<sup>1</sup> With regards to literary modernism and fascism, Hewitt implicates the avant-garde in Italy, Robert Norton implicates Stefan George and Hugo von Hofmannsthal in Germany, Paul Morrison identifies Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot in Britain, Alice Kaplan identifies Georges Sorel and Robert Brasillach in France. More broadly, and among many other critics, Claudia Koonz has argued that high-profile academics like Martin Heidegger gave National Socialism the intellectual credibility it needed to succeed among particular demographics, an argument that has risen again to

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout my dissertation, I make occasional references to Ernst Nolte's concept of fascism as a "resistance to transcendence," a highly ambiguous term that has come under considerable scrutiny. My project does not attempt to intercede in debates central to the *Historikerstreit*; it does not seek to legitimate Nolte's conversial claims, particularly those made after the publication of *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche*, which have been interpreted as approximating an apologist position. I am struck less by Nolte's concept of "practical transcendence," by which he seems to mean social progress and modernization, than by that of "theoretical transcendence," which he describes as, "the reaching out of the mind beyond what exists and what can exist to an absolute whole; in a broader sense this may be applied to all that goes beyond, that releases man from the confines of the everyday world" (Nolte 433). I find Nolte's implicit argument that fascism struggles against a release from the confines of the everyday world compelling because it implies that the phenomenological emergence of fascism (in Nolte's construction) is consonant with a teleological privileging of that which confines. In my dissertation, I consider such confinement in aesthetic terms, as the rejection of failure: a parallel between human failure and the failure of language to escape the bounds of power. I do not, however, support Nolte's overarching phenomenological approach to fascist metapolitics, nor do I endorse a purely ideological approach to understanding fascism. Quite the contrary, I hope to ground my aesthetic analysis in prevailing historical research. For one of many critiques of Nolte's phenomenology, see Kitchen, "Ernst Nolte and the Phenomenology of Fascism."

academic consciousness following the publication of Heidegger's black notebooks. Yvonne Surratt takes this argument even further in her recent book in which, identifying Heidegger as a collaborator with National Socialism, professes to tell "the story of how philosophy was implicated in genocide" (xvi). Donna Jones has recently made arguments regarding Nietzsche as a forerunner to National Socialism, as has Richard Wolin, who draws on Isaiah Berlin's notion of the Counter-Enlightenment to implicate a tradition of German irrationalism that culminates in post-modernism. Evelyn Barish's new book tries once again to establish how Paul de Man and deconstruction were fatally tainted by fascism. This concern with identification or association has been one necessary framework for understanding how many modernist writers and thinkers were drawn to the ideological lineage of fascism. It does not, however, compare "fascist modernists" with those more average literary works that emerged and circulated under fascism, a topic that has received considerable scholarly attention in the last few years. This approach allows a comparison on the grounds of aesthetic form rather than thematic content and thus offers new insight into how, and to what extent, aesthetic objects such as the lyric poem were complicit in the success of fascism. Furthermore, it introduces work by the conservative beneficiaries of National Socialist ideology and practice. The relative political passivity of these figures leading up to and following their failure to prevent Hitler's dictatorship, orchestrated as it may have been by Nazi terror, emerges as a lyrical indeterminacy that, while constitutively distinct from National Socialist literature, was nonetheless unconsciously or indirectly complicit in the success of the regime.

What many of the above studies fail to consider is the distinction between fascism as an "aestheticization of politics" more generally, a conception that seems to

invite comparison with “high” modernism, and specific fascist (“low”) cultural productions themselves. In light of the fracturing of “Modernism” into a plurality of “modernisms” – a critical event also unintegrated into this scholarship – what better sample of “fascist modernism” than what Alice Kaplan names “other-than-masterpieces.” For Kaplan, as a cultural historian concerned with the representation of everydayness, such “banal but persistent topoi condense the traces of a fascist sensibility” (43-47). While my project does not focus on the specific details of the humdrum fascist life per se, it does assert that the project of *Gleichschaltung* historically necessitated not only the well-documented coordination of active participation and suppression (or execution), but also, where that may have been difficult, inaction and indifference, in the sense of Hannah Arendt’s notion of a failure to think. It was a program that strove to assimilate totally the necessary inadequacy immanent to the event of failure. Particularly among former members of the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (DNVP) and the “conservative revolution,” this failure to think was associated with a turning towards the aesthetic sphere as the privileged yet displaced site of political activity. While National Socialists, obviously, did not actively seek an indifferent populace, the success of the movement did result in part from a group of otherwise nonfascist writers who remained in Germany and passively endorsed the regime by retreating into art. The most compelling example of such “low” or mass art is “Unterhaltungsliteratur,” which publishing records and anecdotal evidence demonstrate was immensely popular both in terms of sales and actual readership.<sup>2</sup> Considering such “other-than-masterpieces,” then, is one way to account for the large

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<sup>2</sup> “Eine Auswertung der Romanbestseller der Jahre nach 1933 ergab, daß traditionelle bürgerliche Unterhaltungsliteratur dominierte und nur 20% der Bestseller völkisch-nationalsozialistische Romane waren, die entweder das Thema Krieg oder die ökonomische und soziale Entwicklung in der Weimarer Republik spiegelten” (Haefs 15).

body of literature written by and for fascists during the period of modernism that does not resemble the work of George, Marinetti, Pound, and Eliot and that does not bespeak questions of being and time, political theology, or the will to power.

Alongside the great studies of fascist modernism mentioned above, and in order to focus on one particular national context in which fascism emerged, I propose considering the original research of Uwe-K. Ketelsen and Ernst Loewy, two of the first to anthologize National Socialist (NS) literature; recent historical research by Jan-Pieter Barbian and Christian Adam on literary politics and publishing trends under National Socialism; and theoretical work by Wilhelm Haefs and Ralf Schnell, who consider the extent to which NS literature emerged either within a literary-historical continuity or as aberrance within, though still indebted to, German literary tradition. Unless we want to make of fascist modernism canon-fodder, shifting canonized figures from one category to another, it seems necessary to include in any account of the subject ordinary literature that may have little or nothing to do with theories or practices of fascism yet was nonetheless produced and circulated by and among fascists.

Doing so, however, raises an important question about the complicity of certain canonical modernists in the rise and success of fascism, namely, do the conclusions of writers like Paul Morrison and Robert Norton still hold? That is, if we imagine fascist modernism to be a banal and underwhelming reiteration of neo-classical idealist platitudes that have little to do with politics, not to mention ideology, then can we still speak of the “complicity” of Eliot or George? Are there in fact different complicities at work, such that Eliot’s failure to condemn the Holocaust is inexcusably complicit in perpetuating anti-Semitism, one fundamental feature of German fascism, but not complicit in the development of a literary aesthetic that either represents National

Socialist ideology or reproduces the failure to think, what I call indifference throughout this project, on which National Socialism was able unconsciously to capitalize? My dissertation argues that this is in fact the case. Such “indifferent” art does not fit neatly into the categories of “autonomous” and “engaged” but rather describes art that is both negatively fascist, in the sense of not thematizing fascist ideology and fostering a sense of political indifference, and anti-aesthetic, in the sense of refusing the possibility of art, in this case a poem, to be read against itself. Insofar as this indifferent literary aesthetic is constitutive of what I would call “fascist modernism,” Eliot resists (the materiality and ideology of) fascism precisely insofar as he engages it on an aesthetic level in a way entirely distinct from literary propaganda and vapid neo-classicism. His poetry, as well as that of Stefan George and Friedrich Georg Jünger, represents a different side to a different coin.

This is the coin of conservatism, a political movement that the “third way” of National Socialism also purported to oppose. Throughout this project, the term “conservative” carries both a political and an aesthetic meaning. Politically, it refers to those ideological tenets of National Socialism that overlapped with the beliefs of self-identified conservatives, including anti-liberalism, anti-socialism, anti-Semitism, cultural essentialism, anti-modernism, and anti-rationalism. In Germany, many prominent conservative Weimar writers and intellectuals have been associated with fascism because of one or more of these tenets, including Stefan George, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Gottfried Benn, Ernst Jünger, Hans Grimm, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Oswald Spengler, Ludwig Klages, and Edgar Julius Jung. The charges of fascism vary for each author: George’s millenarianism, Hofmannsthal’s cultural conservatism, Benn’s irrationalism, Jünger’s total mobilization and celebration of violence, Grimm’s

anti-Semitism, van den Bruck's nationalism, Spengler's pessimism, Klages's vitalism, Jung's authoritarianism. While there was never a successful unified effort among these writers to form a cohesive political movement, they are commonly grouped as members of the "conservative revolution." While historians of the conservative revolution have stressed to varying degrees the political significance of each of the above tendencies, they agree that the conservative revolutionaries were all, to borrow from the title of Martin Travers's book on the movement, "critics of modernity." This argument, in light of Jeffrey Herf's notion of reactionary modernism, is hardly enough to render the broader movement complicit in the support of fascist ideology. Arguments connecting the conservative revolution to fascism tend therefore to rely either on individual case studies or, as Robert Norton has recently argued, a more generalized sense of an aesthetic revolution.<sup>3</sup>

While Norton's point is well taken, he places considerable emphasis on political activism, on the desire to enact social and political reform. While the conservative revolutionaries were "critics of modernity," this often meant that they were drawn in one way or another to fascism less as the aestheticization *of* politics and more as aestheticization *as* politics (one exception to this is Edgar Julius Jung, the speechwriter for Franz von Papen who was murdered in the Night of the Long Knives). This is an important distinction that, while it most certainly does not hold for many writers who joined the NSDAP in the 1930s, still qualifies a conservative position vis-à-vis fascism prior to the *Machtergreifung*. I therefore also define "conservative" in an aesthetic sense as a hybrid of autonomous and engaged art, a kind of indifferent art, and it is by this definition that I both reimagine high modernism's complicity in the success of fascism

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<sup>3</sup> "In the decades leading up to 1933 and during the twelve years that followed there was a concerted effort first to envision and then to enact the so-called 'conservative revolution' described by Hofmannsthal" (Norton 271).



but also distinguish on aesthetic grounds between the conservative and the fascist poem. The conservative poem produces the effects of “engagement” only insofar as it makes constant recourse to nonpolitical (or politically permissive) autonomy; however, it also registers the failure of this recourse by opening itself up to being read against itself. The fascist poem (or literary work more broadly, though this study focuses on poetry) rejects the possibility of this failure, performing either pure autonomy or escapism (like entertainment literature) or pure engagement (like propaganda). In his book *Sublime Failures: The Ethics of Kant and Sade*, David Martyn also draws on deconstruction – namely de Man and Derrida – to argue similarly that Kantian systematizing, when read alongside Sadean libertinism, makes constant recourse to its own failure. It is precisely such failure that Martyn associates with the ethical and the sublime. “[The strength of Kant and Sade] is the steadfastness with which they stick to their totalitarian desire for purity and wholeness, thereby to occasion a failure of totalization more ethical and more sublime than anything they or any other ‘subject’ could ever have desired” (169). In this sense, the aesthetic event of failure in the poetry of Stefan George or T. S. Eliot distinguishes it from the totalizing fascist poem. I associate this event with conservatism because it is not strictly anti-fascist but rather performs the failure implicit in, and rejected by, fascism. It does this by taking seriously either some aspect of fascist ideology, like masculine hero worship, or the aestheticization of politics more generally.

For writers such as George, Hofmannsthal, Kommerell, Benn, and Jünger, revolution was mediated and contained by the literary-aesthetic-spiritual realm. It necessitated a kind of aesthetic experience that was distinct from the material, socio-political revolution promised by fascism. This difference is slight, and it bears asking if we should maintain it at all, if it really matters to historical understandings of aesthetic

conservatism and political fascism. Why I insist that it does, however, is precisely because of the large corpus of nonpolitical fascist cultural production. By splitting this hair, the continuity from the *aesthetics* (rather than aesthetic) of the conservative revolutionaries to banal fascism is rendered more pronounced, a complicity that does not rely on the identification of or association with an ideology but rather with the unconscious and material proliferation of its desired effect, coordination. A more purely psychoanalytic approach might consider this the inverse of Klaus Theweleit's notion of *Männerphantasien*, whereby the allure of fascism for World War I veterans derived from the violent misogyny cultivated during their experience at the front, such that fascism capitalizes on the desire to overcomplicate politics.

In this sense of the material proliferation of indifference as one aspect of the program of *Gleichschaltung*, George's or Eliot's nonpolitical poetry might be considered complicit. However, to accuse art of political complicity purely on the basis of not committing itself to political resistance fails to account for art's multiplicity, its ability, as Barthes says, to allow us "to understand speech outside the bounds of power." It is in this sense that I draw on another accused fascist, Paul de Man, as well as the great critic of fascism Theodor Adorno, in order to further delineate the nonpolitical dimension of fascist modernism but also to challenge the accusations of historical indifference that have haunted deconstruction. In fact, by demonstrating how deconstruction allows the possibility of re-inscribing the historicity of affect, I argue not only for the socio-historical relevance of deconstructive methodologies, but also the potential of such methodologies to lay bare an aesthetic critique of affect impossible on the political plane. Such readings reveal how poetry can dramatize a critique of indifference the possibility for which fascist modernism necessarily forecloses.

The privileging of high art is therefore one undercurrent that runs through this project, and for good reason. The writers in question were conservative; they believed in high art, whereas the fascists did not. Or rather, fascism sought to annihilate dominant critical perceptions of high art, to impose from above the parameters by which art is considered “high” or “low” (degenerate). In this very narrow sense of imposing the standards for high art from some privileged vantage point, the high modernists, Adorno and de Man, and Goebbels are not so different. But deconstruction, as a particular mode of literary analysis, need not eschew entirely historical context. When employed alongside Adorno’s argument that lyric poetry reads the sundial of history, this modified deconstructive methodology provides the tools for understanding art free from the relativity of which deconstruction is often accused. Art itself thus provides the grounds for similitude and differentiation, such that fascist modernism is constituted by a rejection of aesthetic indeterminacy, which in turn confirms historical scholarship on popular opinion that has demonstrated the uncritical nature of the widespread enthusiasm for the regime. While disengaged from politics, the conservative aesthetic that I examine in this study does not actively question or challenge such enthusiasm; it does, however, lay bare the grounds for critiquing fascist ideology’s rejection of the possibility of failure. This argument could hold for the relationship between any aesthetic regime and political category, such that a nonpolitical and uncritical poem from the Soviet Union could be classed as communist, just as one written in the US today could be classed as democratic, insofar as it proliferates the effects of that political ideology without challenging it (à la Brecht) or opening it to an aesthetic critique (à la George, Eliot).

This argument, however, does not simply set out to exonerate certain poems and poets from an association with fascism, a point that can be demonstrated in the context of gender. The gendering of poetic debates, as we see with fascist subjects and their enemies, was central to scholarly and popular literary debate at the turn of the century and following World War I. Essentializing concepts of gender were used as a paradigm to understand and categorize poetic form in both the Anglo-American and the German tradition. For the polemical English writer T. E. Hulme, the romantic was feminine and the classical masculine. Referring to Rousseau's notion of man in the state of nature, he considers the romantic a feminine state of infinite possibility, free from the ordered confines of "inequality" and social and political structures; its opposite is the classical, or masculine, to which he repeatedly refers as "dry," "hard," "ordered," and "finite." These ontological categories for the state of man correspond to aesthetic categories, and the qualities and modifiers he applies to each view similarly correspond to the mode of aesthetic production from that period. "The dry hardness which you get in the classics is absolutely repugnant to [the Romantics]. Poetry that isn't damp isn't poetry at all. They cannot see that accurate description is a legitimate object of verse. Verse to them always means a bringing in of the emotions that are grouped round the word infinite" (126-7). Hulme's polemics present poetry in dichotomous terms: dry or damp, hard or soft, descriptive or emotional, finite or infinite. Each of these adjectives bespeaks in turn both a gender, male or female, and a politics, conservative or liberal. Romanticism, by Hulme's logic, is therefore feminine, liberal, metaphysical, and stagnant. These arguments were highly influential for Ezra Pound, who took to the radio to support Mussolini almost thirty years after helping found imagism, a movement much indebted to Hulme's influence.

Debates about poetry in Germany were similarly gendered, with perhaps more immediately visible political ramifications. As Mark Elliot argues, “debates [about modern German poetry] were governed on all levels and across the political spectrum by a gendered paradigm: a hierarchical opposition between ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ that had been established by right-wing ideologues before 1933” (Elliot 908). As Elliot goes on to argue, this dichotomy could be mapped onto two poets. “[Stefan] George was largely equated positively with masculinity, discipline, and associated aesthetic categories, such as formal restraint, and Rilke negatively with femininity, decadence, and fluidity of aesthetic form.” One can see the influence of such rhetoric in an essay-letter from 1939 by the Austrian poet Josef Weinheber, a supposed inner emigrant who often wrote in support of National Socialism during the later years of the regime, reflecting on his relationship to Rilke from years earlier. “[I]ch begann ihn zu hassen, ich machte ihn bei mir selbst verächtlich, als form- und zuchtlos, molluskenhaft und weibisch” (in Berger 213). This masculinist perspective persisted even after the war. In recounting her education immediately following her release from the camps, Ruth Klüger writes, “Another of our teachers, a veteran who was doing his first year of practice teaching at a local school, complained about the discipline problems he encountered. He told us that boys at least had a sense of honor to which he could appeal, which was lacking in girls... While Germans had to revise their judgment of Jews, however reluctantly and sporadically, they didn’t even try to revise their Nazi-bred contempt for women. I learned so little from this man that I don’t even remember what subject he taught. I was also told that Rilke, whose poetry I had just discovered, was too feminine. No man should write such verse, which was only good enough for poetesses” (162). Gottfried Benn, in his “Rede auf Stefan George” also emphasizes the

importance of form, in a classical and masculine sense. "In der Dichtung entscheidet nicht der Sinn, sondern die Form... Es gibt nur den Geist und das Schicksal, die Religion ohne Götter, oder die neuen Götter: Form und Zucht" (487-489). Drawing on the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg's notion of the aesthetic will, Benn relates George's formal hardness to the masculine German will to overcome.

The irony here is that even by the political, gender-essentializing standards of Hulme, Weinheber, and Benn, there is no unifying formal, aesthetic quality among the nonpolitical works of Pound, Weinheber, and George that corresponds to a political category. In fact, an Adornian-deconstructive approach foregrounds how "masculine" and "feminine" as qualifiers of poetry are discursively constructed (ultimately for non-aesthetic purposes). Among thematically similar poetry by all three poets, there are radical formal differences. More importantly, many poems by all three men - which a gendered poetics would describe as masculine and affectless - actively reinscribe both subjectivity and emotion, allegorizing the relation between subject and feeling in ways that fail to cohere around some essential "masculine" or "feminine" set of qualities. The notion of a fascist modernist poem, thus, requires determination by a set of aesthetic criteria (the foreclosure of aesthetic indeterminacy and the rejection of allegory) that adhere to an observable aesthetic trend (the imitation of neo-classical forms and the thematizing of neo-idealist platitudes) during a particular historical moment (the political reign of fascism, whose success was facilitated in part by escapist entertainment literature). The poetry of Agnes Miegel therefore belongs as much to fascist modernism as does that of Josef Weinheber, a grouping that reveals the violent homogenizing impulse of fascism, its assimilation of all that challenges the hegemonic masculinity on which it depended.

In this sense, my dissertation draws on the central thesis of Roger Griffin's recent book *Fascism and Modernism*. "The thesis explored in this book," Griffin writes, "is unrepentantly 'big'. It maintains that a fundamentally homogeneous and uniform psycho-cultural matrix generates not just the bewildering proliferation of heterogeneous aesthetic, cultural, and social forms of modernism, but conditions – without *determining* them – the ideologies, policies, and praxis of generic fascism as well. In short, it claims that fascism can be usefully, but not exclusively, analyzed as a *form of modernism*" (Griffin 38). My dissertation considers fascism as a form of modernism by isolating the convergence between one of its particular political (the conservative revolution) precursors and aesthetic (literary) emanations.

There immediately arises one problem in conflating the aesthetic with the literary in the context of de Man, since de Man himself resists this conflation: "In [*The Resistance to Theory*], he contrasts aesthetics with poetics in terms of the concern in poetics with 'a nonconvergence between "meaning" with "the devices that produce meaning,"' aesthetics by implication basing itself on such a convergence" (Loesberg 89). Critiquing what he calls "aesthetic ideology" became the object of much of de Man's late criticism, a concept that Martin Jay finds resonant with Lacoue-Labarthe's and Nancy's notion of eidaesthetics, "whose task is the overcoming of differences, contradictions, and disharmonies. Although implicitly challenged by a counterimpulse they call 'romantic equivocity,' the telos of eidaesthetics is the closure of a complete work produced by an omnipotent subject, who realizes the Idea in sensual form" (46). As Jay writes, "for de Man, it was literary language's resistance to closure, transparency, harmony, and perfection that could be pitted against the aesthetic ideology" (48). In Jay's reading of

Jonathan Culler's defense of de Man, "de Man's realization of this opposition demonstrates his rejection of his earlier collaborationist position."

For Jay, de Man's notion of aesthetic ideology is "one-dimensionally negative" and "reducible to the nightmare of seductive sensuality that appears to have kept de Man restlessly tossing and turning in his bed of linguistic austerity" (51). However, with regards to the very specific context of fascist (literary) aesthetics, the extremeness of de Man's "hostility to natural metaphors of organic wholeness" serves to foreground the political nature of such metaphors (48). Considering Adorno's dialectical understanding of lyric poetry's ability to register the materiality of social conflict, my dissertation claims that the fascist modernist poem collapses the tension between the literary and the aesthetic such that lyric poetry performs, rather than registers, the material forces driving social conflict (whether in the form of hegemonic masculinity, biological racism, political indifference, etc.). In this sense, de Man's distinction between poetics and aesthetics bears a heavy political burden worthy of the overstatement with which de Man warns of sensual and transparent language. By maintaining a tension between meaning and the devices that produce it, certain modernist poetry is able to dramatize the failure of conservatism, no less than the failures of fascism, in such a way that fascist modernist poetry disallows.

If we follow Stanley Payne's argument that fascism was anti-liberal, anti-communist, and anti-conservative, then my research also posits an implicit, arguably more speculative, argument that hinges on the discrepancy between the poetic discontinuity and aesthetic continuity between conservative and fascist modernists. On the one hand, both conservatives and fascists insisted on the utmost social and political value of poetry; their respective enactment of poetic form, however, speaks precisely to



either the acknowledgement or refutation of political failure. In this sense, it might be possible to theorize fascism's negation of conservatism as an aesthetic phenomenon. This negation would not be grounded on the aestheticization of politics but rather aestheticization as an almost psychoanalytic process of sublimating the very failure immanent in the paradoxes of fascist ideology and praxis. The failure of this sublimation of failure thus acts as a defense mechanism whereby one is tempted to strive for the permanence seemingly offered by natural and transparent representation. Obstructed by this temptation, the fascist modernist poem produces a regime of signification pathologically determined to annihilate the difference between meaning and the devices that produce it. Unobstructed by such temptation, the conservative modernist poem makes both this failure as well as its own failure (indeterminacy, helplessness) its object. In this way it is no less complicit in the success of fascism, though it nonetheless insists on the very rhetoricity, and absence, that fascism seeks to destroy.

Chapter II begins with the controversy surrounding major events of Stefan George's life, including his study with Mallarmé, the founding of the George Circle, his correspondences and interactions with key National Socialist officials, and finally his trip to Switzerland at the end of his life. Drawing on Stefan Breuer's notion of "aesthetic fundamentalism," I argue that George's conception of conservatism sought to fashion itself constitutively apolitical, or disinterested in direct social or political engagement, insofar as it conceived of politics as circumscribed by aesthetics. Drawing on de Man's notion of allegory and Adorno's argument in "Lyric Poetry and Society," I then proceed to perform readings of three of George's most political poems: *Algabal*, "Der Dichter in Zeiten der Wirren," and "Einem jungen Führer im ersten Weltkrieg." Each of these

poems, I argue, dramatizes the failure of political indifference in such a way that opens such indifference up to an aesthetic critique.

Chapter III broadens the scope of my dissertation to include poetry from the Anglo-American tradition in order to account for the question of "protofascism" removed from the geographical locus of National Socialism. It begins with a reading of Shelley's "Ozymandias," a poet and poem traditionally grouped with the political left. By arguing that "Ozymandias" presents not only a critique of authoritarianism and empire but also a critique of revolution, I identify a conservative strain in the poem in which the indeterminacy of poetic language dramatizes a way out of political commitment to one side of the Hegelian dialectic. After surveying critiques of T. S. Eliot's sympathy to fascism in his poetry and the *Criterion*, I then draw on this reading of "Ozymandias" to consider two of Eliot's most direct meditations on politics, *Four Quartets* and (the unfinished sequence) *Coriolan*. Each poetic sequence, I argue, thematizes political failure while dramatizing the relationship between politics and art, what Eliot calls the "pre-political." This relationship is summarily expressed in the final words of *Coriolan*, "RESIGN RESIGN RESIGN," which operate both diegetically and rhetorically. That is, while the poem ends abruptly with a call for the dictator to quit his position, it also calls for the poem to quit its attempt at political engagement. The repetition of these capitalized words calls attention to their ultimate signification, the necessary re-signing of political aesthetics, from a critique of material failures to a poetic and ultimately spiritual affirmation of those greatest of human failures, mortality and finitude.

Chapter IV begins by considering the material failures of Weimar conservatives, most notably the DNVP, who believed that forming a coalition with the NSDAP would

allow them the opportunity to exert some degree of influence over Hitler. It first establishes for one particular strain of conservative thought a general backdrop of failure, from the perception of Weimar democracy to the ineffectualness of Hugenberg, von Papen, and other conservative political leaders. It is against this backdrop that the “conservative revolution” is not only born but also developed throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. Tracing this idea through Thomas Mann’s early conservatism and glossing its various manifestations in the work of writers such as Spengler, Ernst Jünger, Hofmannsthal, and Kommerell, I demonstrate the recourse to literature in conservative revolutionaries’ effort to overcome failure. Following Keith Bullivant’s argument that this idealist-literary aspect of the conservative revolution was constitutively nonpolitical, I argue that the movement helped give credibility to National Socialism because of its failure to distinguish art from politics, a difference fundamental to my understanding of the poetry of George and Eliot.

Chapter V then considers the transformation of conservative thought on literature into the 1930s, comparing it with Nazi literary policy and cultural practice, and individual accounts of literature by Nazi party members and officials, most notably Hans Friedrich Blunck, who served for a period as president of the Reichsschrifttumskammer (RSK). Namely, I demonstrate how conservative and fascist writers tried to reclaim political significance for nonpolitical, ostensibly neo-classical, literature. Together with the relative success of nonpolitical “Unterhaltungsliteratur,” I theorize this proliferation of indifference as one aspect of the Nazi program of *Gleichschaltung*, the (likely unconscious, or at least unintended) coordination of a banal disinterest in politics where active political participation was ruefully absent. Finally, in the Conclusion, I consider Friedrich Georg Jünger’s poem “Der Mohn,” which

represents a conservative attempt, in the sense of my readings of George and Eliot, to politicize indifference in an effort to actively combat the proliferation of a nonpolitical literature (for an audience, presumable, more inclined to stay out of things) theorized by the conservative revolutionaries.

Some fifty years after Hofmannsthal delivered his address on language and the conservative revolution to a Munich auditorium, another pronouncement of the revolutionary power of language was uttered in Paris. In his inaugural lecture as the Chair of Literary Semiology, Roland Barthes referred to literature as a “permanent revolution of language.” Language, Barthes says, “is quite simply fascist; for fascism does not prevent speech, it compels speech. Once uttered, even in the subject’s deepest privacy, speech enters the service of power.” Insofar as language is both authoritative and stereotypical, whenever I speak I am both master and slave, “I assert *tellingly* what I repeat.” The lesson of semiotic post-structuralism, as Barthes indicates, is that interpretation provides us a way out of language’s fascist control. Literature provides us the tools necessary “to understand speech *outside the bounds of power*.” It is precisely this mode of understanding, of interpretation in its most basic sense, which fascism sought to coopt, if not annihilate entirely. To accuse the poetry of Eliot or George of fascism, even protofascism, is to overlook the desire in their writing to challenge the fascist desire to compel speech, a desire evident in the poetry produced and circulated under National Socialism’s program of coordination. To accuse deconstruction of fascism, even of relativism, is to overlook its most basic tenet: the Nietzschean will to interpretation demands that language be put under scrutiny such that where possibilities for meaning are actively rejected, readerly suspicion and condemnation are aroused. In a sense, this is precisely what characterizes National Socialism: the rejection of the possibility for

meaning in human life. In his 1963 study of National Socialist literature, Joseph Wulf wrote the following.

Ein so undeutscher Geist – um im NS-Jargon zu sprechen – wie Friedrich Sieburg mit seinem brillanten Verstand verfiel damals auf die Idee, unter Umständen müsse ‘ein Volk eines Tages zwischen sich selbst und der Humanität’ wählen.

Schrieben sie alle für ihr Volk oder vielmehr für das Regime?

Da steckt der Verrat!

Niemand mußte unbedingt NSDAP-Mitglied sein, um als Schriftsteller solchen Treubruch zu begehen... Der Scheideweg lag damals nicht zwischen rechts und links, war keine Frage von radikal oder konservativ, sondern lediglich eine Frage des Charakters und der menschlichen Haltung. (10)

Ultimately, my study is an attempt to understand this question of the human character as it presents itself in what historically has been considered the most human of literary forms, the lyric poem. While it does focus primarily on conservative beneficiaries of National Socialism, to borrow a term applied most recently to white Afrikaners under apartheid, I try never to forget that any study of this period is a study of the betrayal of people, humanity, in the name of “the people.” The methodology with which I proceed in this dissertation provides what I consider to be the clearest way of revealing how the Nazi rejection of difference and rejection of meaning manifest in poetic form. In performing such rejection, the Nazi fascist poem also rejects the possibility of finding meaning in and empathizing with others, one cornerstone of being human that National Socialism not only disregarded, but sought actively and violently to annihilate.

## CHAPTER II

### “DIE GESETZE DES GEISTIGEN UND DES POLITISCHEN”: ALLEGORIES OF INTERPRETATION IN STEFAN GEORGE’S POLITICAL POETRY

In his recent, award-winning monograph on the “afterlife” of Stefan George (1865-1933), Ulrich Raulff describes how the critical discourse surrounding George’s life and poetry has been marked by a complicated relationship with National Socialism. “Spätestens seit diesem Augenblick, Ende 1933, hat sich ein dauerhaftes Diskursschema etabliert: Hier George der politische Seher (oder Scharlatan), dort George, der reine, tiefe Dichter.” Shaped like a “Y,” or what Ernst Jünger calls a “Zwille,” the political half of the schema is further bisected, such that there have developed three distinct Stefan Georges. “[Des Schemas] politischer Ast ist in zwei Zweige gespalten: Der eine führt zu George, dem Visionär und Warner, der andere zu George, dem Verführer und Wegbereiter des Faschismus. Auf der anderen, ungespaltenen Seite des Y-Schemas steht Georges reines, einzig der Kunst ergebendes Schöpfertum” (Raulff 51). This interpretive split has occurred in large part because George, who studied under Mallarmé, abided by the principles of *l’art pour l’art*, and insisted throughout his life that poetry’s preeminent role in cultural renewal was as high art, both behaved in a manner and composed poetry that resonates eerily with the practices and revolutionary ideology of the emerging NSDAP.<sup>4</sup> Critics have turned to a number of sources to detail George’s indirect complicity, including: the George Circle, which was structured around a charismatic

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<sup>4</sup> As Paul de Man notes, “George claimed that ‘from him, no road led to science’” (“Modern Poetics in France and Germany” 157).

figure of authority; the work of his disciples, which was occasionally anti-Semitic;<sup>5</sup> his association with Verlag Georg Bondi, which, as the exclusive publisher of George's *Geistbücher* and *Blätter für die Kunst*, stamped a swastika on the front of each publication (and this despite his association with the Jewish historian Ernst Kantorwicz); and of course both George's own actions, such as his decision to remain in Germany after 1933, as well as his most political poetry.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, understandings of George's poetry and politics are often anachronistically overdetermined by the Holocaust. The same interpretive schema that has emerged regarding George's biography has in turn established itself around this poetry, such that rhetorical readings – implied as descendants of the nationalist component of Gottfried Benn's argument in *Rede über Stefan George*, in which he likens the poet to the Nazi intellectual Alfred Rosenberg – have become regarded as increasingly fraught.<sup>7</sup> Any rhetorical reading that would take seriously George's insistence that poetry is a "formal organization of language" now finds itself suffocating from the need to address George's appropriation by, and sympathy with, nationalist, and often by extension fascist, causes: they must either dissociate the poet and/or his poetry from the context of National Socialism entirely or perform readings *in spite of* his complicated biography (Travers 22). In light of recent research that demonstrates the

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<sup>5</sup> Klaus Landfried, among others, insists that George did not share the enthusiasm for anti-Semitism rampant among conservatives. "Der im deutschen Konservatismus oft anklingende Antisemitismus blieb George fremd. Seine 'Vaterländische Wendung' nach der Wiederentdeckung Hölderlins war faktisch eine Wendung zur deutschen Kulturtradition, sozusagen eine Wendung von der Innerlichkeit eines internationalen Künstlerkreises zur Innerlichkeit eines metaphysischen 'Herkunftsgemeinschaft'" (243).

<sup>6</sup> "[The swastika] continued to be used to identify the works of the George Circle even after [George's] death." (Norton 278).

<sup>7</sup> Appropriate to this argument, Benn also maintains in the same speech that George's poetry embodies the tenants of *l'art pour l'art*.

extent to which George's life provided intellectual and artistic credence to the *Zeitgeist* that pervaded late-Weimar Germany and led to the success of the NSDAP, to ignore this relationship would be to perform an historical injustice. However, implicitly dismissing a rhetorical approach in the act of proving that George's poetry is a reflection of his "nascent fascism" performs a disservice of its own, namely to the poet's insistence both on the authority of his spiritual craft and, as he said late in his life, that "die gesetze des geistigen und des politischen sind gewiss sehr verschieden." Formalist criticism, rather than further obstructing or concealing some "secret" desire or sympathy for fascism, provides a way of reading the ambivalence towards the movement, and towards the role that poetry could or must play in its instatement, that George himself expressed explicitly in his personal life.

Of George's large body of work, three of his poems give voice to a concrete political position: *Algabal*, "Der Dichter in Zeiten der Wirren," and "Einem Jungen Führer im Ersten Weltkrieg." Each of these poems thematizes a conservative desire for cultural renewal (as opposed to liberal, cosmopolitan modernity), a kind of social revolution, by featuring a political leader determined to remake the world: respectively, a ruthless emperor, a young leader in the aftermath of World War I, and a mythological savior who will found "das Neue Reich." However, rather than subordinating the innovative possibility inherent in poetic form and language to a political position, each of George's poems acutely calls attention to itself as poetry. As prominently as they depict political subjectivity, the poems foreground poetic agency – the poetic will, the poetic utterance, and the poetic trope – thereby performing the limit that art reaches when striving to effect (or affect) the revolutionary politics that it describes. Each of these poems therefore allegorizes an orientation towards the relationship between art



and politics that it deems fundamentally inadequate. They dramatize the ambiguities and problems that historicist accounts have uncovered in George's own biography: namely that the George Circle, designed as a platform for discussing purely aesthetic concerns, was a microcosm of the cult of National Socialism, and that George, despite rejecting an invitation to join the Nazis' reconstituted Writers' Academy in 1933 and traveling to Switzerland, nonetheless spiritually remained in Nazi Germany.<sup>8</sup>

The rhetorical methodology employed here determines George's political poetry as a dramatization of his own conflicted orientation towards politics comes primarily from two sources: Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) and Paul de Man (1919-1983). In "Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft," Adorno claims that lyric poetry and the poetic subject are able to "read the sundial of history" by registering social conflicts and injustices, which are immanent to the form of the work of art. "Das lyrische Gebilde," he argues, "sei stets auch der subjektive Ausdruck eines gesellschaftlichen Antagonismus."<sup>9</sup> In the case of these three poems, this antagonism is a negative, though arguably conflicted, relationship to fascist politics. Unlike what Adorno calls "representational" art, such as German naturalism, or "engaged" art, such as Brecht's epic theater, George's poetry is not altogether disinterested in politics; on the contrary, it is interested in delineating, if at all possible, where art ends and politics begins, a project that concerned and troubled George not only in his art, but also in his personal life.<sup>10</sup> Like Adorno's understanding of

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<sup>8</sup> While George's friend Robert Boehringer initially made this claim about his travel to Switzerland shortly after George's death, numerous critics have sought to dispute this interpretation.

<sup>9</sup> Adorno continues, "Da aber die objektive Welt, welche Lyrik hervorbringt, an sich die antagonistische ist, so geht der Begriff von Lyrik nicht auf im Ausdruck der Subjektivität, der die Sprache Objektivität schenkt." (58).

<sup>10</sup> Adorno's argument is keenly aware of this tension in George's work, which he sees embodied by the single word "gar." "Aber die großen Kunstwerke sind jene, die an ihren fragwürdigsten

autonomous art, George's lyric retreats into itself as the site of political revolution; as I demonstrate in Chapters IV and V, however, this event carries the possibly unintended, or unconscious, political effect of disengaging with material politics, an indifference, or "failure to think," on which National Socialism was opportunistically able, unintentionally or unconsciously, to capitalize.

The following reading also requires a look back at deconstruction, particularly the trajectory of its most divisive advocate. Not incidentally, the insistence on historicism in George criticism is emblematic of a theoretical paradigm shift that occurred in the 1980s, in the wake of the controversy surrounding the discovery of Paul de Man's wartime writings.<sup>11</sup> "To judge from various recent publications," de Man writes in the opening essay of *Allegories of Reading* from 1979, "the spirit of the times is not blowing in the direction of formalist and intrinsic criticism" (3). Such criticism, however, is key to reconciling the various poles of Raulff's schema, insofar as it opens up a way of thinking through how "social antagonisms," and even biographical indeterminacy, are emergent in a work of art. Incidentally, the trajectory of de Man's own work, no less than the work itself, provides a framework for revealing an orientation towards politics in George's most political poems that insists on its own powerlessness in the realm of direct political influence. Namely, in his most political

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Stellen Glück haben... [so verhält es] sich auch mit dem 'gar,' einem Goetheschen 'Bodensatz des Absurden,' mit dem die Sprache der subjektiven Intention entflieht, die das Wort herbeizog.... Zog ihr Ausdruck sich zusammen in den individuellen, so wie sie ihn ganz mit Substanz und Erfahrung der eigenen Einsamkeit sättigt, dann wird eben diese Rede zur Stimme der Menschen, zwischen denen die Schranke fiel" (67-8).

<sup>11</sup> "The de Man affair, as though orchestrated by some hidden hand of history, curiously coincided with a downturn in those intellectual fortunes, and some at least of the ill feeling associated with the rumpus sprang from a current of theory which now felt that its back was increasingly to the wall. Rightly or wrongly, deconstruction stood accused among other sins of an unhistorical formalism; and throughout the 1980s, not least in the United States, there had been a gathering swell floating literary theory back in the direction of some brand of historicism." (Eagleton 197).

poems, George draws attention to this political limit of aesthetic form through what de Man calls allegory, a “distance in relation to its own origin,” the deferral of political revolution through its poetically- (formally- and linguistically-)constituted realization.<sup>12</sup> Such a reading salvages the aesthetic merit of George’s poetry by defining it not as a suspiciously apolitical allegory for the ambitions of art, but rather as a (political) allegory for the process of working out the relationship between art and politics.

Rather than conceiving of Raulff’s Y three-dimensionally, such that to analyze a poem is to drop it on the apex and see down which side it tumbles, this argument instead abstracts from the Y a Venn diagram in which aesthetics and politics overlap. Seeking to move beyond the association of formalism with a disinterest in, and even rejection of, history, it therefore proceeds from both George’s own emphasis that “die gesetze des geistigen und des politischen sind gewiss sehr verschieden” as well as Robert Norton’s argument that “[i]t was owing in no small measure to the extraordinary prestige, even veneration, that George enjoyed among his German contemporaries that it was possible for Hitler to benefit from the conflation of aesthetic and political authority George represented in the public mind and for Hitler’s form of rule to enjoy the legitimacy it did” (Norton 279). While these two analytical points of origin seem contradictory – the one separates aesthetics and politics whereas the other brings them together – that is precisely the point.<sup>13</sup> George did not seem to know what he wanted (to

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<sup>12</sup> This characterization of allegory is not unlike George’s notion of “Denkbild.” See Berghahn, “A View Through the Red Window: Ernst Bloch’s *Spuren*” 204-210.

<sup>13</sup> Stefan Breuer identifies a similar tension with his concept of “aesthetic fundamentalism.” This philosophy, which he traces from German Romanticism through Wagner and Nietzsche to George and his disciples, viewed art as the most essential means of inspiring social transformation but is not, in itself, in the service of politics. “[Dieses Buch] geht... um das, was sich maßgebliche Gruppen der deutschen Gesellschaft zu einer bestimmten Zeit von der Kunst erhofften, nämlich Impulse für eine Neugestaltung des Ganzen schlechthin” (Breuer 8).

believe), and drawing on de Man's notion of allegory and its place in the development of his work allows a way of reading George's poetry as a dramatization of the ambiguities, the problems, and especially the contradictions implicit in both interpreting his poetry and reconstructing his biography. I will go on to argue throughout my dissertation that this indeterminacy, what Klaus Landfried calls the "politik des Unpolitischen," is a kind of poetic dramatization of what publication records show to have been the widespread retreat to nonpolitical or entertainment literature that contributed to an Arendtian "failure to think" and contributed, in some small way, to the rise and success of fascism.<sup>14</sup>

In de Man's dissertation on Mallarmé and Yeats from 1960, which had originally been planned to include a third part on Stefan George, de Man develops the concept of the emblem, distinguishing it from the poetic image. Yeats, he argues, begins his career by using primarily natural, mimetic images. In his later poetry, however, he experiences a kind of crisis of the natural image because it reveals itself as contradictory: it is indispensable as the necessary starting point of an image, but "by its mere presence [it] voids the poet's hope to find permanence in words" ("Image and Emblem" 160). These natural images, in Yeats's mature work, become emblems, linguistic events, accretions of signification, which reveal the inadequacy and downfall of the image while also seeming to offer up access to something more eternal. As de Man argues, what were once "mimetic nouns referring to natural objects which the poet claims to present to us as perceived by him" no longer have any mimetic reference whatsoever. "The images have given up all pretense at being natural objects and have become something else. They are taken from the literary tradition and receive their meaning from traditional or personal,

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<sup>14</sup> See Landfried, *Stefan George – Politik des Unpolitischen* 187-249.

but not from natural associations" (164-5). For de Man, the emblem springs up from "literary tradition," what he later figures more explicitly as language itself; rather than signifying, the emblem emerges as signification from signification. However, as Forest Pyle elucidates, "the course of Yeats's mature poetry is marked by a series of progressively powerful failures: the 'downfall' of the image and the inability of the emblem to fulfill the profound 'hopes Yeats had invested' in them... As de Man understands it, the trajectory of Yeats's poetry is one of sheer and successive negations" (Pyle 187). As a result, de Man's later work engages very similar questions through a modified conceptual framework.

The basic impulse of de Man's chapter on Yeats – establishing the difference between the mimetic and the arbitrary – thus becomes the basis for his much later work "The Rhetoric of Temporality," which, rather than image and emblem, uses the concepts of symbol and allegory.<sup>15</sup> Drawing on Coleridge's conception of the symbol as transparent, "conceived as an expression of unity between the representative and the semantic function of language," de Man challenges the notion that the hallmark of romantic poetry was its use of the symbol ("Rhetoric of Temporality 189). "Unlike the impressionists, whose light almost possesses volume, Yeats's light is pure transparency, the fitting lack of texture for the *sign* which is there to reveal, not itself, but what stands behind it" (205). Rereading Yeats against Frank Kermode, de Man argues that the totalizing symbol of unity and reconciliation that Kermode reads in Yeats is actually allegory. "Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this

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<sup>15</sup> For a more thorough reading of this trajectory, see Balfour, "History against Historicism, Formal Matters and the Event of the Text: de Man with Benjamin."

temporal difference. In so doing, it prevents the self from an illusory identification with the non-self, which is now fully, though painfully, recognized as a non-self" (207). Like the emblem, the allegory is an event born from language into language, offering a glimpse of something that both "stands behind," and stands before, itself.

De Man's argument that allegory recognizes itself as a non-(identical) self – that it is not the signification (and identification) with something achieved by metaphor, but rather the signification (and deferral) of signification achieved by metonymy – indicates a "temporal" gap, or "void," between form and content, which do not directly correspond to each other. This emphasis, while it derives from de Man's early work on the emblem, is representative of what Jeffrey Librett calls de Man's "passage from a nationalist aestheticism which has as necessary condition the firm belief in the value of natural and adequate form [the "image"]... to an anti-nationalist anti-aestheticism which incessantly restates the implausibility of any belief in (this) value while acknowledging its own capacity to cease precisely *addressing* the problem of value" (320). Such aesthetic complicity in the political arena, which de Man rejects, has as its necessary condition "the commitment to the mutual and natural appropriateness of form and content" (314). Instead of this appropriateness, de Man's notion of allegory instates the notion of temporal distance, a distance always already occurring in language and unveiled by the act of deconstruction. George's poetry likewise rejects a "natural and adequate" nationalist form – one in which political value corresponds to and derives from aesthetic form, the poetic image – in an effort, however troubling, to render the belief in such mimetic and natural adequacy implausible. Forest Pyle has shown convincingly that for de Man, because the poetic image is self-originating, it is likewise "intentional," in the archaic sense of "an appearance," what the seventeenth-century Dutch logician Francis

Burgersdicious calls “species and specters of the sense and understanding, and other things whose essence only consists in their apparition” (in Pyle 197). For Pyle the de Manian image (in this case Percy Shelley’s “a shape all light” from *The Triumph of Life*) “produces no historical illumination... we might call it an event, but only if we understand by event that which undoes the possibility of historical reckoning. If this is a visual image, there is nothing ‘pictorial’ about it” (201). Making this very same distinction between a pictorial and rhetorical image, my reading of George’s poetry proposes that we include to what Pyle refers to as “history” the concept of political commitment and value.

George’s poetry dramatizes this “undoing [of] the possibility of historical reckoning” primarily through its use of prophecy, a temporal difference, the signification of signification, immanent in George’s most political poems, particularly two from *Das Neue Reich*.<sup>16</sup> These prophecies involve the convergence of a projection into the future and an exposition in the present; they are the instantaneous presentation of simultaneity and sequence, the collapsing of an origin and a distance, the necessarily inadequate paradox of which can be neither natural nor desirable. The “signification” of such a prophecy – the emblem that is “Das Neue Reich,” for example – is (dis)avowed in the “void of temporal difference,” the distance of the poetic prophecy in relation to its own origin, poetic language. This is not to liberate George’s poetry from fascist or

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<sup>16</sup> “[The Circle’s] approach was antiphilological in the extreme (not footnotes, sources, or bibliographies), but their merit lies rather in their respect for the autonomy of the poetic mind than in their attacks on traditional methods. The writer on literature must come as close as possible to the creative experience itself, helped in this by admiration and love for his subject rather than by scruples of accuracy and objectivity. There is great emphasis, also, on the messianic role of the poet as an almost superhuman figure, to be dealt with in a language closer to that of myth or religion than that of science...In... George himself, the tangible expression of the transcendental value of poetry was to be found in the perfection of the form; it was by the act of extreme formal discipline, a kind of ascesis of the form, that the poet earned the right to statements of prophetic weight.” (“Modern Poetics in France and Germany” 157).

totalitarian politics, but indeed quite the opposite, to read the poems as political insofar as they allegorize and think through, “figure and act out,” as Librett says, their own political impotence. “De Man’s ‘passage’ from adherence to the authority of form to adherence to the authority of (de)form(ation) names, then, neither an excuse nor a condemnation but the task to figure and act out political transformation at all times in terms other than those that promote the installation of any naturalized propriety of the desirable” (Librett 321). When read rhetorically, George’s poetry comes to “figure and act out” the political limit, rather than the untrammelled potential, of the poem. This process, explicit in George’s later poems such as “Der Dichter in Zeiten der Wirren,” is immanent primarily in his early, political aestheticist poem *Algabal*. Rather than represent the symbolism with which this poem is generally associated, it in fact allegorizes, or performs, George’s own indeterminate position towards aesthetics and politics embodied, at this point in his life, by the George Circle.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder painted one of the most critical images of George in his 1976 comedy *Satansbraten*, which satirizes Hitler’s charismatic yet destructive authoritarianism through the aspiring, revolutionary, and financially and morally bankrupt poet Walter Kranz (played by Kurt Raab). In the film, Kranz, suffering from severe writer’s block and having never heard of Stefan George, suddenly begins composing inspired, verbatim reproductions of his poetry while the lives of those around him slip further into tragedy and absurdity. Kranz comically goes so far as to pay a coterie of young, attractive men to stage meetings of the famous “George-Kreis,” in which participants, dressed like classical writers such as Dante and Virgil, gathered to recite and discuss poetry. Historically, the George Circle, thought of by some as a microcosmic precursor of Nazi Germany’s cult of the charismatic individual with



George at its center, had its beginnings in the literary journal *Blätter für die Kunst*, which George and his disciples began publishing in 1892, when George was still attending the gatherings of Mallarmé, “le maître,” on which he modeled the Circle, and the same year that he published *Algabal*.

*Algabal* the poem concerns Algabal the politician, a Roman emperor alone in his underground kingdom of coal and crystal bent on overthrowing the base natural world through poetic will. Both the symbolist influence and the subject matter itself have led to political readings of the poem as a rebellion not only against the socio-political conditions of the period, but also nature itself. While this might seem contradictory, insofar as the material world is set in contradistinction to the natural world, such contradictions are in fact integral to George’s privileging of the aesthetic sphere. As Adorno writes more generally, “George ruft gegen jene Welt, die ihm als wurzellos erscheint, die Eindeutigkeit der Natur auf. Eindeutig aber wird dieser Moderne Natur nur durch Naturbeherrschung... Wer Natur nur denken kann, indem er ihr Gewalt antut, sollte nicht das eigene Wesen als Natur rechtfertigen. Solcher Widersinn ist das Georgesche Gegenbild zur Hofmannsthalschen Fiktion” (217).

Regarding politics specifically, *Algabal* makes no direct political commentary and is as much “about” poetry as it is about a tyrannical Roman emperor. While *Algabal* is typically considered distant enough from George’s “nascent fascism” that it escapes allegations of complicity, it nonetheless serves to dramatize the historical disagreement surrounding and contradictions of the George Circle, namely its ambitions to be the “secret” – and eventually real – Germany. By ascribing constructive authority to *Algabal* the poem, or to poetic language itself, rather than Algabal the ruler, the text allegorizes the inadequate relationship between (revolutionary) poetry and (authoritarian) politics,

the inability of the poetic to render fully and completely the political and the inability of the political to overcome the poetic.

This understanding of allegory derives from de Man's famous reading of the unity between the dancer and the dance in "Among School Children."<sup>17</sup> The dancing subject, in this case Algabal, and the material of dance, in this case poetic language, are "united." This unification is explicitly captured in the title, the doubling of signification that references both content and form, subject and object. In de Man's argument, however, what presents itself as unity is really characterized by an underlying confrontation: between the literal/thematic, Algabal the political ruler, and the rhetorical/formal, *Algabal* as poetic language. As de Man says of Yeats's famous line, "[t]he two readings have to engage each other in direct confrontation, for the one reading is precisely the error denounced by the other and has to be undone by it" ("Semiotics and Rhetoric" 12). This is precisely the problem faced by Ruliff's schematization of George scholarship: either Algabal is a political text, or it isn't. De Man's work, however, allows the possibility that the text is political insofar as it explores within the formal and rhetorical mode of poetry the (im)possibility of being political. Because Algabal is a political figure only insofar as he is *Algabal*, the text poetically constructs and limits the possibility of the political, reining it back into a confrontation with the text. Rather than referencing something outside of the text – whether past, future, or future anterior – or sending a message to that world, the text formally and

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<sup>17</sup> The final paragraph of *Lolita* also makes explicit that the novel is an allegory for the distance between art, as the collapse of subject and material, and life. "Thus, neither of us is alive when the reader opens this book. But while the blood still throbs through my writing hand, you are still as much part of blessed matter as I am, and I can still talk to you from here to Alaska. Be true to your Dick... And do not pity C. Q. One had to choose between him and H. H., and one wanted H. H. to exist at least a couple of months longer, so as to have him make you live in the minds of later generations. I am thinking of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art. And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita." (Nabokov 309).

even thematically points reflexively back at itself as an event in language. This self-reflexivity inverts the hierarchy that the poem initially presents, of a political figure creating his own artificial kingdom, suspending the two in unresolved tension.

An example of this self-reflexive allegorizing of the distance between art and politics occurs in the second section of *Algabal*, "Im Unterreich," which calls attention to itself as a poem through the thematic, formal, and rhetorical emphasis on mirrors and mirroring in the second stanza.

An allen seiten aufgereiht als spiegel  
- Gesamter städte ganzer staaten beute -  
Die ungeschmückten platten goldnen ziegel  
Und an der erde breiten löwenhäute.

There are three key images in this stanza – the "unadorned stones," the "golden bricks," and the "broad lionskins," – each of which serves to allegorize the relationship between art, the material of the poem, and politics, the subject of the poem. On the one hand, politics, as the poem's subject, materializes metonymically as these adornments of the emperor's *Unterreich*, the "booty of every state and city." These metonymic stones and bricks, however, are imbued with, and comprised of, poetic tropes: metaphor, as they are strung up "like mirrors," and symbolism, as they are "golden." The stones and bricks thematically adorn the poet's *Unterreich*, making the text "about" politics, but they also reflexively comprise one's experience (reading) "Im Unterreich," making the text as much "about" poetic language. And because metonymy and metaphor are not identical, since they refute each other, so too does each interpretation of the text refute the other. Because language itself constitutes this mutual refutation, the poem therefore dramatizes the foreclosure of the possibility of a purely political message.

This foreclosure derives from the fact that the experience of the *Unterreich*, as the second line indicates, is characterized as “beute.” The poem emphasizes this word spatially: it appears at the end of the line and right before a dash. The syntax of this line is also inverted such that it appears at the end of a clause. This emphasis is important because it calls attention to a word that represents the site of both political and aesthetic signification. On the one hand, “beute” connotes both “bounty,” “booty,” or “prize” as well as “prey.” As the potential “prey” of other cities and states, which wish to claim it as “booty,” this line figures the *Unterreich* as an object of political desire. On the other hand, however, the word is strikingly similar to the French “beauté” and the English “beauty,” a similarity that figures the *Unterreich* in terms of the poetic language used to describe it. Like EA Robinson’s *Richard Cory*, an object of both aesthetic and political desire who shoots himself in the head, George’s poem renders both forms of desire incomplete as it implies a secret. And here the poem, in trying to “figure out” this relationship between art and politics, “acts out” its (anti-)resolution.

The rendering of desire as incomplete, the suspended tension between political and aesthetic concerns, is captured by the word “beute,” which is rhymed with the word “löwenhäute” in the final line. The image of lionskins, like the syntax of the second line, is one of inversion that reflects, like a mirror, back on the word “beute.” While these lions are predators-turned-prey, they are also yellow, like the “beautiful” booty of golden bricks that comprise the *Unterreich*. On the one hand, this wordplay emphasizes the dual nature of the *Unterreich*, as something political that is outwardly desired but inwardly grim, while also foregrounding its constructed origin in (poetic) language. In emphasizing that “Im Unterreich” is comprised of literary tropes such as metaphor, the poem seduces us from, but still lays bare, the political limits of the poem. For the

“unadorned stones” are only strung up like mirrors; they are not, in fact, mirrors, and they only ever offer the semblance of a mirror. This semblance is of aesthetic significance not only because it is a metaphor, but also because the word “spiegel” is rhymed with the beautiful “goldnen ziegel.” But the rhyme is deceptive, as the stones, like the poem, can never really reflect anything; they can only ever be artificial imitations, aesthetic imposters. And such is *Algabal* the text: originating in language and signifying language, the poem can only ever allegorize the unnatural and indeterminate relationship between poetry and politics that the George Circle, which eventually fractured into several satellite Circles, embodied. George’s disciples, all at one time members of the Circle, ranged in political orientation from the eventual Nazi Woldemar Graf Uxkull-Gylleband to the Jewish emigrant Ernst Kantorowicz, from the social conservative Hugo von Hofmannsthal to Claus von Stauffenberg, who orchestrated the failed plot to assassinate Hitler.<sup>18</sup>

This motif of the “unnatural” (recalling the poem’s rejection of “a mutual and natural appropriateness of form and content”) is repeated throughout the poem as *Algabal* distances himself from nature and is politically elevated to the status of a singular God ushering in a new poetic reality to supplant a debased and bourgeois “natural” world. The de Manian “emblem” that most summarily conveys this political impulse is the “dunkle große schwarze blume,” a wholly unnatural rendering of the most beloved of poetic subjects, the flower, which like the *ziegel* can never really be a flower. This emblem is political because the poetic agent is not understood as a product or feature of the flower but is rather its lord and progenitor. The flower is a product of

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<sup>18</sup> “Der Dichter in Zeiten der Wirren” is dedicated to Uxkull-Gylleband’s brother. Furthermore, “[Uxkull’s speech] ‘Das revolutionäre Ethos bei Stefan George’ ... depicted the National Socialist ‘revolution’ as a continuation of George’s struggle against the corrosive legacies of nineteenth-century individualism, materialism, and rationalism” (Ruehl 224).

poetic language: the lowercase noun, the lack of punctuation, the containment on a single line, these are all intended by or emergent in language rather than some other authority, either within or outside the text. In the words of de Man, the flower has been “taken from the literary tradition and receive[s its] meaning from traditional or personal, but not from natural associations.” Rather than symbolizing an emotion, an experience, or a political position, the black flower spontaneously creates a vortex of signification made possible by and in language that has as its only referent an absence of reference.<sup>19</sup> It therefore, in striving to overthrow the base natural world, reveals its own limits to existing outside of language.<sup>20</sup>

This reading of the black flower crystallizes in the context of the broader section in which it appears, a description of Algabal’s garden as an allegory for the text that produces it: the garden is the timeless and otherworldly space of the poem, a prophecy or, as the final section of the poem is (self-reflexively) titled, a “Vogelschau.” “Mein garten bedarf nicht luft und nicht wärme · / Der garten den ich mir selber erbaut.” A garden, like the poem, is an attempt to overcome nature, to control the natural world by making it into an aesthetic object. Algabal’s “garden,” like the kingdom-poem he has built by himself (“ich selber”), is unnatural, existing only as a possibility, only in language, and only for himself (“mir selber”). Rather than associations with rebirth and

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<sup>19</sup> See de Man’s analysis of “nun, nun müssen dafür Worte, wie Blumen, entstehn,” in which he acknowledges the impossibility of the naturalization of language. “By calling them *natural* objects, we mean that their origin is determined by nothing but their own being... Hölderlin’s phrase ‘Wie Blumen entstehn’ is in fact a paradox, since origination is inconceivable on the ontological level.... For it is in the essence of language to be capable of origination, but of never achieving the absolute identity with itself that exists in the natural object” (“Intentional Structure of the Image” 4-6). This is the basis for his later analysis of Heidegger’s ontological reading of Hölderlin as a witness to authentic Being. “[Hölderlin] says exactly the opposite of what Heidegger makes him say” (“Heidegger’s Exegeses of Hölderlin” 255).

<sup>20</sup> George is also, of course, critically responding to Novalis’s “blaue Blume” from *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, which symbolized the Romantic dialectic of the finite self and infinite nature.

renewal, “seiner vögel leblose schwarme / haben noch nie einen frühling geschaut.” The trees are made of coal, the fruits never ripen, dusty vapors hang in the air, and the entire scene is perpetually gray: “Ein grauer schein aus verborgener höhle / verrät nicht wann morgen wann abend naht.” Like the life of Algabal that the poem recounts, the garden is, on the one hand, dreary, secretive, ambiguous, and on the other, a construction of language, a linguistic refuge from the corrupt natural world.

Algabal ends this section, breathing the black flower into life, with a rhetorical question: “Wie zeug ich dich aber im heiligtume / ... Dunkle grosse schwarze blume?” On the one hand, the syntactical proximity of “ich dich” mirrors, again, the “ich mir selber” in the second line of the poem. Syntactically, both “dich” and “mir” are objects, establishing a metonymic relationship between the poet-poem and his unnatural linguistic creation. The nature of the question, however, is such that two questions, whose answers provide two ways of reading the poem, are raised at once: “How can I engender [*zeugen*] you in the spiritual world of art?” and “How can I (politically) testify [*zeugen*] to the world that you are an aesthetic-spiritual creation?” The condition for the possibility of the second question – the more directly political of the possibilities – presumes the realization of the first. However, in questioning how to reveal the black flower, the poem calls attention to the flower’s own unnatural inadequacy to represent any specific thing: the flower is a metonymy for the garden, which is a metonymy for Algabal, who is a metonymy for *Algabal*. The rhetorical question, therefore, which by its nature does not provide an answer but rather foregrounds the urgency of its utterance, serves as an allegory for the limits art faces in trying to force the unnatural black flower, and the chain of signification behind it, on the natural world.<sup>21</sup> The revolutionary ethos

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<sup>21</sup> See de Man, “Intentional Structure of the Image” 3-7.

the poem performs therefore relies on the discord it produces between two incompatible worlds: a known natural world and the world of the poem. Just as these two worlds are incompatible, or unnatural and inadequate to each other, so too are the two readings of the poem incompatible, such that “the one reading is precisely the error denounced by the other and has to be undone by it” (“Semiology and Rhetoric” 12). This is, however, not to say that the poem is without an argument or position. Rather, its deconstruction helps to foreground de Man’s “anxiety of ignorance” (rather than an “anxiety of reference”) that it seeks to induce. This ignorance of political action is dramatized by the poem itself, which is constituted by the distance that it purports, and fails, to overcome.

In 1933, towards the very end of his life, George was asked by Bernhart Rust to join the reconstituted Writers’ Academy, from which many esteemed writers (including the Mann brothers) had already been forced to resign. In the letter declining the position, George makes an important statement, claiming that the principles of the political and the spiritual are “gewiss sehr verschieden.” He goes on to say, “Ich kann den herrn der regierung nicht in den mund legen was sie über mein werk denken und wie sie seine bedeutung für sie einschätzen.” The phrase “ahnherrschaft der neuen nationalen bewegung” was highlighted by Rust in his obituary of George, presumably in an effort to politicize George’s poetry and legacy. “Er, der sich noch kürzlich in einem Briefe ausdrücklich zur geistigen ‘Ahnerrschaft der neuen nationalen Bewegung’ bekannte, wird bei uns immer lebendig bleiben” (in Raulff 52-53). Critics have also found in the letter evidence of George’s (if nothing else) passive complicity in the new regime’s success, focusing particularly on comments in which George “welcome[d the Academy’s] reorganization under a ‘national sign’ and acknowledged himself [‘positively’] as the ‘forefather’ of the new national movement” (Norton 728-729). This



unresolved tension between, or even paradox of, an insistence on the distance between the spiritual and the political and a welcoming of the reorganization of the Academy under a national sign is staged most explicitly in “Der Dichter in Zeiten der Wirren,” a poem from George’s final collection of poetry.

Remaining formally indebted to aestheticism, his final collection of poems, *Das Neue Reich*, is arguably the most political of a body of later work that became more directly engaged with political questions of the day.<sup>22</sup> “George’s *Das Neue Reich* contains a number of somberly impressive poems denouncing modern civilization and foretelling its apocalyptic overthrow and renewal under an autocratic leader” (Robertson 198). Some critics even see a relationship between this desire and the promises of fascism.<sup>23</sup> While there are certainly some undertones of fascist ideology to be found in these later poems, and accounting for Norton’s argument that the *effect* of such language may have given intellectual or artistic credence to this ideology, the poems also foreground the poetic nature of George’s political prophecy, allegorizing, rather than overcoming, the distance between art and politics.

While popular readings of “Der Dichter in Zeiten der Wirren” focus on the figure of the *Mann* who founds the “Neue Reich,” the poem is primarily a direct reflection on the relationship between art and politics (George 28). The poet of the poem’s title, after all, is the one who calls the *Mann* into being in the first place. Aside from the final nine

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<sup>22</sup> The title of *Das Neue Reich* shares language common with National Socialist propaganda, and German periodicals drew a comparison between George and the rise of National Socialism. “Almost all of [the German newspapers] took the opportunity to draw an explicit connection between George and the current political situation” (Norton 740).

<sup>23</sup> “George came to see himself as the leading spirit in a holy war against modern civilization.... [His] longing for a new social order cleansed of the evils of modernity found a powerful echo in his next volume of poetry, *Das Neue Reich*.... In this, his last work, George moves quite explicitly into the ambit of nascent fascism” (Travers 29-30).

lines in which the *Mann* materializes, though, the poem is focused on describing the role and characteristics of a poet during periods of war, conquest, plague, starvation, or, as the title says, *wirren*. Like *Algabal*, the poem is concerned with exploring the power and limits of poetic utterance rather than poetically declaring a nationalist political agenda.<sup>24</sup> Three observations undergird this reading: 1) the poem is reflexively concerned with the literary nature, or possibility, of revolution; 2) it does not mention or indicate specific historical periods or geographical regions, referring rather to a spiritual or mythical world outside of time that it equates with poetic language; 3) prophecies are poetically realized, rather than politically constructed as moral imperatives.

The poem establishes from the very beginning a concern with the relationship between politics and art insofar as the “meaning” of the poet is determined by socio-political affairs. It opens with a statement about the poet, that he has a particular meaning relative to the political condition of his age. “Der Dichter heisst im stillen gang der zeit / beflügelt kind das holde träume tönt / Und schönheit bringt ins tätige getrieb.” In times of peace, the poet is romantically referred to as a singer and a seer, set apart from others who are unable to see and hear. That is, while the political sphere determines the poet and his art’s meaning, the poet nonetheless has a privileged and distinctive social position, emphasized a few lines later by the period-dash: “Wenn alle blindheit schlug · er einzig seher.” The poet is alone, we learn, in his ability to “see,” “reveal” (*enthüllen*), and prophecy coming strife. “Wenn alle blindheit schlug · er einzig seher / Enthüllt umsonst die nahe not . . .” The double period that surrounds these lines, and that is only used two other times throughout the entire poem, further emphasizes the unique ability of the poet to prophesy. The poem then proceeds to detail how, in the

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<sup>24</sup> While the word “völkisch” has been given considerable attention, it is important to keep in mind that George composed the poem in 1918.

times of chaos and confusion, the poet continues to “see” in vain. Over the next fifty-two lines, the poet is ignored, silent and sighing in a period of war, alone and isolated in one of conquest.

The opening lines of the second and final stanza, the age of “trauer-läuften,” begin similarly to the opening lines of the first, except the word “Dichter” has been changed to “Sänger” and the word “aber” is inserted before the verb, which has gone from “heissen” to “sorgen.” While there is therefore some continuity – the poem moves through a progression of mythological, rather than historical, epochs – the word “aber” indicates that a major shift has occurred: the “seeing” poet rife with meaning is now actively producing, “singing,” the future rather than passively witnessing it. That is, his creative capabilities are less ambiguous (the word *Dichter* can mean poet but also simply writer), as they have become imbued with musicality and lyricism. In a “mournful age,” the poet “sorgt,” which means both to worry about something but also more actively to tend to it. And here again the poem foregrounds its constitutive tension, the irreconcilability of the aesthetic and the political, for to worry about something is precisely *not* to tend to it. And this something, the poem reveals, is the germ, or “keim,” of a revolutionary spirit. The poet’s role here is not merely to produce beautiful poetry but to actively protect against decay – what we might think of as a spiritual, yet ultimately aesthetic, decay – keeping the cells of revolution from asphyxiation and fanning the holy fires (“schürt die heilige glut”) that will form in its belly. The poet works with the “chosen ones” to prepare and educate a younger generation that will “save the world,” a phrase also emphasized with the third double period. All together, they will work towards summoning the leader who we meet at the end of the poem,

“der Mann,” the emblem of redemption who overshadows the poet and plants *das Neue Reich*.

The poet nonetheless brings these cells of revolution to life, and to do so he uses literature. He “holt aus büchern

Der ahnen die verheissung die nicht trägt  
Dass die erkoren sind zum höchsten ziel  
Zuerst durch tiefste öden ziehn dass einst  
Des erdteils herz die welt erretten soll . .

In refuge and isolated, the poet actually turns to books and poems like the one in which he exists. He helps to bring forth this heroic savior – an act of poetic will not unlike the black flower – by actively exhuming from ancestral books (“holt aus büchern / der ahnen”) the promise, or the prophecy, of this new, singular generation “chosen for the highest goal.” These “chosen ones,” like Hölderlin’s flower, are events in language that spring up (quite literally) from acts of signification. The savior that in turn emerges from them is similarly constituted, an emblem of the limits of poetic possibility. The savior,

sprengt die ketten fegt auf trümmerstätten  
  
die ordnung . geisselt die verlaufnen heim  
Ins ewige recht wo grosses wiederum gross ist  
Herr wiederum herr . zucht wiederum zucht . Er heftet  
das wahre sinnbild auf das völkisch banner  
er führt durch sturm und grausige signale  
der frührots seiner treuen schar zum werk  
des wachen tags und pflanzt das Neue Reich.

While there are some rather obvious parallels here between George's language and the ideological platform of the Nazis, the poem is at four removes from its own labors: from it springs the poet, from whom come the chosen ones, from whom emerges *der Mann*, who then "plants" the *Neue Reich*.<sup>25</sup> This Russian doll-like structure is thematized in these final lines, which allegorize their own *distance* from any direct involvement, insisting on the existence in the spiritual realm. Of particular note here is the image of a breaking "chain" (of signification) revealing entry into the "eternal," which de Man describes in Yeats as "the fitting lack of texture for the *sign* which is there to reveal, not itself, but what stands behind it" ("Image and Emblem" 205). But the poem also formally doubles the notion of a chain through the chain-link and chain-like repetition that *constitutes* this "eternal right" to which the breaking of the chain grants access:

Ins ewige recht wo grosses wiederum gross ist

Herr wiederum herr . zucht wiederum zucht .

These chains constitute the prophecy – itself a simultaneous deferral and realization – of *der Mann*, who does not "found" *das Neue Reich* but rather "plants" it. De Man's metaphor of Hölderlin's flower is even more apt here: like the flower, an event "planted" in language insofar as it springs up from it, so too is *das Neue Reich* an event of signification that springs up from signification, a distance in relation to its own origin. As a political gesture the poem therefore allegorizes the potential and limit that art, represented metonymically by the forgotten poet and his ancestral books, faces in making such a gesture and, in turn, George's own inability to clearly commit to a

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<sup>25</sup> These parallels include: the image of breaking free from oppressive forces (the chain as metaphor), the rising of a new, eternal order from debris and ruins, the restoring to greatness what was once great, the "völkische banner," the "einzigkeit" and exceptionalism of this new generation, and of course the "Neue Reich" itself. It is important to note, however, that the nationalist implications of "Drittes Reich" were not really immanent until 1923 when it appeared in a novel by Arthur Moeller van den Bruck.

political position. “[I]t is nevertheless manifest that the place of art is still found in opposition to social realities, no less in this late poem than in, say, *Algabal’s* ‘Mein garten’ or in ‘Komm in den totgesagten park.’ What changes, through the diverse periods of George’s writing, is the articulation of this underlying constant opposedness” (Waters 45).<sup>26</sup>

Thematically, the poet is set in a mythological time. The descriptions of the various “ages” in which the poet lives are in no way historically indicated, and the events of the poem never seem to correlate with specific, landmark historical events. The opening lines of the poem, in fact, are set in the peaceful “*gang der zeit*,” an ambiguous passage or passing of time, rather than a particularly delineated age. In addition to the various references to Christian and Eastern theology throughout the poem, this mythological time is also captured by the conflicting tenses in the line “*dass einst / des erdteils herz die welt erretten soll . . .*” The redemption is placed outside of time, or in some ahistorical (mythological, poetic) time, insofar as the word “*einst*” implies something that has or will have happened. “*die welt erretten soll*,” however, authoritatively implies something that will definitively happen. Insofar as the language here calls attention to the mutual refutation of possibility and certainty, so too does the poem call attention to its own irreducibility and deconstruction.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> In this case, Robert Norton’s critique of Waters’s essay, that he “contradicts himself,” is appropriate to the argument that George’s poetry stages precisely the event of such contradictions.

<sup>27</sup> The word “*erdteil*” arguably has a degree of specificity, as is indicated in the 1974 translation of the poem by Olga Marx (Carol North Valhope) and Ernst Morwitz, a close friend of George who published the poet’s collected works after his death. Morwitz, who was Jewish, fled to the USA in 1935; his two stepsisters, who remained in Germany, were murdered by the Nazis. There is little reason to assume that Morwitz would have had any interest in consciously politicizing his translations of George’s poetry, which is why the decision to translate “*erdteil*” as “*Europe*” instead of “*continent*” is striking. “*Continent*” is a much more ambiguous landmass that, through its mythological indeterminacy, calls attention to itself as a word, an arbitrary signifier.

Though George seldom capitalizes nouns, he does so for several in this poem.<sup>28</sup> Among these are words with religious connotations (*Assur, Heilige Stadt, Vesper*), words that depict pseudo-mythological or archetypal figures (*Dichter, Krieger, Lenker, Sühner, Heutigen, Sänger, Fremder*), and words associated with the savior and leader of the new kingdom (*Mann, Neue Reich*). The only word that stands out as not fitting into one of these lexicons is the word “Rat,” which is the domain of the poet, who counsels through his prophetic poetry. Formally, then, the poem calls attention to these words as concepts and archetypes, as literary representations rather than historical correlatives. Whereas the capitalization seems to mobilize these signifiers in the service of some extra-aesthetic intention, as motivated and substantial signifiers, this overall lexicon of the supernatural undermines the possibility of undivided and historically-situated political intentionality. The language, however, also anticipates as closely as possible the Nazi apotheosis of Hitler. The capitalization therefore foregrounds a paradox that dramatizes the conflict implicit in George criticism: the poem is simultaneously indifferent to historical and/or political referents (or reference) and deeply entrenched in such history.

Like *Algabal*, the final words of the poem, also capitalized, recall the title of the collection, a fundamentally aesthetic, and spiritual, task. While this does not prove that George believed in, or even intentionally practiced, his insistence on the distance between the aesthetic and the political, it does reveal the immanence of this indeterminacy – and its ensuing critical debate – in his poetry.

In July 1933, not long after he turned down Rust’s invitation to join the Writers’ Academy, George, whose health was declining, traveled to his hometown of Bingen and then on to Berlin. From Berlin, where “his close friend Ludwig Thormaehlen was under

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<sup>28</sup> These capitalized nouns are: *Dichter, Assur, Rat, Heilige Stadt, Krieger, Lenker, Sühner, Heutigen, Vesper, Sänger, Fremder, Mann, and Neue Reich*.

the impression that the Master expected the arrival of [a National Socialist] emissary," George went to Wasserburg on Lake Constance and, in August, "took the ferry across the lake to Heiden in Switzerland." Friends and critics of George have arrived at widely divergent understandings of the political implications of these travels. "Robert Boehringer... claimed that George's subsequent remark to the effect that halfway across the lake he had been able to breathe more easily was meant as a political statement," a tempered rejection of National Socialist ideology. Peter Hoffmann, however, emphasizes the fact that "George suffered from respiratory difficulties in the oppressively humid climate of the Wasserburg lakefront and moved to the more elevated Heiden in order to escape it" (Hoffmann 302). Furthermore, it is very likely that "George was simply continuing his normal habit of visiting Switzerland in the autumn, and in any case he considered Switzerland to be part of Germany" (Robertson 201). And in response to those who, like Boehringer, consider these travels exemplary of a voluntary exile, Robert Norton has argued that "the other [myth] is that [George] went to Switzerland in exile to express his revulsion toward the National Socialists and everything they stood for. Neither tale is true. They are legends created by George's apologists" (Norton 723).

One last poem from *Das Neue Reich* serves to demonstrate how George's poetry dramatizes the very same indeterminacy – even when such indeterminacy has been proven historically obfuscating – exemplified by criticism of George, a mysteriousness and ambiguity that the poet himself may very well have striven to exude. That is, the different Stefan Georges that have emerged in critical studies reflect the fragmented poetic subject(ivity) immanent to his final, arguably most political, collection. "Im ‚Neuen Reich‘ gibt es keine einheitliche, die einzelnen Gedichte verklammernde kultische Person mehr: Nach einer ekstatischen, ganz unverhohlenen Vergöttlichung



Maximins im ‚Siebenten Ring‘ und einer verborgenen im ‚Stern des Bundes‘ fächert sich nun das poetische Subjekt in ganz verschiedene Figurationen auf“ (Gutschinskaja 117). Parts of this politically disjointed subjectivity – namely the politically-interested and politically-disinterested – are manifest in “Einem Jungen Führer im Ersten Weltkrieg,” which concerns the rebirth of Germany and the crowning of a new leader that critics tend to situate in the wake of the perception that the outcome of World War I was a national embarrassment. By staging a dialogue between a political leader and a disembodied advisor, which quickly yields to the language and form of poetry itself, the poem yet again allegorizes a confluence of the possible orientations towards (conservative or fascist) politics that constitute the afterlife of George and his poetry.

The poem’s form immediately calls attention to itself as text, as it makes use of both typical Georgean devices, such as invented grammatical signs and a general lack of capitalization, as well as the more innovative formal construction of spatially breaking up each individual line on the horizontal plane. The form is consistent; each stanza has five longer lines, of thirteen to fourteen syllables with a visible gap after the sixth or seventh syllable, followed by a concluding five-syllable line. These gaps, impossible to ignore, haunt the poem, which is ultimately “about” trying, and failing, to overcome gaps: the gap in understanding between the two speakers, the temporal gap between the present condition of disrepair and the future prophecy of glorious triumph, the gap in signification that preconditions and defers the possibility of overcoming either, and the gap between aesthetics and politics.

The poem is an address, a kind of pep talk, from an unnamed speaker, a disembodied poetic voice, to an anonymous young leader as the two men walk side by side. The subject of this pep talk is how the leader will overcome military defeat, which

hinges on his difference from the drone-like masses. "Du aber," the poetic voice says to the leader, "tu es nicht gleich."

Du aber tu es nicht gleich unbedachtsamem schwarm  
Der was er gestern bejauchzt heute zum kehrlicht bestimmt  
Der einen markstein zerhaut dran er strauchelnd sich stieß. .  
Jähe erhebung und zug

The double period indicates and foregrounds that the leader is distinct from the instable, "imprudent sheep" who undermine themselves at every turn. The leader, however, will do things differently ("nicht gleich"). This difference is not only key to understanding the leader's constitution, but it also provides a framework for reading the entire poem as an allegory for the unresolved relationship between art and politics. The poetic voice figures the leader's success as a revolutionary prophecy, which, constitutively rhetorical, calls attention to itself as an event simultaneously deferred by and realized in language. The gaps that regularly disrupt the poem's form therefore serve as visual reminders of the irreducible gap not only metaphorically between the leader and the "unbedachtsamem schwarm," but also metonymically between the poetic voice and its prophecy, language and action.

This tension is foregrounded by the use of both metaphor and metonymy. A number of metaphors comprise the poem, imbuing it with a sense of political immediacy and relevance. At the start of the third stanza, for example, the poetic voice consoles the leader. "Anders als ihr euch geträumt fielen die würfel des streits. ." But as a poem about the gap between metaphor and metonymy, this unexpected roll of the dice yields the possibility of creating not Germany, but rather meaning itself, anew.

Jähe erhebung und zug bis an die pforte des siegs

Sturz unter drückendes joch    bergen in sich einen sinn

Sinn in dir selber.

There are two prominent metaphors in these lines: “pforte des siegs” and “drückendes joch.” These metaphors comprise a subordinate clause set apart by horizontal gaps, the positioning of which causes the clause to be read from the upper right to the lower left. Opposite this is the main clause, which is read from the upper left to the lower right. Visually, then, these two clauses create an X: “jähre erhebung und zug ... / bergen in sich einen sinn” and “bis an die pforte des siegs / sturz unter drückendes joch” Comprising the other half of the X, rather than metaphor, is an explicit statement about meaning, “sinn.” The key words in this clause are “in sich bergen.” By itself “bergen” means “to salvage” something, whereas “in sich bergen” means “to hold,” “to retain,” or “to conceal” something. This something, as the repetition over the enjambment between the final two lines emphasizes, is “sinn” itself. The phrase therefore signifies two possibilities: to save meaning from something (to salvage) or to save it for something (to hold on to). That is, the “erhebung und zug” described in these lines doubles as a “procession” of signification, the movement from meaning in relation “from” something to meaning in relation “for” something.

The X therefore would seem to signify the intersection of metaphor and metonymy, were it not for the gaps at its center. Instead these gaps are asymptotic, rendering the X more of a hyperbola: )( . The center that the poem names, the leader himself, is therefore transferred to the final line of the stanza where, representing meaning both (and neither) metaphorically and metonymically, his presence serves to allegorize the distance between, or collapse of, a metaphorical, political reading and a metonymic, rhetorical reading. The poet’s command to “sinn in dir selber,” to “reflect”

or “mean (or retain meaning) within yourself,” doubles as both political counsel, “trust your instincts,” and aesthetic commentary, “you are poetic trope.” He therefore embodies Librett’s notion of de Man’s turn from a belief in the value of “mutual and adequate form” such that resolution – politically fraught as this nonetheless may be – is rendered by the poem as unnatural and inadequate. The gap between metaphor and metonymy, politics and poetry, is transferred to both the political leader, “you create meaning,” and poetic utterance, “you are meaning,” such that each is incomplete, constituted by the gap that doubles those gaps in understanding ubiquitous in reconstructions of the life, and afterlife, of George himself.

In the final stanza, the poem explicitly reveals itself as an allegory of interpretation. Following the double period, the stanza concludes:

Sieh · als aufschauend um rat    langsam du neben mir schrittst  
Wurde vom abend der sank    um dein aufflatterndes haar  
Um deinen schein der schein    erst von strahlen ein ring  
Dann eine krone.

As with the singer-prophet of the previous poem, the poetic voice here commands the leader to “see.” This word is isolated between the double period and the floating period, doubly emphasizing its importance as an indication of the prophetic, poetic image that is to follow. In fact, the notion of seeing is so important that the word “schauen” is repeated in the word “aufschauen” immediately after the floating period. Like in “Der Dichter in Zeiten der Wirren,” the poem also places considerable emphasis on the word “rat,” which comes immediately before a horizontal gap. The command to “see” is a form of counsel, and the object of this sight is the political prophecy, rendered as poetic trope, in the past tense. This prophecy materializes ambiguously and is the projection of

the past onto the future. The poet is speaking of an act in the future, but he makes note that the leader is counseling in the present, indicated by the present participle “aufschauend,” but speaking of the past, indicated by the verb form “schrittst.” The text does not describe the actual appearance of the ring and the crown with a verb but rather with half of the construction for the passive voice in the past tense. Even this image is not concrete, as it is the image at first of the luminance of a ring and then either of the luminance of a crown, or of the crown itself. The crown is not presented metonymically, however, but metaphorically as a symbol for triumphant cultural rebirth in the wake of the destruction wrought by World War I. The prophecy therefore rhetorically collapses the past, present, and future, positioning itself outside of historical time while also specifically eschewing a purely mythological setting by resolving into commentary on real, historical events.

All of this is to say that the poem continuously resists presenting the advisor and the leader as metaphors for the direct involvement of poetry in politics, just as it resists reducing the two to a chain of metonymic signification. Rather, the indeterminacy that it stages – the simultaneous possibility, and therefore mutual refutation, of metaphor and metonymy – allegorizes the indeterminacy that constitutes George’s afterlife. While we can only argue whether George was more the poet or the politician, his poetry performs the undecidability that pervades his biography no less than the biography of many prominent German intellectuals and aesthetes implicated in one way or another with the rise of the NSDAP.

In his 1934 *Rede über Stefan George*, Gottfried Benn argues that George’s poetry expresses a “Weltwille,” which was primarily a formal, rather than political, undertaking. For Benn, however, who associated himself for a time with the Nazi party,

this Weltwille is nonetheless political. It embodies not only an aesthetic will, what he calls “formal rigidity,” but also a national, German, will. “Es ist vielmehr die unerbittliche Härte des Formalen, die über seinem Werk liegt, durch die er sein Werk schuf, ihm Einheit und Norm erkämpfte, und der er sein Leben zum Opfer brachte; es ist das, was Alfred Rosenberg den ‘ästhetischen Willen’ nennt, diesen deutschen Willen, der im Kunstwerk eine Welt aufrichtet und eine überwindet, *formend* überwindet, das ist es, was George in die große abendländische Perspektive der Zukunft stellt” (Benn 487).<sup>29</sup> Manifesting in the work of art, the German/aesthetic will both constructs a world and, by constructing a world, overcomes another, which it achieves by nature of its form: “formend,” or “formatively”. This argument, which invokes the prominent Nazi intellectual Alfred Rosenberg, seems aptly to capture the interpretive ambiguity in George’s life and poetry that has in turn grown to constitute his legacy.

The rhetorical argument laid out here therefore speaks more broadly to the methodological binaries we impose on ourselves, and expect, as literary critics. The morally fraught and historically complicated relationship between George’s life and poetry calls attention to the need, particularly in politically controversial instances such as this, for an integrative theoretical approach that incorporates elements of both formalism and historicism. Otherwise why read George’s poetry at all – which, incidentally, was considerably less popular under fascism than Rilke’s – but as another

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<sup>29</sup> Alfred Rosenberg became one of the most intellectually influential ideologues of the Nazi party. He edited the party newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, and in 1930 had published the widely read, anti-Semitic, and anti-Catholic *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Jay Baird, author of *Hitler’s War Poets: Literature and Politics in the Third Reich* refers to him as Hitler’s “ideological high priest and gatekeeper” (187) While there is some scholarly disagreement over the degree of his influence, and some evidence of high-ranking Nazi officials including Hitler disregarding *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*, he was nonetheless hanged after the Nuremberg trials having been found guilty on four counts: conspiracy to commit crimes against peace, war of aggression, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

defense against that indeterminate and omnipresent threat of fascism within as well as without?<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Adam, *Lesen unter Hitler* 252-4, 268, 309, 324.

### CHAPTER III

#### “RESIGN, RESIGN, RESIGN”: T.S ELIOT AND THE AFFIRMATION OF FAILURE<sup>31</sup>

“How confused and obscure my own mind has been.”  
-T. S. Eliot, “Last Words,” 1939

The story behind the composition of Shelley’s “Ozymandias” is not one of failure. Challenged amiably by Horace Smith to compose a sonnet on the subject of Ozymandias, Shelley successfully published the poem two weeks later, on 11 January 1818, and it has gone on to become one of the most familiar works of British Romanticism. Like the irony through which the poem is organized, there is irony to this success, since the poem is principally concerned with failure: the failure of empire, but also the failure of poetry. More specifically, as the poem becomes implicated in the nested levels of representation and narration, its signification begins to splinter. While it purports to contain and overcome the political, it also reproduces, ironically, the same conditions of failure that it documents. In this sense, the poem is in dialogue not only with the fall of empire, but also with the process of revolution. Insofar as revolution represents a counterforce to empire building, it is the means by which empire fails. However, the impossibility of failure constitutes the concept of revolution, which can fail by either not overcoming existing political structures or reproducing those structures. In “Ozymandias,” Shelley is able to stage this failure in a way that political revolution necessarily cannot, thereby ascribing to art a vantage point from which,

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<sup>31</sup> This title alludes to Paul Morrison’s chapter on T. S. Eliot in his book *The Poetics of Fascism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Paul de Man*.



through its own movement towards failure, to imagine a critique of revolution without the material risks a failed revolution would entail.<sup>32</sup>

Shelley's poem therefore frames a problem that becomes much more pronounced in the 1930s: can poetry contain the political, can it even exceed the political, and if so, what might this mean? Like revolution, fascism also necessitates the impossibility of imagining failure. It is through this lens that "Ozymandias" bears on the work of T. S. Eliot (who, incidentally, much preferred someone like Coleridge to Shelley). By imagining and performing political failure through the medium of poetry, "Ozymandias" takes a critical view of revolution the possibility of which revolutionary politics must necessarily deny. While Shelley did generally support revolutionary movements, the agnosticism implicit in "Ozymandias" bears much greater consequences for Eliot as he works through his position on the emerging fascist movements across Europe, most notably in France and Germany. Just as "Ozymandias" can be read in the context of Shelley's complex views on revolution, Eliot's poetry of the late 1920s and early 1930s - most notably *Four Quartets* and *Coriolan* - provide insight into the ways that poetry is able to think through politics in a way that politics themselves are unable to do.

This chapter will read all three of these poems as the working out of a shifting orientation towards, and negotiation of the possibilities and limits of, political revolution, of the left in the case of Shelley and of the right in the case of Eliot. The poetic, rather than political, rendering of failure in each instance thus reveals the

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<sup>32</sup> My unconventional reading of Shelley's poem is an attempt to think through the political possibilities of "Ozymandias" in a way that consonant with de Man's reading of Hölderlin. "Standing at the beginning of the romantic tradition," he writes, "Hölderlin also points beyond it, away from it" ("Hölderlin and the Romantic Tradition" 119). Likewise, I consider this specific instance in Shelley's writing to point beyond any adherence to a symbolic poetic unity corresponding to totalizing political commitment (in this one instance, to revolution).

necessary inadequacy implicit in revolution that was acknowledged and affirmed by each poet, but vehemently rejected by the Jacobins and National Socialists.

The narrator of Shelley's sonnet tells the story of a traveler "from an antique land" who has seen the ruins of a statue of the once-great king Ozymandias. The statue, like the empire it represents, has collapsed, and the central irony of the poem hinges on the words written on its pedestal: "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: / Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" Like the powerful emperor, so have the empire and the symbols of its power fallen, impotent against the forces of history. However, Ozymandias's words are not only ironic: if one is to despair at the works of Ozymandias, it is not out of fear for the wrath of the long dead "king of kings" but rather of the force that toppled him from his throne and brought his kingdom to ruins, the futility of glory and the brevity of human life. While most notably a critique of power and a statement on the finitude of empire, Shelley's poem is also a reminder of our own mortality, our own helplessness against the currents of time, and the despair that this can instill in us.

The text captures this sense of helplessness in the final lines, in which the poem pans out from the image of the broken statue to reveal a barren and desolate landscape: "Nothing beside remains. Round the decay / Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare / the lone and level sands stretch far away." The second half of the sestet, lines traditionally assigned to providing poetic resolution, is saturated with images of disintegration and loss: "nothing," "decay," "wreck," and "bare." These lines also reiterate how feeble and powerless man is against such inevitable loss, as the narrator is left with the image of nothingness, the "boundless" and infinite landscape. He is as "lone" as the sands around him, an image that recalls Caspar David Friedrich's famous

painting "The Monk by the Sea," which contrasts the tiny figure of a monk with the vast and sprawling, seemingly "boundless," image of shore, sea, and sky. The monk, while a student of religion, God, and the eternal, is small, finite, and bounded in comparison to the world of God's creation. In this way he is like Ozymandias, the self-proclaimed "king of kings," who is unable to overcome the forces of history, change, and progress that bring him, and his empire, to ruin.

This romantic irony, the Faustian striving to overcome the limits of mortal man, is a central feature of Romanticism writ large. For Shelley in particular, such overcoming was tied to social and political reform, an aspiration that – in the case of the French Revolution, for example – was not without its own irony. "Again and again in his comments on the French Revolution [Shelley] argued that the attempt to overthrow the old order by violent revolution merely perpetuated the spirit of that order" (Dawson 6). Thus for Shelley, such revolutionary ends, "the necessary transformation of society can only come through the step-by-step purification and improvement of the old order, rather than by a single apocalyptic stroke" (7). This gradualist understanding of progress is implicit in the final image of the poem: the "long" and "boundless" sands that "stretch far away." Like the statue that serves as a metaphor for corrupt power, these sands are a metaphor for time, particularly the progression of reforms and revolutions that can ultimately corrode that power. The immoral king Ozymandias proves unable to triumph over the immortal sands of time.

The overtly political message, however, comes to us as a declaration by Ozymandias embedded in the stone pedestal of his broken statue, which is embedded in the memory of the traveller, which is embedded in the language of the poem, which is embedded in arguably the most traditional of poetic forms, the sonnet. The events of the

poem, and those recounted in/narrated by the poem, are examples of what Shelley would call "human activity": not only the history of Ozymandias the tyrant, but also the carving of the statue, its discovery by the traveller, the traveller's recounting of the inscription, and then the creating of these events into the sonnet, the expression of each layer in their supposed totality. Insofar as the poem presents these events in accordance with its themes of the corruption and ephemerality of power, however, the individual events are subordinated to the relations among them. These relations structure the poem, which is ultimately a staging of collisions: both between subjects – the poet and the traveller, the traveller and the "lifeless" ruins, the sculptor and the king – and between modes of expression – political address, sculpture, storytelling, poem. In this sense, then, the poem does not simply embody the very totality for which Ozymandias the tyrant strove; rather, it embodies the (aesthetic) fragmentation that performs the (political) inadequacy Shelley finds necessary for revolution that does not become the very thing it strives to overthrow. "The fragmented construction is doubtless a verbal replication of the fractured statue it describes. But it is also part of the system of filtering postponements that steal not initial but delayed and considered attention from the simpler message. Or rather, it shifts attention from the obvious substance of the moral to the conditions of its realization" (Freedman 66). In shifting attention to the conditions of the realization of the moral and thus foregrounding the poem's aesthetic operations, "Ozymandias" performs Ozymandias, ironically doubling the king's failure in order to render it applicable to revolutionary anti-absolutism/monarchism.

The importance of these relationships is foregrounded in the first two lines: "I met a traveller from an antique land / Who said." In the first two words, the poem presents the speaking poetic subject, "I," and the chance encounter during which he

“met a traveller.” The reference to this second speaking subject as a “traveller” evokes the encounter not just between two people but also between two ambassadors of geographically, culturally, and politically disparate places. Because the traveller hails from an “antique land,” there is the implication that this cultural difference is a result not only of spatial, but also temporal, distance, a distance that is then doubled when the traveller tells of his own encounter with an ambassador of an antique land, the statue of Ozymandias.

Ozymandias demands with hubris that his “works” be looked upon. The referentiality of this term is tripled: it means at once the products – political, architectural, legal, aesthetic, assimilated, conquered, etc. – of his reign, what his reign produced, but it also refers back to the statue, both as a physical immortalizing of Ozymandias’s body and spirit, and as a metaphor for power. In the final line of the poem, the theme of power’s ephemerality crystallizes with yet another metaphor: the immortal sands of time will wash over power’s claim to immortality, rendering the irony of Ozymandias’s triumphant statement. That metaphor, by way of the image of a desert, is the instrument by which the poem calls attention to the significance of figurative and poetic language [de Man on Hölderlin].<sup>33</sup> In fact, the tension between language and the visual is foregrounded in the inscription on the ruins: “Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!” While Ozymandias’s words have withstood history, his sculpture has not. And his imperative to “look” and “despair” is actually rendered

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<sup>33</sup> For his part, de Man did identify Eliot’s indebtedness to the romanticism he ostensibly challenged. “We are well used to such ironies of history as T. S. Eliot attacking romanticism in the name of ‘dissociation of sensibility,’ a concept which is itself one of the most characteristic intuitions of romanticism. Nor should the apparent objectivity of stylistic criticism blind us to the fact that it deliberately (and often consciously) takes for its object the formal attributes of romantic and post-romantic poetry: our interest in metaphor, for instance, can not be separated from the predominantly metaphorical structure of romantic poetry” (“Hölderlin and the Romantic Tradition” 109).

ironic precisely because the words survived and the statue didn't. The "Mighty" to which his words refer is therefore also triply referential insofar as it, too, is a metaphor for the eternal state to which Ozymandias aspired. There are three audiences "looking" at Ozymandias's triply-referential works: ye Mighty gods look upon the historical products of his reign, ye Mighty sands look upon the statue that they have eroded, and ye Mighty poem looks at the rhetorical statue, a metaphor for power.

As aesthetic representation built on language, the poem embodies the timeless and eternal condition to which Ozymandias strove. It is, one could say, the "lone and level sands" that "stretch far away," or the gods who, observing Ozymandias's hubris from a vantage point outside time, laugh at his boastful naivety. The poem achieves this infiniteness through the compression and expansion of time, which imputes a mythical quality to the poem such that it becomes untethered from particular temporal limitations. The first eleven lines of the poem progressively inhabit previous historical periods, and the poetic subject shifts accordingly. The first narrator meets a traveller from an "antique land." This traveller then becomes the new narrator, telling of his experiences finding the statue of Ozymandias, who becomes the next new narrator issuing his commandment to despair. However, as the poem proceeds backwards in time, the tense with which these past events are narrated remains in the present. This present tense is brought to attention by the enjambment after the second line, emphasized all the more strongly by the alliteration of "stone" and "stand." This sonic consistency, as well as the enjambment which makes "stand" the first word of the third line, reinforces the fact that "stand" is in the present tense. The sixth line also begins with an active verb in the present tense, as the face of the statue "tells" the traveller

about the history of Ozymandias, whose present-tense declaration is also reproduced verbatim.

Despite this compression of history into the present, however, the poem also gestures towards the expansion of time, most significantly with the final image of the poem. These last three lines, in addition, also mark a break from the shifting narrator. In these final lines, it is unclear who is speaking, indicating that the various poetic voices have come together to chant in unison that, "Nothing beside remains." Because of its punctuated brevity, and the trochaic "nothing" that interrupts the iambic cadence, this motto stands outside the narrative and reflects on the poem. It tells us three things simultaneously. First, it emphasizes that there is nothing left to the ruins other than the inscription and "half-sunken visage" embedded in the sand; nothing beside this head and these words remain. It also indicates that there is nothing at this site besides the remains of this statue, fragments of the past. And finally, if we read the sentence in keeping with the iambic meter, then it tells us that "no thing beside remains," shifting the emphasis of the poem to be about language and objects and recalling the famous line by Stefan George, "kein ding sei wo das wort gebriecht," "where word breaks off no thing shall be." That is, to borrow again from de Man, the "thing"ness of the statue is emergent in, and constituted by, language. There is "no thing" besides the linguistic, and specifically *poetic*, remains of it, its rendering in poetry, its catapult into eternity and the ensuing *Aufhebung* whereby to disappear is to appear forever.

And it is this poetry that is given a degree of authority and agency in the final lines of the poem, during which each individual voice blends into the other, converging at the moment of poetic resolution into a voice as timeless and "boundless" as the sands. In this sense, the poem is less about power and more about poetry, or the power of

poetry. It makes sense that Shelley would choose the form of the sonnet for making such an argument – despite the irony we could now say is implicit in choosing a traditional poetic form to criticize “traditional” power structures – as the sonnet is one of the most recognizable poetic forms. Because any reader would know that sonnets resolve, this resolution is implicit in the poem from the very first word – “I” – which transforms over the duration of the poem from a particular “I” to a universal one. On the one hand, the resolution of the poem is the transformation of the particular poetic subject into the universal one. But on a more global level, the resolution of the poem is self-referential. While it thematically makes the argument about the inevitable decline of power, it also shows how the power of poetry lies less in the content or message that it depicts than in the formally traditional composition of that content.

And this is why Shelley’s poem depicts the relationship between the expression of different “activities”: meeting, telling, mocking (both the sculptor mocking Ozymandias and Ozymandias mocking “ye Mighty” gods), etc. By dissolving the narrative voices into each other, Shelley creates an onus of interpretation at the level of form: recognizing the gradual dissolution of voices as the poem moves backwards in time – mirroring Shelley’s understanding of history as the gradual progression of time – and eventual convergence of voices depicting the infinite expansion of time. That is, these voices, and the activities they recount, are the result of the work of the imagination. For Shelley, “all human activity has its source in the imagination.” The imagination, then, is the constructive and mediating force between each level of utterance. It is “vitaly involved in all purposeful and creative human activity,” the expression of which is the poem (Dawson 224). Furthermore, “Shelley’s account of the imagination was originally developed as part of his moral philosophy.” The poetic



voices in "Ozymandias," particularly when they sing in unison in the final lines, therefore have a political role that Gerald MacNiece connects to Shelley's revolutionary politics. "The imagination awakes the power of the will. Service to the method of the imagination and to the symbols it creates will reconstruct the mind and redirect its strategies for shaping reality. Only thus may the worship of reason and the dangerous bias of modern civilization be corrected. Poetry is the instrument of the imagination. In his poetry Shelley set himself the task of recharging the power of revolutionary ideas" (MacNiece 6). By thematizing and performing the inadequacy, and failure, of totality, the poem is able to stage its political argument on the level of experience mediated by the imagination.

On the one hand, then, the political message of the poem – that worlds exist where empires have fallen long ago – is an allegory for the act of reading poetry, which is the act of thinking the possibility of such worlds. Just as the poem expands time and space, the act of reading poetry expands the imagination. This expansion, this entry into eternity, is constituted by a loss – of empire no less than the poetic subject himself – an absence that, when repeated and multiplied ad infinitum, constitutes the dialectical ontology of the poem. Like standing between two mirrors, the subject(s) – the content of the poem no less than the poem itself – simultaneously appear(s) and disappear(s). Through the disappearance of the possibility of revolution, such possibility reappears, and yet the expansive totality evokes endless repetition, the failure of revolution that does not acknowledge the limits of its realization. The appearance of resolution, once multiplied, reveals itself as the disappearance of that resolution, the perpetuation of the corruption and violence that inspired a call for resolution in the first place. Poetry is uniquely suited to lay this bare because in positing its irony, it also performs that irony,

implicitly elevating itself among modes of political commentary while simultaneously acknowledging the limits of its realization as a political commentary.

Like revolution, art must be necessarily permanent in its inadequacy. This logic is how T. S. Eliot links poetry to politics. In his 1955 lecture for the London Conservative Union, he defines “political thinking” as “thinking that concerns itself with the permanent principles, if any, underlying a party name, [which] can follow two contrasted lines of development” (141) In one case, he says, the theory may precede the practice, such that adherents to a political doctrine espouse its enduring truth. In the other, opposite, case, however, “a political party may find that it has had a history, before it is fully aware of or agreed upon its own permanent tenants.” In this instance, such tenets to which the political party realizes it ascribes value preexist their embodiment and codification under a particular political banner. It is up to each generation to distinguish anew between the permanent, which must be embraced, and the transitory, which must be excised from their political philosophy. Eliot privileges this process, of course, which he associates with conservatism. My own understanding of conservatism follows from Eliot’s in its concern for what Eliot calls the “pre-political,” the human ephemerality, transitoriness, indeterminacy, and failure that precondition any permanent political principles.

Eliot links this conception of permanence with the concept of cultural tradition, which for him revolves around the literary. In the same speech, for example, he insists that, “I have been making the point that there should be no complete separation of function between men of thought and men of action” (142). In this sense, he argues that literary production – the work of men of thought – can influence the political sphere, admitting that such attempts may not yield immediate, apprehensible results. That said,

he nonetheless claims that the literary, as a humanist discipline, is a “pre-political area... the stratum down to which any sound political thinking must push its roots, and from which it must derive its nourishment” (144). And this “pre-political area,” in fact, is not just the realm of the literary or the philosophical, but also the imagination. “But we can look still further for literary influence, not only philosophical, but imaginative, upon politics” (144). The imagination, Eliot implies, is capable of engaging not only with the ethical, but more importantly with the theological, insofar as it can posit possible answers to “the question of questions, which no political philosophy can escape, and by the right answer to which all political thinking must in the end be judged... What is Man? what are his limitations? what is his misery and what his greatness? and what, finally, his destiny” (144)? It therefore has the potential to influence politics insofar as it is grounded in the ethical sensibilities he derives from Christianity.

Eliot addresses these questions in *Four Quartets*, which like Shelley’s poem is concerned with the problem of impermanence, or more specifically the relationship among literary tradition, poetic language, and the eternal. While “Ozymandias” is thematically political, its poetic rendering performs what Eliot calls the “pre-political,” insofar as the poem reveals itself to be more “about” the human (whether Ozymandias, the traveller, or the speaker) than empire. The fragment of statue, more than serving as a metaphor for the collapse of empire, allegorizes the fragmentation of human nature and the power of the imagination to make sense of such fragmentation (as opposed to fascist totality). What Shelley calls the Imagination, however, Eliot refers to as language, the “word.”

Words move, music moves

Only in time; but that which is only living

Can only die. Words, after speech, reach  
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,  
Can words or music reach  
The stillness.

In Part V of "Burnt Norton," Eliot sketches the seeming paradox of poetic language. In these lines, he conceives of the temporal, the utterance, in terms of the spatial, the written word. The phrase "after speech" therefore connotes both the period of time after a word is spoken as well as the form that language has taken after the advent of speech, that of writing. Whereas words, like music, "move," or come into being, in a particular temporal moment, they also possess the ability to persist into timelessness. This timelessness is represented metaphorically as a "stillness" that opposes "movement," an existence outside the constraints of human activity, the goal of human endeavor. This conception of poetic language does not resemble the specifically fascist political goal of totality, however. Like Shelley, Eliot recognizes that the only attainable form of permanence is impermanence.

Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still.

That is, just as language is able to reach the stillness, it cannot itself remain still. In this sense, while it provides us access to the eternity beyond mortal limits, it also imposes on us the impossibility of truly accessing that eternity. The very constitution of language - decay, imprecision, cracks and breaks - is fundamentally at odds with the concept of

totality, requiring as it does physical stillness, temporal limitlessness (history and future, possible and realized), and spatial wholeness.

In the first section of "Burnt Norton," the past conditional mood made possible by language renders this fragmentation by representing "what might have been." In fact, creative language in particular can give equal weight to the mythological and the historical, the possible and the particular. And both of these stories "point to one end, which is always present." That is, in the spirit of Nietzsche, language is capable of presenting – as well as present-ing, or making present – possible interpretations of history. The present moment is thus always the culmination of these events that both did and did not occur, such that any moment could conceivably be any other moment. The poem refers to this infinitely expansive landscape of alternate moments as the "rose-garden," which it attaches to the "echoes" of poetic language – in this case, made explicit by the metaphor of the rose garden – that makes it possible for the imagination to create these alternatives. The echoes that comprise and make possible access to the metaphor of the rose garden are attached to a variety of human emotions, beginning with regret. "Footfalls echo in the memory / Down the passage which we did not take / towards the door we never opened." In this sense, the echoing footfalls (one of the numerous paradoxes employed by the poem) leading to the rose garden comprise Eliot's concept of the objective correlative, which calls forth a subjective, universal emotion. The purpose of following certain echoes, of "disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves," is beyond the realm of human understanding. "But to what purpose / ... / I do not know."

And yet, language makes it possible, even incites us, to follow the footfalls of any number of echoes. And here the bird, like Yeats's artificial bird, guides the human subject like Virgil through the rational impossibility of simultaneous possible pasts. It is

here that we encounter the drained concrete pool, the first image of stone, which serves in the poems as a metonym for the eternal. In this case, the anthropomorphized footfalls of echoes of poetic language move “in a formal pattern / ... / to look down into the drained pool.” The pool fills with sunlight like water and, once a cloud passes to cover the sun, is suddenly rendered empty again.

Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,  
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,  
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,  
The surface glittered out of heart of light,  
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.

There are two important moments in these lines. The first is the phrase “lotos rose,” which is simultaneously an act of movement, as in the lotus flower rising from the pool, and a still image of the “lotos rose.” In the second section of “Burnt Norton,” the poem describes such a paradoxical moment, the collapse of sequentiality and simultaneity, as “*Erhebung* without motion.” The self-referential misspelling of “lotus” as “lotos” calls attention to the way in which such a paradox is only possible in language, in the realm of the imagination. The “lotos rose” is only one letter away from the “logos rose,” the rose garden, or the rising up, of poetic language.

The second moment of note is the visual reflection of the sonically echoing footfalls, another of the poems’ many paradoxes. The poetic subject looks forward to see backward, a spatial representation of the collapse of time future and time past, the encounter with eternity, with which the poem is continuously engaged. In this moment, the two converge in the sunlight that fills, and thereby obstructs, the cement pool. As a cloud passes overhead, however, this illusion is quickly shattered and the pool revealed

to be empty. The transcendence made possible by the echoes of the footfalls of poetic language is shown to be divorced from the permanence of the cold and dark cement pool. The rose garden is thus a site of dialectical tensions: between living roses and dead cement, the fullness of light and the emptiness of shade, the immobile permanence of the pool and the movement of the echoes of poetic voices, the reassuring dreariness of certainty and the frightening exhilaration of possibility.

That is, the pool represents a second example of the objective correlative, this time linked to the glum monotony of modern life. In this sense, both the pool and the roses that surround it, which “had the look of flowers that are looked at,” embody various emotional states wrought by the condition of being mortal. The seeing, poetic, and above all human subject, like the subject reading the words that “echo / Thus, in your mind,” is implicit in the rose, sees himself reflected back in the living flower and again in the dead concrete. The speaker here is following the echoes of poetic language through a rose garden when he discovers the pool, at which point he sees those echoes reflected back in the light. The echoes of the written word are like the dry concrete of the pool, permanently empty but rendered visible by the light. Insofar as they are a reflection, they are thus also a part of the subject who sees them who, striving for the permanence of the pool, must also recognize the metaphorical dreariness, the emptiness, and the passivity necessitated by attaining such permanence.

The central problem with which Eliot wrestles throughout *Four Quartets* is how to lead a spiritually meaningful life amidst such dreariness, the only experience of permanence possible for the mortal human bound by the limits of the material world.

Yet the enchainment of past and future

Woven in the weakness of the changing body,

Protects mankind from heaven and damnation

Which flesh cannot endure.

While time and change imprison the human, they are also a form of protection against that which a mortal being cannot comprehend. The concept of physically enduring the eternal, or immortality, illustrates the limits of human cognition and reason, which like the body are bound by the restrictions put on them by existing within the confines of temporality. The only possible thought systems that can emerge within such confines are those that necessarily assume sequentiality, progress, history, and time. Recognizing this, *Four Quartets* ponders how poetic language, itself subject to the very same restrictions, can posit an alternative, aesthetic, and imaginative reality. This alternate reality is embodied by the “unheard music in the shrubbery” that coexists with the roses and the pool. “Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children, / Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.” It is such children’s laughter that *Four Quartets* encourages us to hear. The Virgilian bird commands the poetic subject to leave the garden in an effort to proselytize this message. “Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind / Cannot bear very much reality.” That is, human kind cannot bear its reality very much longer without the respite offered by the poetic imagination, a tempered, Hegelian respite that – only ever capable of presenting anything in the fragmented nature with which it must come to be – can nonetheless call attention to the fragmented nature of experience and offer a variety of alternatives to the dreary permanence engendered by such fragmentation. That is, the act of aestheticizing impermanence renders such impermanence bearable.

Eliot’s sense of children’s laughter seems a hybrid of Wordsworth and Nietzsche, insofar as it is associated with the affirmation of experience through memory. Like the poetic subject above Tinturn Abbey, whose experience of the abbey is enhanced by the



memory of innocent and imaginative childhood activity, the second section of "Burnt Norton" (1935) emphasizes the power of memory – a concept whose existence would be impossible without the concept of time – to overcome, like the sunlight, the dreariness of the empty pool of existence.

To be conscious is not to be in time  
But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,  
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,  
The moment in the draughty church at smokefall  
Be remembered; involved with past and future.  
Only through time time is conquered.

Insofar as "to be conscious is not to be in time," these memories are, like Proust's madeleine, involuntary; along with the emotions that accompany them, they are triggered by experiences with poetic language. The moments described in these lines are not specific and can thus function as objective correlatives, capturing emotions that can be associated with a range of memories recalled by a vast range of human subjects.

The caesura in the final line of the second section anticipates that of the final two lines of "Burnt Norton," which read: "Ridiculous the waste sad time / Stretching before and after." On the one hand, this formal trope rhythmically captures the opposition that comprises the paradox, a conceptual trope that recurs throughout the poems. That is, like the paradox, the caesura is disruptive; it foregrounds the fragmented experience of reading the poem and our inability to fully determine its meaning. This line alludes to "Ozymandias," the "lone and level sands that stretch far away." The version of permanence critiqued in the third section of *Four Quartets* is like these sands: alone, unchanging, and static. Asymptotically approximating this stasis, however, provides the

great, meaningful, pre-political thrill of mortal existence: the acknowledgement and affirmation of our finitude. For in this affirmation we are granted access to a different form of eternity: the universality of human emotion.

Love is itself unmoving,  
Only the cause and end of movement,  
Timeless, and undesiring  
Except in the aspect of time  
Caught in the form of limitation  
Between un-being and being.

That is – and it does seem to me that Eliot believes in a form of the will, perhaps an irrational or unconscious will – we are given three choices, as we are made of flesh and are thus “caught in the form of limitation / between un-being and being,” between death and life. On the one hand, we can

Descend lower, descend only  
Into the world of perpetual solitude,  
World not world, but that which is not world,  
Internal darkness, deprivation  
And destitution of all property,  
Desiccation of the world of sense,  
Evacuation of the world of fancy,  
Inoperancy of the world of spirit

This, it would seem, would be to choose death-in-life, to give in to certain desires that seem transcendent such that we become automatons mired in monotony. But insofar as “this is the one way,” then “the other / is the same.” That is, we may also choose life-in-

death, the epicurean overflowing of desire, also offering the illusion of transcendence. These paths, bound as they are by the notion of time, are those presented by the world, which “moves / in appetency, on its metalled ways / of time past and time future.” Desire, appetency, is linked to metal, static and unchanging. Opposed to desire is love, which is “undesiring / except in the aspect of time.” And it is this “waste sad time / stretching before and after” that we must affirm in order to transcend, such that we can hear the “hidden laughter / of children in the foliage.” The illumination thus provided by poetic language allows the reflection necessary to understand our own limitations, the irrational impulse to prod our feelings of regret or consider how things might have been and laugh. Thus aware of the “ridiculousness” with which we are forced to live, we can affirm our fragmented experience with the knowledge of its limitations and potential.

In “East Coker” (1940), however, the poem confronts the limits of poetic language, which leaves “one still with the intolerable wrestle / With words and meanings.” Such words and meanings must inevitably refer back to history, such as that of family lines (to which East Coker, where Eliot’s family once lived, is a reference) and the “Mirth of those long since under earth / Nourishing the corn.” The paradoxical phrase “in my beginning is my end,” which runs throughout this poem, refers to the cyclical nature of this history, the return of the seasons or repetitive patterns of experience. Eliot’s speaker is looking for a way to affirm this repetition without reproducing it meaninglessly. The “worn-out” poem at the start of the second section performs such meaningless repetition, relying on established and tired poetic tropes such as metaphor and allusion. This short poem imposes a particular epistemology whereby patterns are induced from experience, whereas Eliot’s speaker is attempting to

conceive of history as a constellation of the possible and impossible, the real and imagined. In this conception, every moment is the culmination of every previous moment possible, such that it comprises every possible pattern and, thus, no pattern whatsoever. When a pattern cannot be imposed on experience, then, we are left with affect, the raw experience of human emotion, which is always present. And to realize this requires a sense of humility, an ascetic discipline.

You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.

In order to arrive at what you do not know

You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.

In order to possess what you do not possess

You must go by the way of dispossession.

In order to arrive at what you are not.

This chant, reminiscent of the final lines of *The Waste Land*, expresses the humility required to attain a sense of the eternal and “arrive at what you are not.” For the goal expressed by Eliot’s speaker is both to gain knowledge of how to live a spiritually meaningful life and to understand what such a life means. Language, the speaker reiterates, while the only tool at our disposal, will only ever allow us an approximation of this experience: “For us,” he says, “there is only the trying.” This act of approximation is the pursuit of transcending the mortal worlds of time, including the natural world (“the evening under starlight”) and the modern, urban world (“the evening under lamplight”). That is, it is the striving for affirmation, which is a striving for love, “a deeper communion / Through the dark cold and the empty desolation” of the mortal worlds we can only ever inhabit.

The speaker returns to this love in the final poem, "Little Gidding" (1942), associating it with nationalism, the "love of a country." This love, "never indifferent," hinges on memory, particularly the history of one's country. Specifically, the speaker's impetus is to shift the emphasis from remembering, or constructing history, of the men who died for the love of their country to the act of dying itself. The speaker makes numerous allusions to Yeats, among others, throughout "Little Gidding," and this distinction between the dying and the dead, like the dancer and the dance, is one of the most pronounced. While the question is not rhetorical, Eliot's speaker asks, "Why should we celebrate / These dead men more than the dying?" In celebrating by remembering the act of dying, we remember an imperfection, a fragmenting of a political cause rather than its total representation. This symbol of dying is affirming, as it reminds us that "all shall be well and / All manner of thing shall be well," and it therefore promotes love for one's country. However, it also torments us, as it reminds us of our own imperfection, our own mortality, "the intolerable shirt of flame / Which human power cannot remove."

The distinction between the dying and the dead has further political implications, particularly regarding de Man's rhetorical reading of the figure of the dancer and the dance in Yeats. For Eliot's speaker, the dying is perceived as a symbol. Rather than a symbol of nationalism, it is a symbol of human finitude and mortality, an end that is also a beginning. As such, this question allegorizes the poem's own failed symbolism, its own tormented attempt to understand and then to represent the unknowable. In its failure, however, the poem foregrounds the political stakes of such a pursuit, which Eliot considered "pre-political." Nationalism, in this conception, can therefore only ever be a concept in language. As such, it is subject to the same

fragmentation and imperfection that comprises both human experience and attempts to represent that experience in poetry. In performing this fragmentation, and its affirmation, the poem neither questions nor espouses nationalism; rather, it sees it – and all political impulses – as the inevitable product of systems of thought invented by human subjects who are themselves mortal and fallible. This could not be more antithetical to fascist nationalism, embodied by propaganda, which constructs an ideal view of future permanence.

The future, no less than the past, are concepts that each of the quartets is highly skeptical of. They are necessarily contested, limited, imperfect, and possible, rather than determined. And it is failure, specifically, that Eliot's poems, like "Ozymandias," consider constitutive of any epistemological sense of historical progress with regards to futurity. In a letter from 1939 published in *New English Weekly*, Eliot wrote that propagandists "have as their job rather the propagation of existing views, than the creation of the valuable views of the future" (in Ricks 269). As Ricks argues, this notion that the future can be rendered valuable in the present runs antithetical to Eliot's conception of the present, particularly that elaborated in *Four Quartets*. For Eliot, the present is both sacred (transcendental) and sinful (human); any attempt to impute to the past or the future these paradoxical qualities of the present, such as the fascist valorizing (or value-izing) of the dead, is to mire oneself even more deeply in fallibility. Rather, by insisting that the act of dying is itself symbolic of a positive kind of nationalism (Love for one's country), the text foregrounds the aesthetic, and particularly poetic, nature of this nationalism. The act of dying is an eternally present one, insofar as it can never be repeated, and as such achieves what Eliot considers to be the goal of poetry, which it can never fully attain. That is, the act of dying renders understandable the failure implicit in

any human endeavor, the limits of human experience. It therefore symbolizes the affirmation with which we must live our lives despite such limitations. Insofar as death itself is the symbol, the figure of its rendering it poetry allegorizes the process of affirming life in death, a process that "Little Gidding" describes, echoing Dante, as it describes encounters with the dead.

Poetry, then, would be able to represent the realities of war, so long as it did so with an eye to presenting, or making present, the experience of dying, the one definitive experience of a mortal, human life. And this, of course, is an impossible task, so the real goal of poetry is, in attempting to approximate the experience of war, to dramatize the impossibility of such an attempt and, ultimately, to affirm the impossibility with which we endeavor to undertake the task. Such an endeavor to affirmingly make present the realities of war, Eliot explains two months before the publication of *Four Quartets*, requires temporal distance. "You cannot understand war - with the kind of understanding needed for writing poetry - or any other great experience while you are in the midst of it" (in Ricks 270). This is the process that Eliot describes in the fifth section of "East Coker."

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—

Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*

Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt

Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure

These poetic beginnings are therefore endings, as they all end in failure. They double what they represent: the ending that is the act of dying. However, as Eliot insists throughout the quartets, "in my end is my beginning." And thus, the act of dying is what inspires the attempt to capture it in poetry. So while the failure of words to capture

the experience of war, the experience of dying, seems here to be something to lament, Eliot insists that such failed endings are in fact hopeful beginnings.

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost  
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions  
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss,  
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.

Here, the “trying” effort, the “fight to recover” endings by rendering them present eclipses “the rest,” the act of apprehending time in its entirety; affirming the momentary act of dying proves more meaningful than trying to make sense of, ascribe value to, or valorize the eternal state of death. Temporal distance gives us the time to recognize and affirm the necessity of human failure, the ultimate example of which is the act of failing to remain alive, to recognize that because we live, and because we die, neither of these states is eternal and we are thus limited in our access of the eternal to the emotionally powerful approximations we can only ever experience in the present.

It is with this affirmation of failure that Eliot opens a short poem on war poetry published the month after he published “Little Gidding.” The very first word of “A Note on War Poetry” is the word “Not.” Whether meant to evoke the German word “Not” or not, across both languages, this word renders meaning irreducible, as the two meanings coexist paradoxically: absence and negation, in English, and urgency and necessity, in German.

Not the expression of collective emotion  
Imperfectly reflected in the daily papers.

If nothing else, these terse lines reject the notion that the poetic figure of dying can act like propaganda, which constructs collective emotions by appearing to reaffirm their



individuation. If war poetry is to employ the objective correlative, it must do so in a way that goes beyond such propaganda and addresses the enduring questions of what it means to be human, the “pre-political.”

While the poem does not use the words “death” or “dying,” it does present the same distinction made between the two in “Little Gidding.” Whereas death serves as a metonym for the material masquerading as the eternal and is subject to politicization in the daily papers, any literary trope of the transient act of dying is immune to such politicization. It symbolizes, in other words, the doubling of failure that occupies the speaker of *Four Quartets*: the ethical failure implicit, as Nabokov would say, in both mortality and morality (“the moral sense in humans is the duty / we have to pay on mortal sense of beauty”). Both the human and the work of art fail to persist forever in the present moment, as both are subject, like Ozymandias, to the onslaught of time. The recognition of this failure, however, as Humbert Humbert implies in his pun on “duty,” is both a tax and a responsibility, imposed on us from without as well as within. The symbol of dying, which symbolizes the failure of representation, both imposes on us, and inspires within us, the need to recognize and affirm our own sinful, mortal failings.

And it is in this sense that “A Note on War Poetry” engages the concepts of death and dying without naming them explicitly. Instead of these terms, Eliot employs the “universal,” and the “transient,” of which we should be skeptical of both. Whereas the universal, “death,” is a concept easily subjected to political propaganda, the transient, the moment of “dying,” cannot simply replace it and thereby be subject to the same propaganda. To do this, dying must be understood as a failure and affirmed nonetheless. The poem concludes with the following stanza.

The enduring is not a substitute for the transient,

Neither one for the other. But the abstract conception  
Of private experience at its greatest intensity  
Becoming universal, which we call 'poetry,'  
May be affirmed in verse.

The war poem, "the abstract conception / of private experience at its greatest intensity," is not the substitution of the transient for the universal, or the universalizing of the transient. Rather, it reveals what may arguably be the only universal, that of affirming the impossibility of knowing, experiencing, or representing the universal. The war poem, which records with great intensity the individual experience of witnessing the act of dying again and again, approximates this experience, represents it, and has the capacity to acknowledge the failure of representation to render it apprehensible. But, in typical Eliotic fashion, verse itself is the site whereby the grounds for affirmation are made possible.

Where is the point at which the merely individual  
Explosion breaks

In the path of an action merely typical  
To create the universal, originate a symbol  
Out of the impact...

Eliot here sees the rawness and emotional immediacy of the war poem as symbolizing the universality of the affirmation of failure. Yet this, like language in *Four Quartets*, is by necessity a failure of language, "a meeting / / ... of forces beyond control of experiment." For to hone a war poem, to control it like an experiment, to strive towards its perfection, is an act of politicizing that seeks to dissimulate the failure that constitutes

the act of dying, itself constitutive of the experience of war. We may think back to the opening of *Four Quartets*, when the speaker declares that “human kind / cannot bear very much reality.” It is precisely this reality that Eliot desires human kind not only to bear, but to affirm.

The affirmation of failure (to comprehend or partake) is, in fact, one way to conceptualize Eliot’s own self-diagnosis with regards to politics, and fascism in particular. There have been a number of studies examining Eliot’s relationship to the various tenets of fascism, including his anti-Semitism (Julius), his poetics (North, Morrison), his forays into politics and economics in *The Criterion* (Harding), and his anti-liberalism (Surette). These critics range in their conclusions, from Julius’s contested claim that anti-Semitism serves as a structuring element in Eliot’s work to Surette’s insistence that Eliot’s attraction to, or at least indifference towards, fascism was as much a product of what he saw as the failures of communism and capitalism, to which fascism is opposed. However, as with Stefan George, who Eliot considered more significant for German poetry than Rilke, there are only a few sources from which to intimate Eliot’s position towards fascism; as his poetry demonstrates, this position is marked by the recognition that his attempt to fully comprehend the movement(s) amounted to failure, what he calls “humility” in *East Coker II*. While he does not resist fascism, neither does he completely ignore nor embrace it, acknowledging the limits of his understanding and, in so doing, articulating an attitude about the movement that – symbolized perhaps by his association with Montgomery Belgion – was passively permissive despite its self-aware modesty.

Eliot’s most succinct articulation of his politics occurs in the forward to *For Lancelot Andrewes*, when he writes that his collection of essays is “classicist in literature,

royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion" (7). Eliot's classicism and "royalism," or monarchism, led him to openly defend Charles Maurras, a leading figure in the *Action Française*, for which he has been condemned as having fascist, or at least proto-fascist, sympathies. In addition to his admiration of Maurras, and his desire to wed government with his concept of the "Anglo-Catholic" Church, Eliot also praised Hugo von Hofmannsthal, whose call for a conservative revolution married literary classicism, cultural conservatism, and monarchist politics. "Eliot's élitist and imperialist cultural politics found a number of fellow travellers among Germany's leading bourgeois humanists – Hofmannsthal, Gundolf, Curtius. What they shared was a mission to preserve Europe's cultural heritage at a time of spiritual aridity, communism, fascism, Nazism, and the spectre of war" (Harding 224). When Hofmannsthal died in 1929, Eliot published an obituary in his periodical *The Criterion*, written by the German intellectual and regular contributor of the 'German Chronicle' section, Max Rychner. In addition to Rychner and the George-disciple Gundolf, Robert Curtius was also a regular contributor to the journal and "some years later, Curtius weighed Hofmannsthal in the balance with George." Curtius's humanist writings on Hofmannsthal and George, while "eminently *bürgerlich*," posited a "humanist model of education inherited from Wilhelm von Humboldt as a necessary counterbalance to the cultural nihilism espoused by Hitler's National Socialist movement" (217-218). This is not to say that Eliot was not attracted to the ideals of fascism, as his unfinished work *Coriolan* demonstrates, but rather that his interest in fascism only went so far as it embodied his evolving sense of cultural and anti-democratic conservatism, national monism, traditional classicism.

What Eliot found appealing in Gundolf, George, Curtius, and Hofmannsthal, then, was both their monarchic politics, authoritarian but not fascist, as well as their

classicist aesthetics. In the work of these men, Eliot found represented the political aesthetics of the French politician Charles Maurras, who helped found the pseudo-fascist movement, *Action Française*, in Vichy France. Maurras's political philosophy was a rethinking of the counter-Enlightenment critique of Rousseau who, for Maurras unlike men such as Joseph de Maistre, saw Rousseau as emblematic of a democratic, Protestant, individualist and especially Romantic worldview. De Maistre saw the revolution as a divine test, such that "the easy euphoria promised Adam and Eve through knowledge is recapitulated in the meretricious appeal of the Enlightenment" (Asher 14). Later in the nineteenth century, the once-liberal philosopher Ernest Renan articulated a conservative position that, while more secular than de Maistre's, nonetheless "found Christianity necessary." Renan criticized post-revolution France, which he found too bourgeois and materialist, by drawing on the success of Prussia, which he attributed to its remaining "quasi-feudal: dedicated to hierarchy, discipline, and loyalty" (17). In this sense, "the conservative position was made up of a loosely related series of fears: of the revolutionary spirit, liberalism, progress, democracy, Rousseau, capitalism, the Enlightenment, foreigners in general, and Jews in particular" (21). Rather than fixate on any one of these specific fears as the unifying tenet of conservatism for my project, however, I focus on how any of them – as generally agreed upon as signifying a conservative position by historians and by the writers in question themselves – receives poetic treatment. The "conservative" gesture then pivots on each poet's affirmation of either an indeterminate position towards such political beliefs or the failure of fully realizing such beliefs in a material political sense.

Inheriting this platform of fears at the turn of the century, Charles Maurras approached the conservative critique of Rousseau with a literary sensibility, such that he

considered Rousseau to embody a kind of proto-Romanticism. As a friend of T. E. Hulme, who wrote the oft-cited polemical essay “Romanticism and Classicism,” Eliot was similarly critical of the Romantics, “associat[ing] the denial of the fundamentally limited nature of the human condition with Romanticism and the recognition of its limited nature with classicism. In this respect they [Hulme, Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis] are aping Charles Maurras and the *Action française*” (Surette 130). The *Action française* was a nationalist and militant right-wing faction, made up primarily of young men, which formed in Paris in 1899 and remained present until the end of World War II. As one of the most active and outspoken members of the group, Maurras rose to prominence, preaching a return to pre-1789 Catholicism and isolationist royalism. And in this sense, his position against Rousseau was simultaneously political, religious, and literary. In 1913, in fact, the *Nouvelle Revue Française* concisely described the Maurrasien position as “classique, catholique, monarchique,” almost the identical phrasing to that used by Eliot in his preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes* in 1928.

While Maurras did not attribute to Christianity the same potential as de Maistre, he nonetheless viewed Catholicism as the necessary corrective to Protestantism’s implicit individualism, which had overtones with his ordered and authoritarian political vision. “According to Maurras, the Catholic Church was the brilliant antidote to Jesus’s seductive anarchy. It reestablished traditional hierarchy by reinstating a legion of intermediaries, priestly and divine, between the individual and God. And thus things remained until the anarchic spirit broke out once again with Luther – and two centuries later with his offspring Rousseau, who infiltrated France from Protestant Geneva” (Asher 23). For the classicist Maurras, who had “a view of history that recognizes no

perceptible rupture between the Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church," these three spheres are inseparable (Asher 26).

Maurras is never troubled by a problem that, throughout his life, will vex Eliot in his defense of this [classical] tradition: can there be a great work of art whose political or religious principles are less than correct? For Maurras, supremely confident in the permanence of "antiromantic truth," the answer is simply no... Formal beauty is always a faithful reflection of immutable truth, and as [Ernst] Nolte correctly points out, this holds for states and religions every bit as much as for works of art. The substance of the truth - order and rank - are equally political, artistic, and religious virtues. (27-28)

For Maurras, the greatest works of art necessarily pronounce enduring, or eternal, political and religious truths.

There was considerable ideological overlap in the positions of the *l'Action française* and National Socialism, particularly with regards to the violence with which they sought to realize their similarly anti-Semitic, extreme nationalist, and authoritarian platforms. That is, both National Socialists and *l'Action française* shared a desire for collective discipline and order that they viewed as lost in an age of bourgeois, liberal, democratic individualism and materialism. Eliot, too, was opposed to many of democracy's principles, such as universal suffrage, though his attitudes towards National Socialism were ambivalent. In any case he seems to have considered *l'Action Française* to be an ultra-conservative, rather than fascist, movement. In his review of a number of texts both supporting and critiquing fascism more broadly from 1927, "The Literature of Fascism," he largely dismisses fascism, claiming that whatever there is to be admired in the movement can already be "found, in a more digestible form, in the

work of Charles Maurras” (in Surette 161). “Eliot’s rejection of fascism, then was not on grounds of its anti-democratic and totalitarian character, nor because of its overt celebration of violence, but because he found it inferior to the anti-democratic and totalitarian doctrines of Charles Maurras and the *Action Française*” (161).

The political and historical weight Eliot ascribed to Maurras is foregrounded by a commentary Eliot published in *The Criterion* from November 1927. In the editorial, Eliot cites “three events in the last ten years” of monumental enough stature “to compel us to consider the problem of Liberty and Authority, both in politics and in the organization of speculative thought.” These events are “the Russian revolution (which has also directed our attention to the East), the transformation of Italy (which has directed our attention to our own forms of government), and the condemnation of the *Action française* by the Vatican” (“A Commentary” 386). In Ernst Nolte’s account, this condemnation caused *l’Action Française* to “undergo a profound change. If royalism, its teeth drawn since 1918, prevented it from extending over the entire Right, so the condemnation deprived it, if not of its whole body of Catholic followers, at least of a coming generation from among young Catholics as well as of a powerful moral support” (Nolte 111). Eliot apparently found the event similarly significant, placing it alongside the Russian Revolution and the rise of fascism. Specifically, as a result of these events, he declares that, “politics has become too serious a matter to be left to politicians.” However, as Jason Harding points out, “What the non-specialist ‘man of letters’ or the *Criterion*, a non-technical ‘literary review,’ had to contribute to political debate was not always clear. For example, although astute contemporaries realized that developments in Italy and Russia were of profound international importance, the Vatican condemnation of the French Royalist movement, *Action française*, was seen as a



backwater event by many English observers" (Harding 180). Eliot then defended Maurras against the Catholic Leo Ward's defense of the condemnation, writing that for eighteen years Maurras had had "exactly the opposite effect" of "pervert[ing] his disciples and students away from Christianity." "Indeed, Kenneth Asher points out that Maurras deeply influenced the Harvard French professor Irving Babbitt, and that Babbitt's hostility to romanticism and fondness for the classic echoed Maurassient views. Babbitt passed on that attitude to his students, including Eliot" (Surette 162).

The opacity of Eliot's religious views here – his embrace of aspects of Anglicanism, Catholicism, and Christianity – characterizes his self-definition as "anglo-catholic in religion." In 1927 he officially converted to Anglicanism, a turn that marks the beginnings an intensification of Eliot's British nationalism, as well as his most intense flirtation with fascism in his unfinished sequence *Coriolan*, which, as Steven Matthews argues, "emerges [in 1932] at a time when the lure of fascism pulled hardest at Eliot's sensibility" (Matthews 44). "In this period," Matthews argues, "the strength offered by belief in totalitarian politics threatens but ultimately does not overturn the religious foundations of his apolitical understanding of the nature of the individual in society... *Coriolan* is the dramatization of the complexities underlying Eliot's feeling for the allure of such politics, as well as the grounds for his resistance to them" (46). Like Maurras, the poetic sequence assumes continuity from Roman art and politics to religion. Eliot, however, challenges the common conception that fascism was a natural outgrowth of Catholicism, which he thought "confused religion with politics. If religious faith is ignored... then politics destructively takes on its aura" (48). As Matthews, Harding, Surette, and, it seems, most Eliot scholars agree today, Eliot's draw to fascism was philosophical insofar as it offered an alternative to liberal democracy founded on

authority, tradition, order, and discipline. However, his interest was tempered by a desire to maintain the fundamental aspects of democracy, as he says in "The Literature of Fascism," and to limit government intervention in "individual and local liberty," as he says in a commentary from April 1929 (Matthews 49). As Matthews argues, the incomplete poem sequence *Coriolan* thus dramatizes the "complex dialectic that reflects the nature of Eliot's convictions at this unsettled point: 'Triumphal March' captures the abjection of the crowd or mass before an equally incognizant hero-figure... 'Difficulties of a Statesman' renders the equivalent, 'hardly' self-knowing perspective of the hero himself, a weakness that brings on the demands to 'RESIGN' at the poem's end. The hinterland of literary and political complexities and complications that surround the moment of *Coriolan*, therefore, seem to enliven... its irresolution..." (57).

The current consensus, if one can speak of such a thing, seems to be that Eliot was drawn to aspects of fascism as a fundamentally inward-looking alternative to liberalism, socialism, and communism but that he ultimately dismissed the movement for, among other things, its celebration of violence, propagation of herd mentality, and claim to supplant religion. In this list, however, one finds a glaring omission, which Anthony Julius has striven to foreground, that of Eliot's anti-Semitism. Julius's sensationalized argument, which has been echoed by the Irish poet Tom Paulin and the Oxford professor of poetry James Fenton, begins with the following. "Anti-Semites are not the same. Some break Jewish bones, others wound Jewish sensibilities. Eliot falls in the second category." In a somewhat appropriate stroke of irony, Julius goes on in the introduction to wound the sensibilities of any reader who could imagine an interpretation of one of Eliot's poems that was not based on recognizing the offense of anti-Semitism, even, presumably, if that reading attempted to reconceptualize the

insulting passage in question. "Indifference to the offense given by these poems is, among other things, a failure of interpretation." Incredibly, Julius goes even further to blanket accuse such interpretations as complicit in the reproduction of exactly the same violent act of anti-Semitism. "They insult Jews: to ignore these insults is to misread the poems" (Julius 1-2).

Such readings are precisely those laid out by the British poet and emeritus professor Craig Raine in his short essay "In Defence of T. S. Eliot." In his essay, Raine invokes Milan Kundera's notion of "criminography," "by which he [Kundera] means the desire to arraign artists on exclusively moral grounds, the desire to annihilate rather than administer complicated justice, the desire to consider only the faults and ignore the virtues and the achievements. Eliot," Raine makes clear, "knew all about what he called 'seductive simplicity' - 'the direct and persuasive appeal to intellect and emotions' that is likely to be 'altogether more plausible than the truth'" (152). I thus share with Raine an "instinct... for complication." It is precisely the impulse towards complication in Eliot's work that, I maintain, allows it to aesthetically critique fascism from within, a critique that fascism itself constantly strives to preclude. As the biography of Eliot demonstrates, however, the material political indifference of such an aesthetic critique does not free it, or its agent, from an ensuing ethical critique.

To complicate the sweeping charge of malicious anti-Semitism leveled by Julius, Raine performs three compelling close readings of passages cited by Julius. The first is of the passage in *After Strange Gods* where Eliot says, "[We must discover]... what conditions, within our power to bring about, would foster the society that we desire. ...reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable" (18-20). It is an incredibly bold gesture to, in the aftermath of the

Holocaust, attempt to read this passage as anything other than anti-Semitic. Raine contends that while Jews are in fact singled out in the passage, there is no reason to necessarily believe that Eliot was skeptical of “large numbers” of members of any free-thinking race and accepting of small numbers of such individuals. To make the case, Raine draws attention to a line quoted in these lectures, that “all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of greeting a stranger... represent the blood kinship of ‘the same people living in the same place’” (on second page in Raine – cite). While Julius does not discuss this quotation, Raine insists that it is crucial to understanding Eliot’s cultural prerogative, as it comes from the Cyclops episode of Joyce’s *Ulysses*. It is, in fact, Leopold Bloom’s

definition of a nation, offered to the bigoted Citizen whose rampant anti-Semitism wishes to expel the Semite interloper from the Irish nation. Leopold Bloom is a free-thinking Jew. And his definition, which is also his defence of his right to live in Ireland, is a definition that the allegedly anti-Semitic Eliot is happy to share. This insight should give us pause, both specifically and generally. By consciously alluding to Leopold Bloom, Eliot effectively includes free-thinking Jews in his recipe for a unified culture... the equivalent of the Labour Party’s immigration policy. (3)

In this sense, as Eliot himself said in a letter, he was “arguing the undesirability of ‘free-thinkers of any race’ in large numbers – and that free-thinking Jews are ‘only a special case.’ By this, Eliot means that, given the diaspora, free-thinking Jews are less likely than free-thinking Christians to retain the vestiges of their religion... Free-thinking Christians in Europe do live, or did live, in a basically Christian culture.”

The impulse of Raine's rereading of Eliot's anti-Semitism is, in fact, to argue that while he engages anti-Semitism in his poetry and prose, often directly, this is generally enough to make the case that anti-Semitism is object of concern, rather than its cause. For example, Julius says, "describing Marx as a 'Jewish economist,' when he was less than a Jew and more than an economist, is insulting." To this Raine cites Eliot's full sentence - "I never expected that Hegel, having been inverted by a Jewish economist for his own purposes, should come back again into the favour" - in which Eliot "is relishing an irony... Hegel was a noted anti-Semite." Another example is the oft-cited lines from Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar":

... On the Rialto once.

The rats are underneath the piles.

The Jew is underneath the lot.

Money in furs. The boatman smiles...

For Raine, "there is anti-Semitism here. But it is not Eliot's.

It must be Burbank's. The two crucial, middle lines are framed, fatally for Julius's argument, by two incomplete phrases... whose truncation, were we to encounter it in *Ulysses*, would instantly indicate interior monologue. They would indicate interior monologue anywhere, as a matter of fact, except in Eliot when one reads prejudicially. Basically Burbank's anti-Semitism is a public posture produced by a private derangement - Bleistein's titular cigar, not mentioned in the poem, tells us that he has succeeded sexually with Princess Volupine where Burbank has failed.

These examples serve to demonstrate how Eliot was engaged with the problem of anti-Semitism, which informed the politics of Charles Maurras no less than the fascist

movements in Germany and Italy. In reading his work as staging, or thinking through, the various perspectives towards anti-Semitism that dominated his age, Eliot is not magically acquitted of at times succumbing to the language of anti-Semitism; such language is in fact necessary to stage a perspective. And as with *Coriolan*, it is as important to read moments of possible anti-Semitic remarks alongside his call for an “organized protest against such injustice,” for example, in the *Christian News-Letter* from 1941.

Perhaps the most damning piece of evidence that Tom Paulin presents in his positive review of Julius’s book is a review of *The Yellow Spot: The Outlawing of Half a Million Human Beings* that appeared in the “Shorter Notices” section of the *Criterion* from 1936. The review understates the events that were occurring in Nazi Germany, claiming that the book was “an attempt to rouse moral indignation by means of sensationalism” (759). As Leon Surette, Harding, Raine, and others evince, the use of this short review to indict Eliot and his journal of charges of anti-Semitism and even support for fascism has been revealed as spurious, in no small part because Eliot did not write the review at all. Rather, the occasional contributor Montgomery Belgion was responsible. “Rather scandalously, that erroneous attribution is also found in Ronald Bush, *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style* (1985), C. K. Stead, *Pound, Yeats, Eliot, and the Modernism Movement* (1986), and Christopher Ricks (who notes that the attribution cannot be certain) *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice* (1988)” (Surette 309). Jason Harding, who has recently presented a thorough account of Belgion’s relationship to *Criterion*, notes that, “Valerie Eliot disclosed to readers of the *Times Literary Supplement* that the review had, in point of fact, been written by Montgomery Belgion, although it might have been evident to anyone who consulted the index to volume 15 of the *Criterion* that Belgion had been the

author – batch reviews were conventionally signed with initials at the bottom of the last entry, in this case ‘M. B.’” (Harding 144). And in response to Julius’s argument since the discovery of this fact, that the review nonetheless ‘bore the stamp of [Eliot’s] approval’ and thus reveals the journal’s latent anti-Semitism, Harding writes that “this means taking a single short book notice, occupying less than half a page, as representative of the contents of a periodical whose bound volumes run to over 12,000 pages. Eliot, of course, was ultimately responsible for all the contents of his journal, but one is still entitled to wonder whether Belgion’s review is at least partly offset by Louis MacNeice’s review of a work by a Jewish theologian, R. V. Feldman, described as ‘very valuable as a corrective to those who find in the Jews a perfect subject for crude generalization” (154-155). This stance seems to be corroborated to some extent by a “Commentary” from 1933, when Eliot said of the economic theories of the anti-Semite Major Douglas, “whether he is right or wrong does not matter a fig to my argument for the priority of ethics over politics” (in Surette 179).

The question undertaken here, however, regards if and how Eliot’s position vis-à-vis fascism in the 1930s, after his conversion to the Anglican Church, manifests in his poetry. This was an ultimately indeterminate and shifting position, in no small part because the same leaders who seemed utterly dismissive of ethics and religion employed aspects of this political vision. Both Hitler and Mussolini were as, if not more, anti-liberal and anti-democratic than Eliot. In a problematic “Commentary” from 1938, Eliot was critical of the “irresponsible ‘anti-fascist,’ the patron of mass-meetings and manifestoes” (in Surette 200). In this article, he called for a return to an agrarian economy, such that, “all classes (so long as we have classes) should be settled in the country and dependent on it.” While the Nazis did embrace modern technology, as

Jeffrey Herf's *Reactionary Modernism* makes clear, Eliot was also aware of their celebration of the German peasant, who represented the racially pure Aryan. This does not seem to trouble Eliot in the October "Commentary," in which he actually identifies fascism as a possible antidote to the "urbanization of mind." One reason for this, as Leon Surette argues, could have been "Eliot's failure to see where fascism/Nazism was headed." As I show momentarily, the affirmation of failure comprises the thematic backbones of *Four Quartets* and *Coriolan*, Eliot's most overtly ethical and political texts of the 1930s and 40s. Eliot was also virulently anti-communist, and fascism could be palatable to Eliot on its shared opposition to its dream of a world without class struggle. Shortly after his defense of fascism, *Kristallnacht* occurred in Berlin. While Eliot never formally mentioned the horrific events, he did discontinue the *Criterion* a few months thereafter. In his "Last Words" for the journal, he admitted, "how obscure and confused my own mind has been." In addition to stating this, however, he also demonstrated it. With the recent events of *Kristallnacht* certainly in mind, Eliot wrote, "For myself, a right political philosophy came more and more to imply a right theology - and right economics to depend upon right ethics." Such right ethics, he goes on to say, are not entirely incompatible with a fascist government, just incompatible with the one offered "locally" by the British Union of fascism. "[T]he version of fascism, which was offered locally... [had] no great intellectual interest - and what is perhaps more important, was not sufficiently adaptable to be grafted on to the stock of Toryism, - whereas communism flourished because it grew so easily on the Liberal root" (in Surette 203).

Eliot's tolerance of fascism, and even of the horrifically violent acts that resulted from fascist governments in Italy and Germany, crystallizes in his three lectures from March 1939 at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. In these lectures, known as *The Idea of*



*a Christian Society*, Eliot declares that, “the fundamental objection to fascist doctrine is that it is pagan” and “dismissed [objections to oppression and violence and cruelty] on the grounds that they ‘are objections to means and not to ends’ (205). In this sense, Surette argues, Eliot “insist[ed] that... Europe was faced with a stark choice between Christianity, fascism/nazism, and communism... Despite abundant evidence of the belligerent, brutal, and oppressive nature of the fascist and Nazi regimes available by March of 1939, Eliot still insisted that they were only marginally worse than parliamentary, capitalist, humanistic liberal regimes... He seems to prefer [fascism/nazism] to liberal democracy, if only it could be purged of its ‘oppression and violence and cruelty.’ That preference appears to have been based primarily on a shared antipathy for the ‘licence’ and atheism of liberalism. Eliot’s stance represents a striking failure of imagination on his part – if not worse” (205-206). In *The Idea of a Christian Society*, this failure to imagine the oppressive brutality of fascism is the result of trying to conceive of an alternative to liberalism, namely an agrarian Christian society that privileged the role of art. Eliot saw fascism as Europe’s only feasible alternative, but the horrors of its reality were necessarily incompatible with a society that Eliot desired to be founded on “right ethics.” Thus the comparison was impossible without its own immanent failure, a fact that likely contributed to Eliot’s own at times deeply troubling indeterminacy and even tolerance before the Holocaust, and outright silence afterwards.

One aspect of this tolerance was likely Eliot’s attraction to fascism’s implicit nationalism, which necessarily rejected urban, international, and liberal cosmopolitanism, the “urbanization of the mind.”

The only motive I can imagine [to evade the issue of the Holocaust] is Eliot’s perception that his commitment to a homogeneous Christian culture for Europe

would make any expression of outrage at the Holocaust appear hypocritical. It is not a judgment I [or I - CL] would have made in his position... [I]t suggests that Eliot's worldview was not coextensive with Anglican Christianity, for Anglicans have had no difficulty in condemning the Holocaust. (255)

It is this national introspection that Joshua Esty argues takes an anthropological form in Eliot's lectures on founding a Christian society from 1939. "But what makes *The Idea of a Christian Society* interesting is not so much its conservative goals as its anthropological methods.

It proposes that English citizens learn to emulate primitive societies 'upon a higher plane' without 'sentimentalizing the life of the savage'... Eliot wishes to shift attention away from artificial or mimetic forms of primitivism that try to borrow back tribal virtues from the colonies. Instead, he proposes a revival based on pre-Revolution England, which he idealizes as a permanently exemplary organization of church and state, of art and faith, of town and country. (Esty 40-41)

Insofar as "art retains vitality only within a bounded culture," Eliot likely found fascism attractive in part because of its practice of isolationism and its (racist homogenizing) ideal notion of cultural nationalism. Its "paganism," however, opposed the Christianity upon which for Eliot any enduring society must be founded.

While composing these lectures, Eliot wrote both "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker," which allegorize - by rendering the poetic dramatization of - the affirmation of human finitude and failure, in a way that is not dissimilar from Shelley's "Ozymandias." Jed Esty presents a similar reading of Eliot's cultural politics in his post-war *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*, published six years after the final quartet "Little Gidding"

and nine years after Eliot's lectures on a Christian society. In *Notes*, Eliot writes in even more explicit anthropological terms.

If colonial ethnography had shown Europe that what Eliot calls 'living total cultures' existed elsewhere in the world then, Eliot seems to reason, *empire's end* allows for the possibility of re-creating such a culture in England. In other words, Eliot writes both against and after the imperial/Arnoldian legacy, which held that England was the spiritually defunct modern center to a set of colorful and culturally vital colonies. (42)

Against the backdrop of Eliot's draw to fascism and his ensuing critique of "pre-political" humanism, however, Esty's argument that Eliot saw the end of empire as necessarily positive is too optimistic. While the end of empire did necessitate a turn towards one's own colony, rather than the imperialist expansion and proliferation of that colony, Eliot's poetry reveals such introspection to be an aesthetic and, therefore, inadequate process. While Esty's argument that *Four Quartets* allegorizes the synthesis of "the local and the universal in a manner befitting a major culture in the act of becoming minor" is compelling, his resulting claim that "*Four Quartets* [is] a poetic form adequate to the dilemmas that remained imperfectly knotted in the serial and discursive logic of Eliot's criticism" is somewhat misleading. While the poems do strive to depict religious experience, for example in the various recurring paradoxes, they in fact allegorize the failure, or inadequacy, of art to serve as the site of reconciling post-imperial cultural nationalism and Christian ethics. Like fascism, art cannot supplant religion, and its attempt to do so is what Eliot finds so disturbing about mass culture. However, in its failure, art can dramatize the affirmation (humility) of that necessary failure (sin) with which all humans after the Fall must live. In this sense, it can provide us with a sense of

the importance of religion, the practice of such affirmation, on which an ethically-sound nation must be founded. Unfortunately, Eliot's silence regarding *Kristallnacht* and the Holocaust stand in ironic contrast to this vision, comprising the one great failure that can be neither forgiven nor affirmed and is what therefore renders the entire process of Eliotic affirmation suspect.

It is primarily in the unfinished poetic sequence *Coriolan* where Eliot demonstrates the futility with which art can influence or engage politics, one form of poetic or artistic failure that he affirms in *Four Quartets*. While *Coriolan* depicts the subjectivity of a fascist citizen and a fascist dictator, respectively, it does this by interrogating the inadequate political import of poetic language. This is indicated in the final line of the poem: "RESIGN RESIGN RESIGN." There are three things to notice in this line. The first is the signification of the word itself, which means to quit voluntarily. While it is undetermined whether the leader himself resolves to quit or this call comes from somewhere else - perhaps the citizen of the "Triumphal March," a disembodied *Zeitgeist*, or even Eliot himself - these lines nonetheless foreground finality, the end of something. However, the composition of this word is such that to resign is also to "re-sign," and in fact there is no clear indication from the poem the word should not be meant as a reflection on the potential of poetic language, like fascism, to create something new, or give new meaning to existing social relationships. This is, after all, the primary aim of fascism, not to mention Ezra Pound's modernism. But the collapsing of these two possibilities into one word does not perform the same paradox that will become a familiar trope in the *Four Quartets* sequence, whereby it transcends human comprehension and offers access to the eternal and holy. Rather, in this passage the sacrifice of determined meaning mirrors the sacrifices and oblations that occur

throughout the poem; rather than transcendence, such sacrifices call forth dust, “dust of dust” and a crown of dust, a trace of life rather than its overcoming.<sup>34</sup> In this sense, the word indicates less of a political statement denouncing fascism and calling for Hitler or Mussolini to step down, and instead refers back to a desire for language itself to be able to “re-sign” the political, to make it comprehensible on a poetic and therefore “pre-political” level.

In this sense, to borrow a line for *Four Quartets*, in the unfinished poem’s end is its beginning, its desperate desire to “re-sign” fascism; in its end, however, is also its end, as this re-signing is also a resignation, an admission of failure. On the one hand, the repetition of the word implies a desperate urgency to this act, while the repetition of the word three times imputes to it a religious quality, namely the inadequate imitation of the trinity reflected by fascism, whose leader here is depicted as a bumbling bureaucrat and regressive infant. Recalling the modernist impulse and Nietzschean construct of creation through destruction, and Gertrude Stein’s “rose is a rose is a rose is a rose” in particular, the repetition of the word “RESIGN” both destroys and refashions figurative language. Rather than the teleological, terminal, and literal notion of failure that the word resignation implies, to end with a “bang,” the intensity of this line recasts failure as a “whimpering” away from politics back to the pre-political realm of poetic signification. In this sense it is an acknowledgement of poetry’s inadequacy, a doubling of the inadequacy of the bureaucracy described in the previous line, “We demand a committee, a representative committee, a committee of investigation.”

These committees of representation and investigation are precisely those regimes of interpretation the poem both demands and denies. Take, for example, the opening

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<sup>34</sup> This may be one way of theorizing the difference between politics and religious ethics: the materiality of the former leaves it static, whereas the abstraction of the latter leaves it dynamic.

procession of signifiers. "Stone, bronze, stone, steel, stone, oakleaves" From the very beginning the poem invites interpretation by deploying the familiar symbols such as stone, bronze, and oakleaves stripped of any determinate referent. But these words are immediately stripped of any symbolic import at the conclusion of the opening line and the one that follows. "Stone, bronze, stone, steel, stone, oakleaves horses' heels / Over the paving. / And the flags. And the trumpets. And so many eagles." The poem makes it immediately clear that we are not dealing with the realm of symbol; the words "stone" or "oakleaves" are not smuggling some secret meaning. Rather they, like the flags and trumpets and eagles, are literally items in a list. "How many?" the speaker asks, "Count them. And such a press of people." This literalism is most jarring moments later, when the speaker asks of another onlooker, "What comes first? Can you see? Tell us." This second voice then responds with a list the precision of which is beyond the scope of average human cognition.

5,800,000 rifles and carbines  
102,000 machine guns,  
28,000 trench mortars,  
53,000 field and heavy guns,  
I cannot tell how many projectiles, mines and fuses,  
13,000 aeroplanes,  
24,000 aeroplane engines,  
50,000 ammunition waggons,  
now 55,000 army waggons,  
11,000 field kitchens,  
1,150 field bakeries.

In the space of reading these items off the list, the entire triumphal march has passed before the eyes of the onlookers, who still eagerly await the Führer. A voice says, with near comical understatement, "What a time that took." Then the entire march is dismissed, as attention is diverted once again towards the Führer.

It is in this moment that the poem transitions from a documentary, representational register to a poetic, investigative one. Specifically, the speaker emphasizes the act of seeing.

Look

There he is now, look:

The word "Look," capitalized, indented, and on its own line, is then followed by a description of the Führer.

There is no interrogation in his eyes

The act of seeing is met with an absence of seeing; the poem is concerned with what it means to represent such vapidity, emptiness, or what I have called elsewhere, failure. And this failure is emphasized by Eliot's allusion to *Four Quartets*.

Look

There he is now, look:

There is no interrogation in his eyes

Or in the hands, quiet over the horse's neck,

And in the eyes watchful, waiting, perceiving, indifferent.

O hidden under the dove's wing, hidden in the turtle's breast,

Under the palmtree at noon, under the running water

At the still point of the turning world. O hidden.

The repetition of the word hidden, not to mention its apostrophizing, points to the committee, or regime, of interpretation. Like the skeleton key in Eliot's much earlier work *The Waste Land*, the poem offers the semblance of carrying some secret meaning in tow. But the lists of literal objects – from stone and bronze to aeroplanes and field kitchens – harbor no secrets. Like the Führer, they are indifferent.

This indifference, however, does not actually crystallize in an image that belongs to *Coriolan* at all. While the shape of this clause seems to indicate that it is the indifference that lies hidden, we know it to be visible apprehensible by a poetic subject who speaks in nothing but lists of everything she sees. Rather, the indifference is hidden in an allusion to another text, "Burnt Norton." On the one hand, the apostrophizing of "hidden" makes of it a noun, a dynamic condition of hiding and revealing set in intertextual motion. But the syntax also implies that something, namely this indifferent affect, is qualified by the adjective hidden. "O hidden... At the still point of the turning world."

"Burnt Norton" is a poem about hiding. In the first section, "the leaves were full of children, / Hidden excitedly, containing laughter." By the final section, this hidden laughter is revealed "Sudden in a shaft of sunlight / Even while the dust moves." This laughter frames, and is thus set against, the passengers of the third section, who most closely resemble the Führer of *Triumphal March*. These tube passengers are also hidden, in a sense, "distracted from distraction by distraction." They are, in other words, hidden from each other and themselves, lost in banality amidst the sea of time. Like the Führer, these passengers exude an air of indifference as they perceive their existence in terms of "time before and time after" rather than "the still point of the turning world."

Here is a place of disaffection



Time before and time after  
In a dim light...  
Neither plenitude nor vacancy. Only a flicker  
Over the strained time-ridden faces  
Distracted from distraction by distraction  
Filled with fancies and empty of meaning  
Tumid apathy with no concentration

We are once again in the register of indifference, as the tube is a “place of disaffection” and its passengers “empty of meaning,” displaying “tumid apathy with no concentration.” The tube, for all its constant movement, is a dreary, vapid, and static place; it symbolizes the movement of the world “in appetency, on its metalled ways / Of time past and time future” without an ability to hear the transcendent laughter of children that remains hidden to its passengers. This laughter, as the bird of the first section says, is of “very much reality,” which “human kind / cannot bear.” The tube represents this inability, this imposition of the illusion of reality, of being stuck in temporality. Eliot, it would seem, is trying to rescue us from this fake reality, what we might call the realm of politics, which is breeding indifference and apathy. On the one hand, this intertextual and allusive gesture linking *Coriolan* to “Burnt Norton” is a statement for art’s power to overcome the political and engage the pre-political. *Coriolan*, however, is testament to the ultimate failure and inadequacy with which art is met in this attempt, embodied perhaps most pointedly by young Cyril, who, firmly rooted in time, grows up between the poems. Cyril is a young boy misinterpreting the symbolism of the communion wafer in the first poem of *Coriolan*, “Triumphal March.” In the second poem, “Difficulties of a Statesman,” he

is appointed telephone operator

At a salary of one pound ten a week rising by annual increments of five shillings

To two pounds ten a week; with a bonus of thirty shillings at Christmas

And one week's leave a year.

This hidden laughter of children is conspicuously absent from *Triumphal March*.

Rather than playing in a garden, or even going to the country, the child in this poem is forced to go to church. And rather than the deeply symbolic gesture of laughing, the child flatly reports what it believes to be eating – not the body of Christ, which operates on a symbolic level, but simply “crumpets.”

(And Easter Day, we didn't get to the country,

So we took young Cyril to church. And they rang a bell

And he said right out loud, *crumpets*.)

The displacement of laughter for crumpets is therefore not only the displacement of transcendence for quotidian banality, but it is also the displacement of art for politics. Misreading the communion wafer as a crumpet mirrors the collective enchantment of the masses by the Führer. The ensuing request for “light” – a device that enables sight, perception, and interpretation – is thus not only hopeless, but also self-referential/ironic. Like the poem, the Führer, who himself is “artful,” denies the possibility of interpretation, supplanting it with the same indifference experienced by the onlookers, egos who recite lists of only that which they literally “perceive” before them.

The poem concludes where it began, with the onlookers completing the list of what they see in front of them, in this case soldiers lining up. The fact that these lines are written in French does not just reinforce the material flatness, the literalness, of the poem's images, or their fundamental indecipherability, but also serves as an allusion to

the *Action Française* leader Charles Maurras. “[B]ut it seems a failure of realization in the poem itself that the appropriate tone only becomes apparent when we are aware of the source, a passage from Charles Maurras’s *L’Avenir de l’Intelligence* in which a writer is ironically presented as talking excitedly about a procession in honour of some mediocre writer. The story is received incredulously: ‘Et les soldats faisaient la haie? – Ils la faisaient’” (Scofield 184).

This reference not only emphasizes the leader’s mediocrity, but also his attempts at artistry, as the soldiers in Maurras’s text line up to celebrate a writer. For Stefan George, the trope of the writer as leader allegorizes the complicity of the poetic, by performing indifference, in the establishment of political indeterminacy. Eliot, however, works primarily by way of the symbol. The utter symbolic emptiness of the images in “Triumphal March” thus serves the poem’s unifying symbol of inadequacy. As an inversion of George’s trope, the figure of the leader as writer expresses poetic, and thus human, failure. Such failure specifically (re)produces the inadequacy of fascist politics, namely as they are embodied by Shakespeare’s Coriolanus. Such politics breed the air of indifference captured by the passengers in the tube, allegorizing the very human conditions that, Eliot affirms, the failure of poetry actually overcomes. For in failing, poetry nonetheless exposes such indifference and thus challenges Nolte’s concept of the fascist “resistance to transcendence.”

This is precisely the fact of Coriolanus in Shakespeare’s play, who finds his identity as a ruler captured by the symbol of the eagle. Coriolanus makes this comparison twice during the play. The first instance occurs during Act III, when he makes his authoritarian and anti-democratic claim for meritocratic or, in the case of Eliot’s poem, more plainly fascist leadership.

Thus we debase  
The nature of our seats and make the rabble  
Call our cares fears; which will in time  
Break ope the locks o' the senate and bring in  
The crows to peck the eagles.

In this metaphor, Coriolanus refers to the masses, which Brutius and Sicinius have organized to challenge his leadership, as "crows." He himself, however, is one of the eagles, those divinely (or privately) selected to lead without the burden of a popular vote. In the final scene of the play, in a reference to his ability to persuade the Volscians to attack Rome, he employs the same metaphor. "[L]ike an eagle in a dove-cote, I / Flutter'd your Volscians in Corioli." The eagle thus symbolizes the potency of Coriolanus's leadership, both his courage and charisma. In the final scenes of the play, however, Coriolanus is not only convinced to agree to a peace treaty with the Romans, but he is also murdered for this treaty, which Aufidius, leader of the Volscians, considers betrayal.

The eagle thus yields to, and is in fact undone by, the doves and crows that his analogy discredits. This is quite the same fate as the leader of "Triumphal March," whose coterie is decorated with "so many eagles" and whose ultimate demise is his own indifference, a failure symbolized formally by the poem itself. This failure is also alluded to intertextually, as Coriolanus is mentioned in Part V of *The Waste Land* in conjunction with the key of interpretation, the temptation of which the poem presents, but the access to which its fragmentation always fails to provide.

*Dayadhvam*: I have heard the key  
Turn in the door once and turn once only

We think of the key, each in his prison

Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison

Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours

Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus

The key to the prison of the poem recalls the committee of investigation at the end of "Difficulties of a Statesman," a committee perhaps to investigate that which is hidden, "o hidden," throughout the poem. The key does not free one from the prison of meaning but rather confirms that prison, such that the only way to make sense of the world is to acknowledge and affirm our inability to make sense of the world. This impossible epistemology is the prison that has broken Coriolanus and led to his demise. Knowing the world through peace or knowing the world through war are both paths that lead to the undoing of Coriolanus, whether by frantic crow or docile dove.

These "aethereal rumours" at nightfall, Eliot's invocation of poetry itself, are the only means through which Coriolanus can be recuperated. If the walls of the prison, like the committee of investigation, represent the limits of human knowledge, then it is only that which exists in the divine ether, beyond the realm of human experience, that can reveal glimpses of such limits and even make such experience tolerable. This is the task, for example, of *Four Quartets*. These glimpses, however, are rumors, they are the inference of experience rather than experience itself, and thus can only operate in poetic language. The affirmation of human failure made possible by such language, the revival of a broken Coriolanus, however, always ends in failure; it can only work "for a moment."

In this sense, Eliot's unfinished poetic sequence about fascism is really a reiteration of themes that he had begun developing in *The Waste Land* and continued

developing through *Four Quartets* and beyond: that which seduces us and tempts us with the illusion of permanence, from the London tube to fascism, can only ever help us acknowledge and affirm our own impermanence. It is this tension that continues in "Difficulties of a Statesman," which opens with a reference to Isaiah 40, verse 6. "And what shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field." This metaphor is put specifically into the context of faith two verses later. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever." In the final verse of this chapter, the eagle symbolizes this devoted follower of God. "But those that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Like Coriolanus, who compares himself to an eagle and is momentarily revived in *The Waste Land*, the faithful followers of God will have their strength "renewed" and "mount up with wings as eagles." Coriolanus the statesman of Eliot's poem recognizes that he too is mortal, that his flesh is like the grass that will wither and the flowers that will fade. Towards the end of the poem, in fact, Coriolanus presents images of dying flowers. "There the cyclamen spreads its wings, there the clematis droops over the lintel." The uncommon nature of these flowers, as symbols of mortality, means they are somewhat obscured, or "hidden," in the text.

Whereas "Triumphal March" is structured around the hiding of the "secret" of human mortality, "Difficulties of a Statesman" is structured around the attempt to reveal that secret.

May we not be

O hidden

Hidden in the stillness of noon, in the silent croaking night."

While the names of the flowers obscure the reference, the whole point of “Difficulties of a Statesman” is to investigate. The investigation of fascism, which Eliot ultimately deemed a failure, thus becomes a model of investigating human finitude, which Eliot also deemed a failure, a working backward from the political to the pre-political.

The primary trope of investigation in “Difficulties of a Statesman” is that of the committee. Coriolan’s desperate compulsion throughout the poem to instate more and more bureaucracy, more and more committees, represents his attempt to artificially, and politically, overcome the limits imposed on us by finitude. One need only think of the films of Leni Riefenstahl, as the camera slowly pans out over a mass rally, the incalculable number of participants reminiscent of Kant’s mathematical sublime. There is a compulsive insistence to form committees such that the word “committee” or “commission” is repeated fourteen times in a poem of fifty-four lines, a rate of once every four lines. There is really an absurd quality to this repetition such that at one point, “A committee has been appointed to nominate a commission.” This repetition speaks to the way in which the poem strives formally to achieve the same sensation of awe that was the aim of films like *Triumph of the Will*. This transcendent awe, or moment out of time, which Eliot strove to represent in *Four Quartets*, formally mirrors the immortality that was thematically immanent in fascist propaganda. Just as death on the battlefield sustains the continued life of one’s people (or race), so too does the poem’s repetition strive desperately to sustain the continued life of the poem. The repetition is a kind of poetic death, however, as evidenced by the final repetition of the word “RESIGN,” which concludes not just the poem, but the entire sequence in medias res.

While these committees reflect the absurdity of fascist ambition on the one hand, they also function internally to the poem as a means of insisting on the inadequacy of

poetry to capture the indifference ultimately proliferated by that ambition. The penultimate line of the poem answers Coriolan's question, itself repeated five times throughout the poem, of "what shall I cry?"

O mother

What shall I cry?

We demand a committee, a representative committee, a committee of investigation

These are the two committees demanded by the poem in its final lines: a committee of representation and a committee of investigation. These are, of course, not only political categories but also refer to the sphere of aesthetics, concerned as it is both with representation and interpretation. That is, these regimes refer ultimately to a search for meaning and how it is constructed. Coriolan "demands" to know the answer to this question by creating his own aesthetic and critical regimes. His demand for these committees is one last attempt to aestheticize politics, to make the political into an aesthetic category that works by enchantment, the construction of illusions and appeal to the emotions.

*Coriolan* is a tenacious poem. Despite operating within the limits of high modernist poetic form, most notably the use of free, unrhymed, and unstructured stanzas, it does not aspire to the high modernist impulse to change the world through poetry. In fact, it aspires much more boldly to the inverse of this, to show with the humility he espouses in *Four Quartets* the quasi-Adornian position that poetry is fundamentally unable to do this. And the promises and threats espoused by fascism is what makes Auden's position that "poetry makes nothing happen" crystallize in a specifically "modern" way. That is, *Coriolan*, as the working through of the relationship



between modernist poetry and fascist politics, reveals the mutual inadequacy of each to the other and each – so long as the poetry and politics are thought together – to the world. As Eliot began embracing Christian thought and writing more explicitly religious poetry, it becomes increasingly clearer that the stakes of poetry's influence on mankind lie in its ability to render possible an experience with the transcendent divine, an experience that (while possibly somewhat anachronous in terms of Eliot's biography) fascism insufficiently attempts to supplant with the facile and fallacious avenues to immortality that it offers, from the mass rally to the endless string of committees and commissions signifying nothing.<sup>35</sup>

In terms of the poetry itself, there can be nothing quite so humble as writing a poem that at times does nothing more than list items in a parade or state the specifics of someone's salary. In these moments, there is absolutely no trademark Eliotic inflection, no careful understatement or deftly deployed tetrameter. There is, quite literally, nothing more than flat description. Such flatness, particularly at this moment in his career, is rather anomalous for Eliot. There seems to be something irreconcilable in his perception of lyric poetry and fascist politics, such that the representation of the latter requires the sacrifice of the possibilities of the former. It is such sacrifice that he pursues for the rest of his career, and it is possible that his fascination with fascism provided a platform for Eliot to begin developing the notion that lyric poetry, always a failure, imitates human finitude and thus provides the most adequate platform for thinking through what it means to be human through its immanent inadequacy to answer that question.

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<sup>35</sup> As Weber understood, one prominent feature of political modernity more broadly is administrated life. Under fascism such bureaucracy, like the ideological promise of immortality, is an illusion, as bureaucracy is always subject to the word of the Führer. In these poems, Eliot seems critical not only of this illusory bureaucracy, but also the extremeness with which he sees fascism insisting on its necessity.

Eliot does not feel that lyric poetry cannot depict fascist subjectivity, but rather that in this depiction it runs up against the limits of poetic language. The most striking example of this limit occurs in the conclusion to "Difficulties of a Statesman."

I a tired head among these heads

Necks strong to bear them

Noses strong to break the wind

The poetic efficacy of this first line, "I a tired head among these heads," harkens back to an understated Prufrockian aesthetic of impersonality. But this impersonality, such a powerful trope for Eliot in his early work, immediately gives way to what we might call Coriolan's indifference. The following lines have no subtle inflection and are nothing more than the repetition of fascist platitudes and polemics. They parrot the idealization of masculinity. The metonymy of "head among these heads" is transformed immediately, and even violently, into literal images: necks, which hold the heads, and noses, against which the wind blows. The metaphorical import of "tired" becomes the literal obsession with youth and physical strength.

This is the general movement of *Coriolan*. From the vapidness of political platitudes to the depth of poetic enchantment, the poem stages the oscillation between the two, the incompatibility and irresolution of poetry and politics. To be political, it seems to say, is to be not poetic, and to be poetic is to be not political. This may be, in fact, the all-important sacrifice that occurs at the end of "Triumphal March."

Now they go up to the temple. Then the sacrifice.

Now come the virgins bearing urns, urns containing

Dust

Dust

Dust of dust, and now

Stone, bronze, stone, steel, stone, oakleaves, horses' heels

Over the paving.

Coriolan recalls this sacrifice at the end of "Difficulties of a Statesman."

May we not be some time, almost now, together,

If the mactations, immolations, oblations, impetrations,

Are now observed

May we not be

There is no object of sacrifice and, in the sense of Girard, it would appear as though the sacrifice provides a way of establishing peace between the poetic and the political. That is, while we do not know what is sacrifice, we know that the outcome of this sacrifice is the proliferation of the absence of meaning. As an allusion to "from ashes to ashes," human mortality, or what he calls "Adam's curse" in *Four Quartets*, the repetition of dust serves to recall the failure constitutive of human nature. But this failure, in both references, is linked with an absence. In "Triumphal March," the insistence of the progression of empty signifiers, "stone, bronze, stone, steel, stone," reminds us that in our end is our beginning; these words still lack symbolic import. And in "Difficulties of a Statesman," observance of the various signifiers for sacrifice – mactation, immolation, oblation – reveal death and finitude, Adam's curse, the absence of being. In Girard's sense, then, meaning itself is the surrogate victim that ensures the peaceful coexistence – rather than mimetic violence – between poetry and politics. But to lose meaning is to lose poetry, and this is a loss that Eliot cannot bear. It is for this reason that he – and not Coriolan – insists so powerfully at the end of "Difficulties of a Statesman," "RESIGN RESIGN RESIGN." This demand counters Coriolan's demand for meaning through the

establishment of a “committee of investigation.” Eliot’s demand is – and here is his brilliance at work – at once literal and metaphorical. The poem does not end in irresolution, but rather with the firm commitment to cease trying to depict or engage politics in his poetry. That is, Coriolan, as metonymy for political engagement, resigns his presence at the same time as Eliot invokes the call for a re-signing of political aesthetics that concern the affirmation of human finitude in religious, rather than political, ways.

## CHAPTER IV

### “IN EINES GEDICHTET WERDEN”: THE CONSERVATIVE REVOLUTION, LITERATURE, AND THE NONPOLITICAL

T. S. Eliot's *Coriolan* thus stages the inadequacy of fascism to overcome human finitude, the failure of which its ideology necessarily rejects. Like George, Eliot's poetry opens fascism to an aesthetic critique, laying bare formal contradictions and impossibilities often elided in the political or ethical logic by which it justified its formation. Such a deployment of the poem, however, was not implicitly conservative. In Germany, the “conservative revolution,” as it has come to be called, was not overtly concerned with the political goal of dramatizing in poetry the impossibility of fascism. On the contrary, for these writers, the notion of a unified German *Volksgemeinschaft* was not necessarily distinct from the rebirth of classical German letters. While many conservatives opposed the NSDAP, still others found resonance in their message of the *Volk*, tied inextricably as it was to German language and literature. For many of these conservatives, failure was not a poetic subject, though it was borne from and ultimately became a political reality.

“But what is a conservative revolution? Is not the very idea self-contradictory? It is, indeed, that contradiction that explains the failure of the enterprise. It implies a resort to the wrong means” (vi). Hermann Rauschning wrote these words in the preface to his 1941 book *Die konservative Revolution*, his attempt – published both in German and English – to explain the appeal and subsequent failures of the conservative revolution. By allying with the revolutionary NSDAP, Rauschning writes, members of the conservative revolution found that “Nazism usurp[ed] these ideas in order to misapply

them to the single purpose of maintaining its power" (198).<sup>36</sup> This was perceived as a great betrayal by many conservative revolutionaries, most notably perhaps Franz von Papen's speechwriter Edgar Julius Jung, who was murdered in the Night of the Long Knives. However, as Rauschning implies, due to escalating tensions between the parties and the growing support for National Socialism, entering that movement "was the only possible means of guiding the movement from within and gaining influence over it... It was the obvious and the only thing to do. It may have been a mistake, but it was no guilty partnership in Hitler's machinations." In fact, as Rauschning continues, more than anything else he regrets establishing "the ideas of the need for inducing the masses to turn away from politics, and thus duping them, [which] were mistaken and misleading" (196). By dampening the conservative push against Hitler, Rauschning identifies conservatives' complicity through political inactivity, an inactivity present in the way many conservative revolutionaries theorize the relationship between aesthetics and politics and that manifests historically, I argue in the following chapter, in the popularity of apolitical entertainment literature.

The goal of this chapter is to establish the role that literature played specifically in the conservative revolutionaries' contradictory "need for inducing the masses to turn away from politics," a need that rendered them disjointed and not unified in their mission to undermine the NSDAP from within. As Keith Bullivant argues, "Die konservative Revolution stellt in mancher Hinsicht die Kulmination des *unpolitischen* deutschen Idealismus dar, der ein integraler Bestandteil des geistigen Lebens

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<sup>36</sup> "Shall I give you a catalogue of all the things we wanted to achieve with the aid of Nazism? Tradition instead of radicalism, continuity instead of a rationally worked-out fresh start. Evolution instead of revolution. A form resulting from growth instead of a manufactured apparatus. Self-government instead of bureaucratism. Decentralization instead of centralization. Variety instead of uniformity. Personal initiative instead of tutelage. The individual instead of the collective. Property instead of independence on incomes drawn from the state. A Christian basis instead of that of the 'enlightenment' of rationalism" (Rauschning 197)

Deutschlands im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert war und den wir in unserm Zusammenhang als den Ausdruck der politischen Ohnmacht des gebildeten Bürgertums auffassen müssen. Die Vergeistigung und Literarisierung von an sich politischen Angelegenheiten, die gegen Kriegsende 1918 in Thomas Manns *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* exemplarisch zum Ausdruck kommen, setzen sich bei ihm sowie in den Schriften der Konservativrevolutionären fort“ (Bullivant 45). By theorizing political revolution in literary terms – rather than poetically allegorizing such revolution – conservative revolutionaries participated in turning the people away from politics, even tacitly giving such nonpolitical activity moral credibility. They implicated literature and the bourgeois project of *Bildung* in the active effort to found a new, if undetermined, social order founded on conservative – namely anti-modern – principles.

In addition to annihilating political resistance and fostering enthusiastic political participation, National Socialism also produced and circulated a considerable amount of nonpolitical entertainment literature and film. One effective tool for coordinating political indifference, however unconsciously it may have been compared to political propaganda, was the dissemination of completely nonpolitical literature. In Chapter V, I will examine how National Socialists, particularly former conservatives, strove actively to reclaim political significance for ostensibly nonpolitical, especially neo-classical and neo-idealist, literature. In what follows here I examine a) how the contradictions of the conservative revolution helped to shape its failure, b) the subsequent recourse to literature as a means of overcoming that failure, and c) the Nazi appropriation of such overcoming as programmatic of a particularly anti-modern ideology of the *Volk*, what Ernst Nolte terms the “resistance to transcendence.”

Failure was precisely the backdrop against which the bizarre political hybrid that was National Socialism rose to relative prominence, winning a parliamentary majority of 52% by forming a coalition with the national conservative Deutschnationale Volkspartei (DNVP). “Like all historical failures,” writes E. J. Feuchtwanger,

that of Weimar was the product not only of the republic’s weaknesses and of the misjudgments of republican politicians, but of the strength and success of the republic’s opponents. The anti-republican, anti-democratic, anti-parliamentary, anti-Semitic, anti-liberal stream was very broad and diverse in Germany after 1918. Many sectional groups, artisans, shopkeepers, white-collar employees, peasants, landowners, house owners, heavy industry, the *Mittelstand* generally, fashioned for themselves ideologies that were loosely related to each other and to anti-republicanism. (323)

The DNVP, whose immediate ancestor was the Conservative Party, formed after the November Revolution of 1918. It was comprised of several conservative factions, including virulent anti-Semites (Jews were banned from joining the party from its inception), industrialists, monarchists, and rural landowners. Generally speaking, the party was split between extreme nationalists and moderate conservatives, those vehemently opposed to the liberal principles of the Weimar Republic and those who encouraged the party to work with the Republic. This divide manifested especially lucidly in the context of debate in 1924 surrounding the Dawes Plan, an American plan to address the disasters of hyperinflation that occurred in 1923 by ending the Allied occupation of the Ruhr. While moderates wanted to adopt the plan in an effort to appease foreign interests, there was particularly strong opposition among the more extreme nationalist factions within the Reichstag, including many members of the



DNVP, which, with 106 seats, had the most seats: six more than the SPD and three times as many as the NSDAP. Recorded as one of the most dramatic votes of its time, the DNVP split the votes for and against the Dawes plan, allowing adoption to pass by 20 votes.

The total number of delegates who had deposited ballots was 441, making 294 votes necessary for the passage. The moment the results were read – 314 affirmative votes – the assembly burst into disorder. Communists and National Socialists brayed insults at the DNVP; mocking cries arose from the Social Democrats. Only the German National People's Party [DNVP] sat mute. Of its 100 delegates present, 48 had voted for adoption. (Grathwol 52)

The extreme nationalist and anti-Dawesian Alfred Hugenberg, who went on to lead the party to form a coalition with the NSDAP almost a decade later, supposedly called for those who voted for the plan to be expelled from the party.

Nonetheless, "the DNVP's abysmal failure in its contest with the government over the Dawes plan was somewhat obscured by its success in the December elections" later that year, and "the party still hoped to exert an effective nationalist influence from within the government" (57). To do so, they adopted a "new, moderate position, which represented the majority opinion of the politically engaged Nationalists, [and] characterized DNVP policy from 1926 through the summer of 1928... Between 1925 and 1928 – to be sure, not without exceptions and opposition – the normal pattern of the DNVP's behavior was that of an increasing acceptance of the realities of the post-1918 international system" (206). As it edged towards the center, the party also remained closely allied with the agricultural sector, which had helped pressure a number of members of the DNVP to ratify the Dawes plan (48-49). This alliance began to break

down in 1928, when the *Christlich-nationale Bauern-und Landvolkpartei* (CNBL) was formed. While similar in message and ideology to the DNVP, the CNBL placed greater emphasis on the small farmer and, in taking away crucial rural votes from the DNVP, helped contribute to the decline of the party at the end of the decade. As E. J. Feuchtwanger writes, “[n]ot only had the DNVP never succeeded in become a broad-based conservative party, it was now [in 1927] also losing its standing as representative of the agricultural interest” (Feuchtwanger 193). Concurrent to the waning of the DNVP as a result of similar parties such as the CNBL, resulting in a lack of consensus among conservatives, Hitler began distinguishing the NSDAP as a movement rooted in revolutionary populism, economic corporatism, anti-republican (Schmittian) nationalism, and cultural (*völkisch*) conservatism, a platform that became increasingly popular. These are just a few examples that led to the DNVP’s disastrous showing at the polls in 1928, when they won only 14% of the vote. It was at this time that the extremist Alfred Hugenberg was elected chairman.

Despite the popularity of the NSDAP and waning support for the DNVP, conservatives remained a thorn in Hitler’s side. In addition to conservative politicians and activists, “[a] problem for which Hitler found no entirely satisfactory solution at this stage [1925-1927] was the relationship between the party and the right-wing paramilitaries” (197). One of the most notable of such paramilitaries was that of the veterans’ organization *Stahlhelm*, which was closely allied with the DNVP and “comprised all the stereotypical demands and opinions of the nationalist right [non-recognition of Versailles; readoption of the black, red and white; expansionism; authoritarianism; anti-Marxism; agrarianism; relative isolationism]... permeated with the front-line ideology of struggle, discipline and solidarity” (198-9). Theodor

Duesterberg, who was the Stahlhelm's leader at the time of Hitler's appointment, "refused a position in Hitler's cabinet [and] claimed that the new chancellor would soon be running his underpants through the chancellery garden to avoid arrest" (Kitchen 60). The Stahlhelm had adopted this mindset in October 1926, when they "had finally ruled out any thoughts of a coup to overthrow the Republic and had determined upon a course characterized as 'Into the State,' that is, a policy of trying to change the state from the inside (Woods 75).

Because of the coalition formed in 1931 and general acquiescence of the DNVP to the NSDAP at the turn of the decade, Hermann Beck argues that the dominant contention in German and American scholarship was that relationship between the NSDAP and the DNVP in particular was generally positive. Challenging this perspective, Beck maintains that the nationalists' helplessness to prevent the increasingly autocratic activities of the NSDAP was mitigated by a much more tenuous and even mutually aggressive relationship between the two groups. He explains that,

in earlier interpretations, two elements of the seizure of power were consistently underrated: the random, uncontrolled violence that attended the *Machtergreifung* on all levels; and the social revolutionary thrust of Nazis that was directed primarily against what the Nazis considered to be the suffocating lifestyle and values of the German *Bürgertum* (Beck 213)

Unlike arguments in favor of an ideological continuity from the conservative revolutionaries to the Nazis in the form of a hatred of bourgeois values, Beck emphasizes that the Nazis actually associated such values with the DNVP specifically, which were denigrated in the Horst-Wessel-Lied as "die Reaktion."

Contrary to “Marxist interpretations” that rejected what Stanley Payne calls “the significance of any distinction between the core fascist groups and forces of right authoritarianism,” Beck argues that “neither the *Machtübergabe* to Hitler nor the tactical alliance between the DNVP and NSDAP should be allowed to obscure the confrontation between the Nazi party and conservative forces in German society during the Nazi seizure of power, manifested in countless violent Nazi attacks with their accompanying social revolutionary overtones and rhetoric” (214-15). Furthermore, the Nazis had “instrumental reasons” for cooperating with the “traditional elites,” namely that after the revolution ended in July 1933 “Hitler needed the experience and expertise of the traditional elites to help run the complex machinery of state.” The old conservative guard, whose support was plummeting and yet who held out hope of having some slight degree of influence on the new regime, had no choice but to acquiesce to the leadership of the Nazis. “Thus, cooperation between the traditional elites and the NSDAP should not be analyzed as if it were an alliance of equals. To treat it as such is to be oblivious to the social revolutionary overtones of the Nazi movement during the decisive months of the winter and spring 1933” (215).

On the one hand, there are shades of ideological difference between these “traditional elites” committed to preserving certain social structures (namely those of class, to which the Nazis were vehemently opposed); the conservative revolutionaries, who acknowledged class conflict but were more concerned ideologically with the anti-individualist and anti-democratic transformation of the German spirit and practically with the antiparliamentarian enactment of an authoritarian government; and the National Socialists, who were above all concerned with enacting a radical social and political reform that promised equal opportunity for the lower classes and was based

ultimately on a perverted sense of biological racism. This is not to say that members of the DNVP and the conservative revolution were not also anti-Semitic. The DNVP was actually the last bastion of upholding the *Rechtsstaat*, to which Jews had traditionally been able to appeal in order “to seek restitution for wrongs committed against them... After January 1933, the only political force in any position to uphold the *Rechtsstaat* tradition in the face of nazi transgressions, including the potential power to counter anti-Semitic attacks, was Hitler’s alliance partner, the conservative German National People’s Party (DNVP)” (Beck 612).

As Beck goes on to show, however, within the DNVP there was a range of degrees of anti-Semitism such that “on an individual level, there was some protest, empathy and occasionally also willingness to help.” Nonetheless, in line with my general argument that the intellectualizing or aestheticizing of political ideals rendered conservatives and conservative revolutionaries complicit in the rise, but not the practice, of National Socialism, Beck also highlights the problematic indifference or passivity ubiquitous among conservative nationalists.

By not intervening to stop nazi violence and discrimination they implicitly sanctioned them; by not standing up to an all-pervasive culture of fear they allowed anti-semitic attacks to go unpunished. Other casualties were the much-vaunted Prussian bureaucratic tradition, and, in the end, those very principles in which conservatives took pride (though no longer embodied) such as decency, the rule of law and the maintenance of civic order. Through their alliance with the Nazis, they themselves had helped to create an environment that doomed the very world order they professed to uphold. (640)

The violence directed by the National Socialists toward national conservatives and conservative revolutionaries served in part to mitigate, foster, and encourage political passivity by discouraging and punishing dissent. When conservatives did not accede to Nazi reforms, they were often threatened and, in a particularly notable instance for this discussion of the conservative revolution, murdered. One of the most important conservative leaders responsible for Hitler's rise to power was Franz von Papen, "a Catholic conservative from Westphalia who served as chancellor from June 1 to December 3, 1932, and then as Hitler's vice-chancellor from January 30, 1933 to July 30, 1934 (Jones 273). Larry Eugene Jones describes Papen as "an opportunist without much in the way of a moral center,... an agent of Germany's industrial elite, or... as a person with unabashed sympathy for the fascist experiments in Italy, Spain, and Austria." Jones proceeds in his article to emphasize that his "core values were rooted in the conservative Catholic milieu of Rhenish-Westphalian aristocracy" (273). As Georg Denzler has recently shown, Papen played a considerable role in the Reichskonkordat of 1933, whereby the Vatican agreed that bishops would swear an oath of loyalty to Hitler's regime in exchange for financial support for Catholic schools and the promise that the Church would be able to oversee administering sacraments and the naming of pastors and bishops. Writing for the liberal Jesuit magazine *America* in 2003, Robert Krieg notes that while the relationship between Hitler and the Church was not entirely amicable, such discontent was often kept secret from the general German Catholic public. While there was considerable dismay over the Konkordat, particularly concerning whether Hitler would honor it, "Pious XI, Pious XII, and the German bishops avoided public disagreements with the Third Reich, choosing instead to voice their protests in

confidential messages and behind closed doors. As a result, German Catholics were puzzled by the silence of church officials amid Nazi injustices” (Krieg 17).

Such silence, or public propitiation, was also characteristic of Franz von Papen, arguably the most influential Catholic politician at the time. In the months leading up to Papen’s acceptance of the vice-chancellorship under Hitler, his relationship with the Center party had become strained. “[T]he deep and ultimately irreconcilable breach that developed in Papen’s relations with the Center in the summer and fall of 1932 left him without a reliable political base at the precise moment when he began to negotiate with Hitler and the National Socialists as to the terms under which they might join the national government. This, in turn, contributed in no small measure to the erratic course of action that Papen pursued in the critical months from June 1932 to January 1933” (Jones 193).

These critical months were precipitated by Papen’s brief stint as chancellor, during which time his relationship with Ludwig Kaas led to “an immediate hardening of lines between the Center Party and the Papen government” (211). After being forced to resign and replaced by the more moderate Kurt Schleicher, Papen, along with the DNVP leader Hugenberg, played a major role in convincing Paul Hindenburg to elect Hitler as the new chancellor. In Hitler’s cabinet, however, Papen remained relatively ineffectual. “Papen’s deep-seated antipathy toward party politics – an antipathy intensified by his break with the Center in the summer of 1932 – only contributed to his utter ineffectiveness as a member of the Hitler cabinet in the critical months following Hitler’s installation as chancellor” (216). The general failure of the Right either to manipulate Hitler from within or to pressure him from without predates the more active role that Papen played in the beginning of 1933. As Larry Eugene Jones has recently

argued, conservatives had been deeply divided at least since the Harzburg rally of October 1931. "Not only was there a deep and ultimately irreconcilable antagonism between those on the moderate Right who hoped to bring about a conservative regeneration of the German state on the basis of the existing system of government and the elements around Hugenberg and Hitler that were opposed to any form of collaboration with the hated 'Weimar system,' he writes,

but even within the ranks of those who sought the overthrow of Germany's republican government there was virtually no agreement whatsoever as to what should take its place once that had been accomplished. The events at Harzburg revealed a bitter split within the ranks of the German Right that was to resurface in an even more virulent form at the time of the 1932 presidential elections and that was to persist right up to and after the establishment of the Third Reich.

(Jones 490-491)

Papen's speechwriter Edgar Julius Jung was one of the leading political figures of the conservative revolution. Two years after trying unsuccessfully to start the *Volkskonservative Vereinigung* (VKV), a conservative party to the left of the DNVP, in 1931, Jung became the unofficial secretary of Papen while he was serving as vice-chancellor. In this capacity, Jung penned many of the speeches that Papen delivered between February 1933 and June 1934 and, according again to Larry Eugene Jones, was "the driving intellectual force in the Papan vice chancery to transform the Nazi revolution into what he and his associates called a 'conservative revolution'" (Jones 143). In a speech from February 1933, as Jones documents, "Papen exclaimed that it was now time 'to arouse all the forces of the conservative revolution' so that 'the three great pillars of the national movement' - the Nazi party, the Stahlhelm, and the Christian-



conservative forces on the German Right – could be spiritually fused into a phalanx capable of opening the state up to the cooperation of those who for the last fifteen years had struggled for a better future” (161).

Jung, however, was hostile to National Socialism, which he believed “was simply another manifestation of the liberal, individualistic, and secular tradition that had emerged from the French Revolution” (163). Rather, he believed that “the course which the dialectic of history has assigned to these revolutionary currents [National Socialism and fascism], however, leads past the present to the overcoming of the masses, the creation of a new hierarchy, the transcendence of nationalism, the establishment of an indestructible *völkisch* foundation from which the *völkisch* struggle can take form” (in Jones 167). From his position within the Hitler cabinet, Jung strove actively to organize and mobilize conservative revolutionary opposition to the NSDAP. As Jones argues, “Jung and his confederates were able to mount a challenge to the NSDAP’s political hegemony that actually came much closer to toppling the Nazi regime than the ease with which Hitler succeeded in disposing of his opponents in the Röhm purge in the summer of 1934 might suggest” (143).

Such influence culminated in the speech that motivated Hitler to pursue the Röhm putsch. Written by Jung, the speech was given by Vice-Chancellor von Papen at Marburg University on 17 June 1934. It strongly expressed conservative opposition to Hitler, drawing “a firm line between conservative authoritarianism and ‘the unnatural totalitarian aspirations of National Socialism” (Kitchen 228). Although Jung was killed in the “Night of the Long Knives” on June 30, 1934, his ideas had been exceptionally formative for the conservative revolutionary movement, which, in having failed to

infiltrate the NSDAP, began in 1934 either to dissolve into its ranks adopting its ideology or fade from political view, a transition I discuss in the following chapter.

The failure of conservatives to infiltrate the NSDAP and transform it from within, ironically or not, recapitulates the general sense of failure that was salient in the illiberal consciousness of Weimar conservatives. One of the most influential intellectuals, Oswald Spengler, for example, famously described the west as being in a state of “decline” in his monumental tome *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*.<sup>37</sup> In this text, Spengler develops a vitalist conception of history as a kind of organism, a system made up of “mächtige Gruppen morphologischer Verwandtschaften” among the arts, sciences, politics, religion, mythology, economics, and so on (Spengler 66).

Ich sah die Gegenwart – den sich nähernden Weltkrieg – in einem ganz andern Licht. Das war nicht mehr eine einmalige Konstellation zufälliger, von nationalem Stimmungen, persönlichen Einwirkungen und wirtschaftlichen Tendenzen abhängiger Tatsachen, denen der Historiker durch irgendein kausales Schema politischer oder sozialer Natur den Anschein der Einheit und materiellen Notwendigkeit aufprägt; das war der Typus eines historischen Aktes, der innerhalb eines großen historischen Organismus von genau abgrenzbarem Umfange eine biographisch seit Jahrhundertend vorbestimmten Platz hat. (67)

The past, he writes, is “ein periodisch klar gegliederter, zielvoll gerichteter Organismus von Jahrhunderten oder Jahrtausenden” (12). In Spengler’s conception of history, each culture moves individually through periods of ascent and decline, transitioning over time from the early stage of “Kultur” to the late stage of “Zivilisation.”

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<sup>37</sup> He “is generally regarded as one of the most influential political writers in Germany after 1918, a view supported not least by the very popularity of his major work, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, which went through forty-seven editions in four years” (Woods 127).

Ich sehe statt des monotone Bildes einer linienförmigen Weltgeschichte, das man nur aufrecht erhält, wenn man vor der überwiegenden Zahl der Tatsachen das Auge schließt, das Phänomen einer Vielzahl mächtiger Kulturen, die mit urweltlicher Kraft aus dem Schöße einer mütterlichen Landschaft, an die jede von ihnen im ganzen Verlauf ihres Daseins streng gebunden ist, aufblühen, von denen jede ihrem Stoff, dem Menschentum, ihre eigne Form aufprägt, von denen jede ihre eigne Idee, ihre eignen Leidenschaften, ihr eignes Leben, Wollen, Fühlen, ihren eignen Tod hat. (29)

For Spengler, "all events are determined, indeed predetermined, by the organic structure of a culture." In this sense, "we see the emergence of two of the key elements of conservative revolutionary thinking – vitalism and activism" (Woods 133). Spengler thus draws an association between vitalism and a "nonlinear model of progress," a non-Hegelian construct that theorizes numerous, localized, cyclical histories rather than a master narrative of dialectical historical progress common across all cultures. In this sense, he was a "Lebensphilosoph, der sich in einer Auseinandersetzung mit seinen Kritikern rühmte, sich auf die Seite des Lebens und nicht auf die des Denkens gestellt zu haben. Er hielt in der Tat nichts vom analytischen Denken, sondern schrieb sein Werk aus einem 'Tieferlebnis' heraus, das er selbst als schwer erfaßbar bezeichnete" (Sontheimer 47). Concerned with vitality and affect rather than reason and intellect, Spengler's highly influential book articulated a broader trend among many conservatives towards the *Volksidee*, the notion of a Germany unified by blood rather than politics, more like Spengler's notion of "culture" than "civilization," and opposed to what it perceived as rational, urban, intellectual decadence. It also, however, speaks to the contradictions among the conservative revolutionaries many of whom, as I will

discuss momentarily, were concerned more with reason and intellect than with vitality and affect.

Bound up in Spengler's belief that the decline of the west meant its movement into the stage of civilization was his antiparliamentarianism, part of a more general critique of Weimar democracy leveled by a number of conservatives. "Spengler war es auch, der die Politik des parlamentarischen Staates zynisch als Geschäftemacherei hinstellte. Für ihn war die parlamentarische Republik von Weimar gar keine Staatsform, sondern eine Firma, für ihn regierte in diesem System der Handel den Staat und nicht, wie es sich seiner Auffassung nach gehört hätte, der Staat den Handel" (Sontheimer 148). Specifically, in a pamphlet published in 1919, Spengler proposed an alternative to parliamentary democracy that he termed Prussian socialism. Unlike Marxism, which was bound up in the materialism of class conflict, Spengler sought to unite what he considered to be the "Prussian," or meritocratic, qualities of discipline and self-sacrifice with the anti-elitist socialist principle of community (Volksgemeinschaft).

Preußischer Staatsgedanke vornehmlich als Idee der Zucht und des Dienstes gefaßt, germanische Gefolgschaftstreue als Vorbild für die im Staat und seinem Führer geeinte Volksgemeinschaft, eine äußerste Geringschätzung der politischen Fähigkeiten des Volkes, eine Verachtung aller konstitutionellen Ideen und eine damit einhergehende Überbewertung der Macht der einzelnen Persönlichkeit, die Glorifizierung der Kräfte des Instinktes, des Blutes und der Rasse, das ist die Summe der Spenglerischen Staatsidee. (198)

This German state, Spengler insists, should not be modeled after England's parliamentary democracy, as this would lead to chaos and powerlessness. Insofar as he believes government to be unique to each individual culture, only such Prussian

socialism, a uniquely German state, can possibly thrive in Germany. As Spengler wrote, "jede Kultur und jedes einzelne Volk einer Kultur führt seine Geschäfte und erfüllt sein Schicksal in Formen, die mit ihm geboren und die dem Wesen nach unabänderlich sind" (in Sontheimer 197).

Spengler thus situates Weimar Germany in the context of failure, or "decline," a condition brought on by the unnatural liberalism and democratization of the German State. Conceptualizing a response to this failure, his work sketches the basis for a conservative revolutionary ethos that, in its broadest and most general sense, began taking hold in literary and intellectual circles in the 1920s. "Indem die konservative Revolution das 19. Jahrhundert in Frage stellte, wurde auch der damit verbundene Fortschrittsglaube dementiert. Die lineare Geschichtsauffassung wurde durch eine zyklische ersetzt und das Revolutionäre wurde nicht durch die vernunftmäßige Steuerung der menschlichen Gesellschaft sondern in dem Ergebnis einer neuen Gliederung des Vorhandenen und des früher Gewesenen gesehen" (Bullivant 33).

While the conservative Swiss historian Armin Mohler has traced the term "conservative revolution" back to the March Revolutions of 1848, many critics attribute Thomas Mann with first using it in a more critical sense, first with regards to Theodor Fontane in 1910 and then again with regards to Nietzsche in 1921 in the introduction to the *Russian Anthology*, which was written between January 3 and January 12, 1921. Mann's argument in this introduction both recalls the conservative impulse of *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, from 1919, and forecasts the argument he makes in "Goethe und Tolstoi," outlined in a lecture from later in 1921 and then published in its complete form in 1925. There is some irony to this fact, if we are to believe Mohler's account of the "Conservative Revolution," as both *Reflections* and "Goethe und Tolstoi" are markedly

Hegelian in their methodology. As Walter Morris writes in the introduction to his translation of *Reflections* from 1988, "Mann even began to think of *Reflections* as not so much the end of an epoch as a continual ironical tension pointing in a Hegelian sense toward the future." Drawing on a letter that Mann received from the future Nazi Alfred Baeumler in 1920, Morris writes, "Baeumler said that for many years Germany had strayed from the reality of history and the power of logical thought as represented by Hegel. Spengler, for instance, was far from Leibnitz and Hegel, but Thomas Mann in his *Reflections* was a historical thinker. Spengler was a metaphysician, an eastern mystic, a translator of Schopenhauerian will into history; his work represented an end, while Thomas Mann's was a beginning" (x-xi).

Likewise, "Goethe und Tolstoi" saw Mann reflect on the synthesis of historical forces embodied by the fundamentally conservative "Russian soul." As Clayton Koelb writes, "here the connection between the 'Russian soul,' which refers especially to Tolstoy, and the notion of a new vision of humanity based on a synthesis of opposites is explicitly made for the first time - a crucial step toward the grand conception of mediation set forth in 'Goethe und Tolstoi'" (58). Like Spengler, with whom Barbara Beßlich has shown Mann was certainly engaging during this period after the war, Mann is concerned with the future of Germany specifically.<sup>38</sup> "The 1925 ending reiterates in greater detail the notion propounded at the end of the lecture that Germany, the geographic middle point between France and Russia, should be the cultural and political middle as well. That middle turns out to be the home to the same conservative values Mann had been preaching all along, for it is the home of German nationalism and artistic self-centeredness" (66-67).

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<sup>38</sup> Beßlich, Barbara. *Faszination des Verfalls: Thomas Mann und Oswald Spengler*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002.

For Mann, as he reiterates in the closing pages of the Prologue to *Reflections*, ideal progress is the literary aesthetic opposition of “Germany’s progress from music to politics” (24). But if literature is itself implicitly democratic and therefore political, Mann asks, “could it be my authorship, then, that, for my part, has caused me to further Germany’s ‘progress’ – while I was fighting it conservatively?” How one answers this question bears directly on the extent to which one believes Mann’s early conservatism to have been constructive of a revolutionary conservative ethos that sought conservative political reformation through an aesthetic revitalization of the German spirit. On one side of this debate would be an argument such as that made by Joe Paul Kroll. “*Reflections*, because it was a profoundly anti-revolutionary work, could not serve as the manifesto for a counter-revolution, and already contains the seeds of Mann’s later distrust of reaction disguised as revolution. The Conservative Revolution was a radical movement, whereas Mann’s view of life and politics were deeply ironic” (Kroll 226).

Kroll’s account is a more extreme version of what might be characterized as the “apologist” argument, forwarded by a number of critics who maintain that there was a distinct shift in Mann’s politics from the conservatism of *Reflections* to his outspoken criticism of National Socialism later in his life. Keith Bullivant groups among such critics Peter Gay, T. J. Reed in his standard work *Thomas Mann: The Uses of Tradition*, Kurt Sontheimer (“perhaps Mann’s most eloquent apologist”), Hans Mayer, and Roy Pascal. Bullivant argues, however, against what Mayer calls Mann’s literary unity but ‘clear political discontinuity.’ (Bullivant 25). Kroll’s reliance on Mann’s use of irony, in fact, speaks to Keith Bullivant’s central claim: that Mann’s understanding of politics never severed it from the aesthetic sphere, “an aestheticization and despecification of the social institution he was claiming to recommend to the public... The republic is translated into

a purely conceptual entity, one of various near-synonyms for Mann's ideal of 'Humanität'. As Golo Mann has said, his support for the republic was 'literature, not reality'" (29-30).

This reconciliation between the republic and German Romanticism, Bullivant argues, is what Mann means by the "middle way" such that his "political conversion had little or nothing to do with socialism 'pur sang' but everything to do with the defence of bourgeois culture" (34). In this sense, Kroll's observation that Mann's conservatism "stemmed from a general loathing of ideology, and a defence of an aesthetic realm immune from political judgments" serves to align Mann even more closely with a revolutionary conservative ethos (Kroll 229). As Bullivant argues,

T. J. Reed implies that Mann... succeeded in distinguishing between art and politics in other than aesthetic terms, whereas... this was not so. The result is the setting up of a constant ideal which, though completely admirable in itself, was presented in such a way that there either appeared to be in many utterances an implicit criticism of the institution Mann was claiming to support, or that this ideal is seen as existing in an almost autonomous aesthetic sphere outside or above that of politics. (36)

Mann, of course, is not grouped among the "conservative revolutionaries," and it is not my claim here to do so. Most notably, this movement evolved over the course of the 1920s away from the defense of bourgeois culture out of which it sprung and to which Mann - even once virulently opposed to the Nazis - remained loyal. In 1937 Mann wrote, "Conservative Revolution. What have stupidity, rebelliousness and malevolence, what has well-read brutality made of this term which was once spoken by intellectuals and artists!" (in Woods 113). Mann is alluding here to the numerous



“conservative revolutionaries” who went on to support the NSDAP. However, much like Stefan Breuer’s notion of “aesthetic fundamentalism” discussed at length in Chapter II, Mann’s preoccupation with “intellectuals and artists,” his notion of the conservative revolution as an autonomous, aestheticized ideal, does well to anticipate and theorize the many contradictions ultimately internal to the “movement.” From Herf’s notion of “reactionary modernism” to what Roger Woods identifies as the “conservative dilemma,” the paradoxes of a movement that addressed the decline of western civilization by calling for the reinstatement of a particular phase of western culture (to use Spengler’s binary) poses a number of theoretical and methodological problems. Furthermore, it can be difficult to differentiate the position of members of the Conservative Revolution from other revolutionaries similarly opposed to the Weimar Republic.

Die neue, radikale Rechte ruhte somit auf den gleichen kulturellweltanschaulichen Voraussetzungen wie die neue, radikale Linke. In beiden Fällen sollte ein fundamentaler Bruch mit der bürgerlichen Welt, mit der parlamentarish-individualistischen ‘Plutokratie’, vollzogen werden, der nicht ‘zurück’ nach traditionellen Verhältnissen, sondern radikal nach ‘vorn’ drängte... Das Verhältnis von Konservativer Revolution und linksradikaler Revolution ist daher nicht als eines von Revolution und Konterrevolution mißzuverstehen. (Sieferle 14)

In this sense, as the positing of a contradictory and impossible ideal, I maintain that the conservative revolution was political only insofar as it was aesthetic, and in this way provides a framework for speaking to the complicity of the “nonpolitical” while also

distinguishing the revolutionary conservative position from the national socialist position. I therefore follow Martin Travers's argument that,

The Modernists broke with the dominant aesthetic of nineteenth century Realism in order to produce a literature which, through its philosophical skepticism and irony (Mann)... would transcend the unreflective commitment to materiality that these writers saw inscribed into the Realist aesthetic. In the final analysis, the Modernists saw the loss of received wisdom and convention... as a means by which a new sense of totality might be reconstructed through 'the aestheticization of all perceptual or cognitive issues.' The same imperative of transfiguration and transcendence also informed the literature of the Conservative Revolution. (Travers 8)

This reconstruction of "a new sense of totality" and "imperative of transfiguration and transcendence" required conservatives to theorize a new kind of community that was cognizant of and emergent from the social and political landscape after World War I, which saw the homecoming of the front soldier, the prevalence of socialist ideas that sought to expose and criticize class struggle and conflict, and the growing ubiquity of new technologies.

The writer most famous for theorizing how the conservative notion of a *Volkgemeinschaft* could stem from such a landscape is Ernst Jünger, who conceived of war and violence as an aesthetic, and inner, experience, most notably in *In Stahlgewittern* (1920) and *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (1922). In *Das Dilemma des Konservatismus in Deutschland* from 1971, Martin "Greiffenhagen thus writes that Ernst Jünger, a leading representative of that branch of the Conservative Revolution known as new nationalism and a major interpreter of the First World War, has an aesthetic understanding of war,

seeing it as a myth and not as the suffering and dying of countless people, and in this Greiffenhagen contrasts Jünger with Remarque" (Woods 78). This embrace of militarism and particularly self-sacrifice, as opposed to the pacifism of Remarque, is another characteristic attributed to conservative revolutionaries such as Jünger.

His aestheticizing of the front soldier, of the experience of war, was not, however, a nonpolitical statement. "Dieser [neuer] Nationalismus hatte einen unmittelbaren Ausgangspunkt im Erlebnis des Stellungskrieges und setzte die Ideologie dieses Erlebnisses um in ein politisches Programm für die Nation" (Sontheimer 123). Speaking of his war diary *In Stahlgewittern*, J. P. Stern writes that, "[a]s in all dystopias, acknowledged or otherwise, the technology as well as the psychic values that are praised here are in the service of a conservative ideology" (Stern 194). Specifically, this conservative "new nationalism" that has been associated with Jünger was a means of distinguishing the revolutionary conservative movement from the restorationism of Wilhelmine era conservatives. "[O]ther new nationalists mock traditional conservatism for its restorationist outlook and for failing to come to terms with such key features of the present as technology, the city and the proletariat... [T]he distaste for the Wilhelmine era is a constant theme for the Conservative Revolutionaries, and it is a characteristic which distinguishes them from the nationalists organized in the Deutschnationale Volkspartei [DNVP]" (Woods 61). Indeed in the search for a *Volksgemeinschaft* based on the *Frontgemeinschaft* of World War I, new nationalists perceived the immanent threat that the "*Frontgemeinschaft* could disintegrate along traditional class lines," which is partly to explain why "the two new nationalist goals which seem to be emerging from the uncertainty over the future are communism and nationalism" (Woods 61). "Es fragte sich dann allerdings, wer 'Subjekt' dieser

revolutionären Transformation sein sollte. Die wichtigsten Kandidaten waren 'Proletariat' und 'Nation', zwei inhaltlich stark divergente, formell aber eng verwandte Konzepte" (Sieferle 144).

Jünger captured this notion of overcoming the difference between concerns of the right (Nation) and the left (Proletariat) in his 1932 text *Der Arbeiter*. "For, as the leader of the revolutionary nationalists, Ernst Jünger, repeatedly argued, and most notably in his epic theoretical defense of this movement, *Der Arbeiter*, the Conservative Revolution stood beyond and above traditional ideological demarcations; in its all-embracing energies, the extremes of Left and Right would meet, fused into a single movement of the popular will whose goal would be the destruction not only of parliamentary politics, but of all the institutions of the modern 'bourgeois' state" (Travers 3). Unlike someone like Mann, who remained invested in preserving bourgeois culture, Jünger represented a type of conservative revolutionary who associated bourgeois values such as individualism with an anti-modern outlook he saw as futile and naïve, even corrupt and soulless. "[Kulturkritische] Gedanken könnten sich ohne weiteres auch bei Ludwig Klages oder anderen konservativen Zivilisationskritikern finden, deren Position Jünger in den zwanziger Jahren doch durch heroische Akzeptanz der Moderne überwinden wollte" (Sieferle 162-163). Thus when Jünger, in acknowledging the realities of modernity and "following in Spengler's footsteps, describes the coming of 'the Worker' or 'the Technocrat', he too couples his utopia with a recommendation for the speedy dispatch of *bürgerlich* individualism, socialist progressivism and the like" (Stern 78).

In the period of the late-1920s and 1930s, Jünger's utopia becomes bound up in the issue of modern technology. "The most obvious casualty in World War I was the

concept of the autonomous subject -- itself, as Junger insists, a creation of the liberal age whose value system and ideology were simply swept away by the dynamics of the machine age. Only those in harmony with technology, a new type of worker, can survive in the future" (Kaes 111). Insofar as this individual exists in a state of "total mobilization," Jünger's theory of the "worker" derives quite directly from his early emphasis that the experience of war awakens aspects of subjectivity that "bourgeois security habitually suppresses" (106). In a state of total mobilization, every "movement is functionalized for the good of the state" (112). The hard, laboring, masculine individual is rendered like technology, which operates on the principles of discipline and order, whose every function is to bolster the state into a singular, what Spengler would call organic, unit. Like technology, the individual works, he is a "worker." "For Jünger, war was thus no longer just armed combat but a gigantic process of labor" (113). As Jünger explains, this extends to periods of peace as well as of war. "[I]n war and peace, [total mobilization] expresses the secret and inexorable claim to which our life in the age of masses and machines subjects us" (Wolin translation of *Totale Mobilmachung* 127). Rolf Pieter Sieferle has argued that Jünger ultimately recognizes that the increasingly maximized potential of technology will lead to a one-dimensional "systematic" or "administrated" world. "Jünger kann daher als einer der ersten gelten, die eine Gedankenbewegung vom revolutionären Aktivismus zu einer subjektlosen Posthistoire vollzogen, die im Zeichen einer dämonischen Perfektion der Technik steht" (Sieferle 162).

Jünger's thought, no less than Spengler's, is motivated by a will towards both power and deindividuation, two concepts that the conservative revolutionaries inherited from the vitalist, or "life-philosopher," Friedrich Nietzsche. Donna Jones traces this

influence in her recent genealogy of twentieth-century vitalism, drawing on the Nietzschean constructs (often discussed in the context of the Apolline and Dionysian) of creation and destruction.

In this articulation of the life principle, vitalist thought incorporates the machine, subsuming and elevating it to the status of an ideal conduit for the life force; technology alone is capable of providing the fullest expression of the Will in all of its creative and destructive capacity. The work of Ernst Jünger best illustrates the ability of life philosophies to construct a mythos of a life-serving technology, technology that extends an *unmittelbarlich* (unmediated) experience, which functions as the material externalization of identity and the 'Will.' (Jones 120)

Assuming a close affinity between Jünger's writing and fascist ideology, she continues by saying that "[f]ascist thought must stage and restage the sacrifice of the body at the altar of the machine as empty insensate conduit for the Will."

In his recent book on sacrifice and Nazi myth, David Pan focuses specifically on how the fascist conceptions of violent sacrifice (of the body) hinge on the anti-Enlightenment insistence on the subordination of the individual body to the community.

[T]he Nazi philosopher Alfred Baeumler thereby develops an idea of reality that J. P. Stern identifies as pervasive among European modernist writers after Nietzsche and that consists of a discernment of a 'true' reality grounded in violence that exists behind a superficial, ordinary reality... For [Baeumler], violence itself produces a truer kind of reality that can serve as the basis of culture. This move away from the aesthetics of sacrifice and toward its materiality ends up denying the importance of considering the specific structure of sacrifice that a ritual would affirm. (Pan 7)

For Pan, therefore, Baeumler's violent and materialist conception of sacrifice opposes Nietzsche's aesthetic and mimetic conception of sacrifice. For Nietzsche, myth and ritual act "as a mediator between subjective experience and communal experience in the sacred," which is not the case for Baeumler, who "claims that the sacred can only exist as an outgrowth of cult rituals" (60). In this sense, "Baeumler does not see any connection between form and ecstatic moments in the subject because these moments remain confined to a passive inner process that does not refer to anything outside itself. This view opposes Nietzsche's idea that it is precisely such an inner process that gives rise to form as the recapitulation of contradictions that extend from the experience of the subject into the 'heart of the world'" (ibid.). Nietzsche's aesthetic understanding of form as an internal process emanating from the subject is foundational for my understanding of the conservative revolution, particularly as it echoes Hugo von Hofmannsthal's definition of the movement that I will discuss momentarily. Important to note here, however, is Pan's reading of the difference between the materialist emphasis on the immediacy of cultic violence and the more idealistic emphasis on an aestheticized subjectivity.

Ernst Jünger was aware of this divide between the "intellectual" nationalists and the "practical" National Socialists but saw the latter, increasingly successful movement, as needing the theory and ideas provided by nationalists like himself.

[Jünger] refers to those who criticize the nationalists for their 'predominately literary activities,' and means by this their inaction. Jünger acknowledges this feature of nationalism and contrasts it with National Socialism which is concerned with practical political organization, but he totally rejects the conclusion that the two movements are therefore quite separate. (Woods 116)

Arguably the strongest commonality between the two movements was their shared disdain for the bourgeoisie, a line of thought that, broadly speaking, speaks to the credence that conservative revolutionary thought gave to the National Socialist ideologies of sacrifice and opportunity regardless of class. One nationalist group that emphasized this disdain was the Stahlhelm, which “published a journal, *Die Standarte*, in which conservative nationalist intellectuals like Ernst Jünger adumbrated [a] front-line ideology” (Feuchtwanger 199). Jünger’s “new nationalist,” or revolutionary nationalist, writing of the 1920s and 1930s represented an attempt to theorize an ideal, total, deindividuated community with a shared experience (of the front soldier) not stifled by decadent, bourgeois humanism that resonated with – and could at times be difficult to differentiate from – the National Socialist metaphysics of pure presence.

Die Front, die [Jünger] zu befestigen sucht und der er mit dem ‘Arbeiter’ ein neues Sinnbild geben will, wird geschildert als eine Front, die mit allen Mitteln zur Fortsetzung des Krieges entschlossen ist. Sie will den Angriff, die totale Mobilmachung der Nation, bis der Typus des Arbeiters in seiner Totalität erscheint. Der Gegenbild zum Arbeiter ist der Bürger, der nie zur Gestalt werden kann und daher von der Zeit zerfressen wird. (Sontheimer 106)

As Jünger himself wrote in the third essay of the trilogy comprised of “Totale Mobilmachung” (1930) and “Der Arbeiter” (1932), the treatment of pain provides an exemplary lens through which to distinguish between the liberal bourgeois citizen of the past and the irrational worker of the future. Whereas the bourgeois citizen desires security and comfort, the diminishment of pain, the worker, in emulating the cold gaze of the camera, will integrate pain so fully into his subjectivity that he will be able to look upon himself with a “second consciousness.” Unlike “modern sensitivity,” which



considers the body “the main force and essential core of life,” the sensibility of the detached and disciplined worker will consider the body to be an “outpost,” integrated so fully into those new forms of destruction enabled by technology (17). “The idea behind this peculiar organic construction drives the logic of the technical world a small step forward by transforming man in an unprecedented way into one of its component parts” (18).

Jünger’s theory “was part of what became known as the conservative revolution, an anti-enlightenment, anti-rational, anti-liberal intellectual fashion that traced its ancestry to Nietzsche. It was partly a generational symptom, from among the roots of these attitudes was also the anti-bourgeois youth protest movement of Wilhelmine Germany” (Feuchtwanger 199). Such youth protests were, of course, central to supporting the National Socialist revolution. Regarding the notion of Nietzsche as a philosophical forerunner to these movements, Donna Jones, following Horkheimer’s “sympathetic critique” but also channeling Lukács’s “dogmatic reaction,” writes that, “Nietzsche is easily read (and I am very sympathetic to these readings) as an apologist for crude biologicistic ‘thinking,’ an advocate for the destruction of the idea of the possibility of true human progress, and an enthusiast for wanton cruelty” (61). Jones, operating primarily within a postcolonial context, is ready to reproduce the logic found on the cover of *Der Spiegel* magazine from 1981 with a caption that read “Täter Hitler Denker Nietzsche.” While my own reading of Nietzsche differs considerably from Jones’s, the point is well made and a propos of discussions of fascism, precisely because of its misinterpretation and misapprehension of Nietzsche.

Regarding the “polysemous” – to borrow from Jones – nature of conservative revolutionary discourse, it is important to recognize the various influences that

Nietzsche had on, in addition to someone like Alfred Rosenberg, Spengler, Mann, Jünger, and most conservatives, revolutionary and otherwise. As Kurt Sontheimer observed in 1962, with a long footnote on Nietzsche's influence on National Socialism's violent biologism, "Man konnte im Gefolge von Nietzsche und Spengler zu einer Verherrlichung des puren Vitalismus und der Gewalt gelangen und die Macht der gesunden Instinkte, das Recht des Stärkeren und die nordische Rasse als Inbegriff herrischen und heroischen Menschentums preisen, aber die Verwendung der Kategorie des Lebens ließ auch bescheidenere, humanere Folgerungen zu, die zuweilen einen stark romantischen Zug annahmen" (58). For many conservative revolutionaries, however, driven by "vitalism and activism" (Woods), there emerged time and again recourse to an aesthetic comprehension whereby the political failures of material activism and embodied vitalism were transmuted into literary experience. This comprehension was especially salient among literary writers such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Max Kommerell.

In his recent essay "From Secret Germany to Nazi Germany: The Politics of Art before and after 1933," Robert Norton argues that these ideas had a direct influence on the ideology and practice of National Socialism, drawing heavily from Hofmannsthal's 1927 speech "Das Schrifttum als Geistiger Raum der Nation." Norton claims that "it was owing in no small measure to the extraordinary prestige, even veneration, that [Stefan] George enjoyed among his German contemporaries that it was possible for Hitler to benefit from the conflation of aesthetic and political authority George represented in the public mind and for Hitler's form of rule to enjoy the legitimacy it did" (Norton 279). In his recent essay "The George Circle and National Socialism," Peter Hoffmann makes a similar claim by drawing on George Circle disciple Max Kommerell's 1928 work of

literary criticism, *Der Dichter als Führer in der deutschen Klassik*.<sup>39</sup> Hoffmann's reading emphasizes Kommerell's use of the term "völkisch," claiming it "denoted war, domination, and exclusion" (Hoffmann 290).

There are, as Norton and Hoffmann show, a number of observable parallels between National Socialist and conservative political aesthetics. These include but are not limited to a) the impulse towards some kind of collective revolutionary ethos denouncing the evils of modernity; b) the fundamentally aesthetic nature of this revolutionary ethos (reminiscent of Benjamin's "aestheticization of politics"); and c) this aesthetic nature's form, constitutively violent and/or authoritarian (in the sense of being organized around privileged, what Kommerell describes as "name-giving," poets). These broad observations, however, run the risk of eliding differences between specific accounts of this relationship that reveal how complicity can be both active and positive as well as passive and negative. While it would be impossible to empirically challenge the argument that elements of works by conservative revolutionaries contributed in some way to the success of National Socialism, and while there is a general, observable continuity between the conservative and Nazi emphasis on the importance of literary aesthetics for reactionary socio-political change, there are significant if subtle differences in how Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929), Max Kommerell (1902-1944), national and Christian conservative writers in the early 1930s, and dedicated Nazi fascists in the mid-1930s conceptualized the relationship between literary aesthetics and politics. Most importantly, conservatives sought to address the political failure they experienced by eliminating it from their conception of spiritual overcoming, which necessarily entailed

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<sup>39</sup> " [The most prominent examples of the views of George's disciples] reveal affinities between the ideas of the George Circle and *völkisch* nationalism; between George's claim to political leadership and the *Führer* principle; and they point up shared assumptions regarding racial discrimination" (Hoffmann 287). See also Norton, *Secret Germany*, 671-674.

the process of representation. Many Nazis, however, sought to re-politicize and therefore reject this desire for transcendence, re-inscribing it in a metaphysics of pure materiality and presence.

In a speech from March 21, 1935, Hans Friedrich Blunck, a conservative writer who was serving as president of the *Reichsschrifttumskammer*, said that,

der Dichter weiss schmerzlich, dass er damit an persönlichem Behagen, an Lebensfreude des kleinen Daseins und an betrachtlichen Stunden lyrischer Deutung der Welt verliert. Er weiss aber auch, dass sein Volk ihn braucht, er steht und ist bereit, sein Geschick anders als in der Zeit eines übersteigerten Einzelwillens zu seinem eignen zu machen und die Volksgemeinschaft aller, auch der Schaffenden, zu bejahen, gläubig zu läutern und zu erfüllen. ("Vortrag über die Reichsschrifttumskammer")

It is, of course, impossible to generalize "Nazi ideology" from the position of one person. However, if we consider Blunck's argument to be representative of a position not at odds with the mission of the regime, and we consider the conception of the political role of poetry to derive in part from a particular way of thinking, then we can also speak of considerable shades of difference between conservative arguments and National Socialism. Despite the general attack on "materialism" put forward by his party, Blunck conceives of the literary in a materially political sense, impelling writers to abandon the subjectively lyrical in the service of strengthening the secular state and affirming its racist/racial(izing) ideology. This conception of the relationship between literature and politics is markedly different from those of Hofmannsthal and Kommerell, however, who conceive of political transformation as an inevitable, albeit necessarily positive, outcome of precisely that lyrical refinement and subjective experience that Blunck calls

on writers to sacrifice. Whereas Blunck demands the suppression of lyrical subjectivity for concrete political ends, conservatives such as Hofmannsthal and Kommerell sought what Martin Travers, borrowing a term from Klaus Landfried, has called, “an ethos [that] might best be described as ‘the politics of the apolitical,’ a transcendence of reality that paradoxically, at the same time, allowed, under certain historical circumstances, for its greatest penetration” (Travers 11).

On the one hand, these ideas, especially the significance of language for moving the collective spirit, do prove foundational for conservative writers and literary critics in 1932 and 1933, such as Hans Brandenburg and Josef Magnus Wehner, who eventually joined the Nazi party. There are, however, even among these conservative writers, shades of difference. While Hofmannsthal and Kommerell consider the development of a new collective ethos to be an aesthetic project experienced internally by the individual engagement with language, Brandenburg and Wehner imply the urgency with which poets must work to inspire and enact material social and political reform at the expense of aesthetic autonomy. While Hofmannsthal upholds this tension between the *völkisch* expression of collectivity and the lyrical expression of individuality, Hans Friedrich Blunck intones its collapse, insisting that the latter must be directly served, and even effected by, the former. There is thus an observable continuity from Hofmannsthal to Blunck regarding the shared expression of the social relevance of poetic language. In the case of these five writers, however, such continuity is marked by various reorientations towards the question of lyrical experience. Though this autonomous experience is of primary importance for Hofmannsthal, it becomes further assimilated to and instrumentalized for the ultimately racialized and nationalist conception of the *Volk*.

In this sense, unlike the recent emphasis on affinities with National Socialism, it is necessary to draw on what Stefan Breuer names the consensus among arguments by those in the George Circle, “aesthetic fundamentalism.” These writers, he says, did consider such aesthetic fundamentalism as “Impulse für eine Neugestaltung des Ganzen schlechthin,” an impulse derived from Stefan George’s belief that art and the artist were imbued with the inherent power to spiritually and culturally remake and reorder the world (Breuer 8). He also insists, however, that this program of aesthetic fundamentalism, as the name implies, was not the explicit articulation of a particular political mission, ideology, or party allegiance, nor was it a call for direct (violent) political activity.<sup>40</sup> Instead, practitioners of aesthetic fundamentalism argue that God, not in fact dead, has been transmuted into poetry that has the power to redeem all of German culture if only its gospel can be dispersed, internalized, and understood. Whereas in this case the poet holds the eternally spiritual and the momentarily political in tension, in Blunck’s speech the two are collapsed into one eternal people of which the poet, himself a part of that *Volk*, has a privileged understanding and over which he has considerable sway.<sup>41</sup>

An example of this tension is Hofmannsthal’s application of the literary notions of form and formal overcoming to the individual and his or her participation in a social

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<sup>40</sup> “Ich will nicht behaupten, daß es gar keine Berührungspunkte oder sogar Übergänge von [Neonationalisten, die schon um der Durchsetzung ihrer Expansionspolitik willen auf die volle Ausnutzung aller Hilfsmittel der modernen Zivilisation angewiesen waren] zum ästhetischen Fundamentalismus gab. Aber eine Begriffsbildung, die nicht imstande ist, die Differenz zwischen einem Hofmannsthal und einem Moeller van den Bruck erkennbar zu machen, verdient den Namen nicht” (Breuer 5). Arthur Moeller van den Bruck was a nationalist writer whose books were influential for architects of the NSDAP.

<sup>41</sup> Nina Berman has made a similar argument both conceding Hofmannsthal’s paternalistic conservatism but also insisting on its distinction from Wilhelmine and National Socialist ideologies. See Berman, “Hofmannsthal’s Political Vision” 206.

and spiritual order outside of literature.<sup>42</sup> Imputing to the abstract notion of form the ability to overcome the horrors of the modern world, he calls for what Breuer names that world's active "Reformation" via the internal transformation of the individual, inspired and mediated by the written word.<sup>43</sup> It is with this notion of individual transformation in mind that Hofmannsthal develops the idea of a conservative revolution whose "Ziel ist Form, eine neue deutsche Wirklichkeit, an der die ganze Nation teilnehmen könne" ("Das Schrifttum" 41).

A broad spectrum of writers have been associated with the Conservative Revolution as a historical literary movement, from Stefan George and Hofmannsthal to Hans Grimm and Adolf Bartels, all of whom critics emphasize were dissatisfied with the rapid social and political changes that swept across Germany following World War I, changes many experienced as the same crisis of modernity against which the Nazis reacted. However, there is no scholarly consensus on whether writers emblematic of the Conservative Revolution prefigured National Socialist ideology. Robert Norton, for example, argues that, "in the decades leading up to 1933 and during the twelve years that followed there was a concerted effort first to envision and then to enact the so-called 'conservative revolution' described by Hofmannsthal" (Norton 271). Martin Travers, on the other hand, claims that,

the hesitancies, inconsistencies, and mutations of direction that they revealed in their work, their half-hearted commitment to practical policy, their, at times,

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<sup>42</sup> "Während der Fundamentalismus à la... Hofmannsthal der bestehenden Ordnung entweder nichts entgegensetzen hatte oder ihr sogar unterstützend entgegenkam, stand derjenige Georges und seiner Jünger zu ihr in unschlichtbarer Spannung" (Breuer 225-226).

<sup>43</sup> "Hofmannsthal's Austrian idea is the ideal of cultural and linguistic translation, and this is central to the importance of language in his mature view. For him the role of Austrians (and of Germans more broadly) was to carry other cultures across to the rest of Europe, to mediate, to translate" (Luft 10).

knowingly utopian projections for the future, and their own idiosyncratic type of ethical individualism, prevented the writers of the Conservative Revolution, however broadly or narrowly we define that movement, from ever belonging to National Socialism *pur sang*." (Travers 10)

Regardless, Hofmannsthal's speech does not consciously or directly intimate support for any political regime or program. In Norton's words, rather than "enacting" the Conservative Revolution, it is primarily concerned with "envisioning" that revolution. By thinking how poetic language inspires and makes possible social reformation, Hofmannsthal does not characterize such reformation in terms of a political coup but rather an abstract spiritual realignment at the national level, the inevitable result of the revival of German literary classicism.<sup>44</sup>

This revolution was not a call for specific, material changes or an endorsement of a specific political movement, although the speech does contain nationalist overtones, and despite the fact that many conservatives went on to support National Socialism.<sup>45</sup> Rather than a social transformation rooted in the concept of the "nation," Hofmannsthal desires "produktive Anarchie," "das [geweckte, geschärfte,] geistige Gewissen der Nation[, was] unser schattenhaftes Dasein immer wieder ans Ewige bindet" ("Das Schrifttum" 30). Hofmannsthal's understanding of nationalism, therefore, is less about German racial supremacy and more about the individual search for national identity. "Konservative Revolution' ist deshalb eine Chiffre für nationale Selbstfindung, für die

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<sup>44</sup> This is not to say that the call for this realignment did not make possible the conditions for the Nazi rise to power, as Norton argues, but rather, as Breuer insists, that the political action the Nazis took was not detailed, either implicitly or explicitly, in either man's work.

<sup>45</sup> Stefan Breuer argues that the speech actually represents "Gleichgültigkeit gegenüber politischen Formen" (Breuer 148). Travers also writes, "What [Hofmannsthal] was describing was not a clearly recognizable revolution, marked out by defined temporal and political parameters, with an agreed agenda, leaders and a unified political base" (Travers 2).



Schaffung einer Identität, die ihrerseits nichts Endgültiges ist, sondern durch übernationale Beziehungen teils begrenzt, teils bereichert wird...Hofmannsthals Herz gehörte wohl der Monarchie, doch war die Frage der Nationsbildung in seinen Augen unabhängig von der gerade existierenden Staatsform" (Breuer 221).

By "nation," then, Hofmannsthal means a community bound together by language, and by extension literature, rather than race.<sup>46</sup> Hofmannsthal refers to this spiritually- and linguistically-connected community as an abstract "form," a unity between language, spirit, and people. "Die Münchner Rede ist zweifelsfrei die hymnischste Huldigung Hofmannsthals an die französische Kultur, die er als unübertreffbares Modell der Einheit zwischen einer Literatur und einer Gesellschaft darstellt."<sup>47</sup> Literature then, as something constituted by language, represented or in fact was the spirit (or "spiritual space") of the community. The unique individual's experience with language will incite or motivate this transformation from within, a response to the "emotional imperative" of undoing modern society. Such conflicted individuals ranged from the Nietzschean philistine ("the searching") to the "Wächter der Tradition, der konservative Ästhet, gleichsam ein benediktinischer Mönch, der über die Schriften der Nation wacht und dabei seine persönliche Originalität dem Kult des Erbes opfert" (Le Rider 277). Whereas the Nazi fascist Blunck, eight years later, impels

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<sup>46</sup> One could also speak here of Isaiah Berlin's notion of a "Counter-Enlightenment" that disparaged rationality and reason as the primary means of understanding the world. For its relationship to fascism, see Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* 1-27, and for a critique of Wolin's argument, see Norton, "The Myth of the Counter-Enlightenment" 635-658.

<sup>47</sup> With regards to Moeller van de Bruck's 1923 novel *The Third Reich*, Le Rider also says that, "Hofmannsthals militante Frankophilie, verbunden mit seiner vehementen Anprangerung der kulturellen Krise der deutschsprachigen Länder, macht diese Rede nahezu unvereinbar mit einem Moeller van den Bruck" (Le Rider 273-274).

German writers to sacrifice the lyrical meaning to the cult of the *Volk*, Hofmannsthal insists that such sacrifice be made for literary tradition.

The subsequent process of individual transformation, which will remake rather than abstractly replace the German nation, is a mystical one; it is rooted in Hofmannsthal's famous *Lord Chandos Brief*, in which the author experiences his notorious crisis of language. In the letter, the fictional Lord Chandos (often read as a stand-in for Hofmannsthal himself) discusses his sudden inability to think or speak of things with language. Displacing language is a powerful and overwhelming feeling that Chandos describes as "ein ungeheures Anteilnehmen, ein Hinüberfließen in jene Geschöpfe oder ein Fühlen, daß ein Fluidum des Lebens und Todes, des Traumes und Wachens für einen Augenblick in sie hinübergelassen ist" (468). This sudden unity cannot be expressed in language and leads Chandos to a loss of artistic creativity, trust in himself, and faith in abstract, conceptual language. Rather, Chandos privileges the experience of things in themselves as a transcendent moment of synthesis and unity with the world that cannot be mediated by language.

Later in his life, however, Hofmannsthal fervently returns to language as the source of abstract and conceptual national unity, synthesis, and community, his stated goal of the conservative revolution.<sup>48</sup> The spiritual drive and force is alive in the language that binds community together and is described quite similarly to the ineffable "Hinüberfließen in jene Geschöpfe." "Dies Suchen und Treiben und Drängen ist überall da, es manifestiert sich in jedem Wort höhere geistiger Rede, das zwischen uns hin und her geht" ("Das Schrifttum" 32). These men, who are able to tap into this spiritual drive

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<sup>48</sup> "Wo aber ist dann die Nation zu finden? Einzig in den hohen Sprachdenkmälern und in den Volksdialekten... in beiden zusammen ist die Nation... Die poetische Sprache der Deutschen vermag in eine sehr erhabene Region aufzusteigen" ("Wert und Ehre" 435).

and answer his call, will also undergo a crisis, now positive, in which they doubt the efficacy and ability of language.

Zuzeiten wieder wird er die Herablassung des Sprechens verschmähen, wird er durch Krisen einer Sprachbezweiflung durchgehen, die ihre furchtbaren Spuren bis in die flackernden Züge seines Gesichtes zurücklassen wird, und wieder zuzeiten sich emporschwingen zu einer Ahnung der heilenden Funktion der Sprache, zur Erschauung verwirklichter Maßgestalten." (33)

But this crisis will lead them to discover the healing power of language and thereby develop a new language, and their literature, made of this language, will become greater than itself: dramas will become myths, novels will reveal cosmic secrets and become Märchen.

This process requires the experience of an internal crisis, the internalization of polarizing forces, which is then overcome by the spirit and elevated to spiritual unity. "Alle Zweiteilungen, in die der Geist das Leben polarisiert hatte, sind im Geiste zu überwinden und in geistige Einheit überzuführen; alles im äußeren Zerklüftete muß hineingerissen werden ins eigene Innere und *dort in eines gedichtet werden*, damit außen Einheit werde, denn nur dem in sich Ganzen wird die Welt zur Einheit" (40, italics added). The process of becoming "whole oneself" is attributed here to a poetic process: "dort in eines gedichtet werden." The world can only become unified to those who are whole in themselves. It is this poetic process of reconciliation and overcoming, and of transforming these processes into language, that leads these men to "break through" into the "highest community."<sup>49</sup> These "Suchenden" who undergo this transformative process are not unlike Ernst Jünger's heroic and self-sacrificing worker-warrior, whom J.

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<sup>49</sup> "Hier bricht dieses einsame, auf sich gestellte Ich des titanisch Suchenden durch zur höchsten Gemeinschaft... Hier werden diese Einzelnen zu Verbundenen, diese verstreuten wertlosen Individuen zum Kern der Nation" ("Das Schrifttum" 40).

P. Stern describes in the context of Nietzsche and Spengler. “[T]his Spenglerian representative of the modern age embodies all the forces latent in the contemporary world. Bearing ‘totality’ (‘das Ganze’) within himself, he offers a total challenge to the world. The supreme value by which he must direct his life is intensity of effort beyond good and evil – this is his Faustian heritage. Discovering his identity as that heroic persona, modern man discovers his purpose and destiny. It is this discovery which makes the worker-warrior capable of that sacrifice whose most significant expression is written in blood. Translated from ‘metaphysical’ into plain historical terms: the war is lost – the war will be continued by other means. This is the continuity of war and peace which became the centerpiece of Hitler’s ideological programme, and which the German electorate enabled him to translate into practical politics” (Stern, *DP* 195).

Stern frames his notion of the “dear purchase,” the theme of “moral strenuousness and self-sacrifice” for something just out of reach that he believes defines German modernism, around Rilke,

his earlier images of angelic strength, of the smile of the Saltimbanques, his notion of world-creating inwardness... and all these images of Rilke’s mature poetry become both expressions and norms, both repository and source of the feelings and perceptions of an age. What colours the mature Rilke’s poetic oeuvre is the present of this supreme effort which, for him, lies in the exploration of feeling, in the inward assimilation of the outward world, for only by way of such an inward conquest is salvation – for him, ‘reality itself’ – to be achieved.

(29)

In this sense Hofmannsthal’s “Suchenden” can be thought of as making a similar purchase such that their spiritual overcoming will inevitably be externalized, resulting

in the restructuring, reordering, and reformation – in short, the healing rather than supplanting of – German society.<sup>50</sup>

The process of overcoming has been transferred to the site of the “poetizing” individual – that is, the individual in language and, therefore, a spiritual community. “In his eyes, the poet dare not claim leadership, because that would mean isolation; instead, the artist is the one who engages and gives form to the historical experience of his group – not the creator of its future” (Arens 200). In this sense, the writer incites the nation, or spiritual community of individuals, to change by articulating, rather than commanding, collective experience.<sup>51</sup> Such aesthetic overcoming is not committed to any social reformation, which instead emerges naturally from it. In this sense, the conservative revolution is less a political imperative and more an aesthetic imperative: to return classicism, like the French have done with their own literary traditions, to Germany’s literary landscape.

Hofmannsthal claims that the writer, through articulating a budding collective experience of social change, inspires the individual transformation that can accelerate social transformation. Rather than ascribing a materially political directive to the writer, however, he speaks of the “mutual comprehension” of art and politics, thereby preserving a sense of distinction between the two and resisting a purely political

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<sup>50</sup> “Indem die Suchenden alle Dualismen in sich hineinreißen und kraft ihrer Gewalt über die Sprache ‘in eines’ denken; indem sie diese im Innern gewonnene Einheit wieder nach außen tragen, heilen sie die Welt, führen sie sie wieder zur Einheit zurück, sich selbst dabei opfernd. So vollbringen sie in und für diese Welt, was die Märtyrer und Erlöser früherer Zeiten nur für ein Reich jenseits derselben zu leisten beanspruchten: Einheit, Synthesis, Gemeinschaft – die ‘Bildung einer wahren Nation’” (Breuer 148).

<sup>51</sup> “Significantly, [Hofmannsthal] also begins to reverse the image of the poet-genius that has been cherished by the *Bildungsbürgertum* in the wake of German Classicism. In this vision, the poet cannot create or lead the nation, but must rather embody and articulate what the nation already is on the basis of its history and experience. The nation, not the poet, is the agent of national formation or change” (Arens 191).

conception of the writer. He describes the “highest goal” in such terms. “[D]aß der Geist Leben wird und Leben Geist, mit anderen Worten: zu der politischen Erfassung des Geistigen und der geistigen des Politischen, zur Bildung einer wahren Nation” (Breuer 40). What Breuer calls the “Reformation” sought by Hofmannsthal concerns the organization of individuals who, by undergoing a subjective experience with language, are then united by that language, which houses the mystical spirit of their community. Unlike Blunck, who collapses the political and the spiritual in the concept of the *Volk*, for Hofmannsthal this impulse, to refer once again to George’s own statement in his letter to Bernhard Rust, is one that proceeds from the premise that, “die gesetze des geistigen und des politischen sind gewiss sehr verschieden” (225-226).<sup>52</sup> This is not to say, however, that Hofmannsthal’s insistence on the primacy of aesthetic experience as a catalyst, intended or otherwise, for socio-political reformation cannot also be seen broadly to prefigure the Nazi attempt to transform politics into an aesthetic experience; it does not, however, reflect the desire for the collapse of these two spheres but rather their mutual “Erfassung.”

Unlike Hofmannsthal, who died several years before the Nazi takeover of the German Parliament, Max Kommerell lived to witness the rise of fascism in Germany. In the 1920s, as a member of the George Circle, he was especially beloved by George despite instigating a number of quarrels with other members of the Circle. In part as a result of these altercations, but also because he sought independence from what George was then calling his “state,” Kommerell left the George Circle in 1930, not long after finishing his doctorate in Germanistik.<sup>53</sup> While generally professing a disinterest in

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<sup>52</sup> If anything, Breuer argues, George’s call for a new social order was distinct from that of Hofmannsthal. See Breuer, *Aesthetischer Fundamentalismus* 225-226.

<sup>53</sup> See Norton, *Secret Germany* 706-712.

politics, he did make several mostly positive assessments of National Socialism, calling them “brave kids” in a letter to Andreas Heusler from 1932 and saying of the first volume of *Mein Kampf*, “borniert, bäurisch ungeschlacht, aber in den Instinkten vielfach gesund und richtig” (Jens 26-27). In 1933, Kommerell briefly held the position of “Dozentenführer” before losing it in the same year. He became a full Professor of German Philology in Frankfurt in 1938 and joined the NSDAP in 1939. Although his 1942 play *The Prisoners* was banned in 1943, he remained a prominent German academic in Marburg until his death in 1944.

Like Hofmannsthal’s speech, *Der Dichter als Führer in der deutschen Klassik* is concerned abstractly with the relationship between the revival of literary tradition and the improvement of the German spirit. In the preface, Kommerell immediately qualifies that the writer should be considered an influential model rather than a political leader. “Wenn der Verfasser sein Buch „Der Dichter als Führer“ nennt, so ist er gewillt, die Dichter darin auftreten zu lassen als Vorbilder einer Gemeinschaft als wirkende Personen.” The book, he explains, is meant as a contribution to literary criticism and history. “[Der Verfasser] hofft aber, vieles, selbst das hinlänglich Durchforschte, in neuer Beleuchtung zu zeigen und so auch der Literaturgeschichte zu dienen.” Kommerell ascribes a fundamentally literary, rather than political, directive to the poet. He describes a poetics of effect whereby the writer is indirectly able to have a social impact (or effect some social change) precisely because he is a “Vorbild,” a precursor or model, of a spiritually-improved society. Like Hofmannsthal, he is not concerned with the materially political, like parties or protests, but rather emphasizes those aesthetic qualities that, when recognized in spiritually rich literary texts, will effect an abstract spiritual realignment.

He goes on in the preface, for example, to explain that by “Führer” he means a person whose work can initiate a spiritual movement. “[D]ann sind [Jean Paul und Hölderlin] mitbedingt durch das Erlebnis Weimars, so sehr sie selbst wieder eine neue Geisterbewegung einleiten.” In the final chapter, Kommerell focuses on Hölderlin specifically, who he says is not concerned with the educated individual, or even the individual at all. “Seine Sehnsucht ist nicht der gebildete Mensch, sondern das erweckte Volk” (Kommerell 466). This awoken *Volk*, unlike the awoken *Volk* of the Hitler youth marching song “Germany awake!,” however, is the embodiment of the spiritual unity that “plays out” in the space of the poet’s language. “[D]ie Einheit von Geist und Tat, der dichterischen Stimme mit der lauschenden Gemeinde, des Helden mit dem Volke – Mächte, durch deren Tausch alles augenblickliche Geschehen im Raum der Sage spielt” (466). The poet, therefore, as an arbiter of language, creates a space in which the people can access and realize their spiritual unity; Kommerell renders these “momentary occurrences” as moments of aesthetic overcoming made possible by poetic language.

The writer-leaders of the *Volk*, while different from the humanists Goethe and Schiller, nonetheless have the same intensity and impact. As he says in the preface, they are “sinnbildliche, stellvertretende Figuren”: “sinnbildlich” insofar as they allegorize and catalyze social renewal, and “stellvertretend,” insofar as they are secondary to the poetry itself. Kommerell therefore calls attention to another level of mediation, for he is not claiming that the writer has a direct (political, cultural, social) influence. As the word “Vorbild” implies, the writer is a “pre-” or “prior-image.” Insofar as he is the one who puts pen to paper, he is the image that comes before, or leads, the literary image. And yet, Kommerell explains in the final chapter of his book, this image is itself not identical to the society that the writer is able to transform. “Von den Geheimbildern mit denen



Hölderlin das erwartete Ereignis andeutet, ist soviel auslegbar: das *Bild als Sprache* ist das Kleinod das dem Volke durch seinen Dichter wird." (481). That is, Kommerell conceives of the poet as the "pre-image" to the "image as language," the poetic text. This text, conceived by and mediated through the poet as an artisan of language, is the "treasure," the desired reality, that the *Volk* in turn is inspired to become through its engagement with that literature. Kommerell's argument seems closer to Hans Friedrich Blunck's, insofar as it emphasizes the collective rather than individual nature of the *Volk*, and yet there is still an important distinction. Whereas Kommerell claims that the *Volk* becomes its poetic representation, Blunck states the opposite, that language gives way to, yields to, or affirms the eternal will of the *Volk*.

Kommerell's book therefore does not claim that the writer should become the political leader, but rather that he, as a creator of the poetry that will mobilize in the masses the German spirit and will, allegorizes the social renewal and transformation that the political leader can then directly enact. As Stefan Breuer explains, citing the final, ominous paragraph of the book,

der Dichter sollte den politischen Führer nicht ersetzen, wohl aber vorbereiten. Er sollte die deutsche Seele einstimmen auf den 'Weltwillen', der sich durch ihn offenbarte; er sollte ihr die Gnade ihrer kommenden 'zweiten Hochzeit' nahebringen und sie bereitmachen für jenes morgen, 'wo die Jugend des neuen Vaterlandes fühlt in glühender Einung und im Klirren der vordem allzu tief vergrabenen Waffen.'" (Breuer 225)<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The full quote reads: "dem Volk... werden seine namengebenden Dichter die Gnaden der zweiten Hochzeit fassen helfen... ein inner ernstes Morgen, wo die Jugend die Geburt des neuen Vaterlandes fühlt in glühender Einung und im Klirren der vordem allzu tief vergrabenen Waffen" (Kommerell 483).

While this argument ascribes to the writer a serious and significant social role, it nonetheless does not claim that the writer is or should be involved with politics directly.<sup>55</sup> Rather than lead the revolution, the writer plays another more mystical and prophetic role. He leads both the leader and his followers to, and prepares them for, cultural rebirth. In this context, it seems misleading to read the “deeply-buried weapons” only literally, as they are the instruments of a revolution that Kommerell insists begins with the exhuming of an understanding of Hölderlin’s poetry that has been “buried,” or forgotten, in German literary history. The word “clamor” can just as well emphasize the sound of the literary armament, the “all-too-deeply-buried weapons” of classical, spiritual, and folkish poetic language. And it is through the poet himself that the will of the world is sounded, or reveals itself, manifesting in the poetry he makes accessible to, and by which he arms and mobilizes, the leader no less than the masses.

The arguments by Hofmannsthal and Kommerell neither preemptively articulate the orientation towards lyric poetry by Blunck, who believed the lyrical should be sacrificed to the new ethos of the *Volk*, nor do they reflect the position of practitioners of inner emigration, who strove to make encrypted critiques of the regime, an alternative (poetic) world towards which to aspire, publicly available. Instead, they reflect a conservative bourgeois consciousness, which persisted into the 1940s, and,

did not see the NSDAP’s ambitious cultural programs as tyrannical measures; [its representatives] viewed them as a long-overdue purification process through which the truly important works of the German cultural tradition would regain their rightful place of honor. It would be wrong to characterize this viewpoint as

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<sup>55</sup> “Der Dichter als Führer: In dieser Parole manifestierte sich nicht so sehr der Anspruch des George-Kreises auf direkte politische Herrschaft, wohl aber auf eine Sendung, die darauf hinauslief, den Führer zu führen” (Breuer 225).

either Nazi fascist or as an expression of inner emigration. Underlying it was a nationalistic-conservative attitude based on these bourgeois and anti-democratic circles' belief that members of this class had been trying to assert in their own self-interest since the late eighteenth century. (Hermand 144)

This is why, as Ralf Schnell argues, it is not sufficient to reduce as fascist, because of "affinities with National Socialism," the work of writers such as Stefan George.<sup>56</sup> Broadly speaking, neither Kommerell's nor Hofmannsthal's argument recapitulates fascist arguments about literature and censorship *avant la lettre*. There is no indication in either text that the paths to spiritual transformation necessitated that certain writers be purged from writers' groups or academic institutions or have their work censored or burned, or that the purification of German letters meant the purification of the Aryan "race."

However, while these texts do not explicitly demand such political activity, they nonetheless seem open to it so long as it results from a change in the national consciousness towards literary tradition. In this sense, it is more productive to speak of the general affinities between national-conservatives and National Socialists in an effort to a) demonstrate the broad appeal that the party courted and sustained, b) resist the notion that National Socialists were the same type of actively-political person and all vehemently believed the same thing, and c) examine the possible dangers implicit in, and historical complicity of, the national-conservative position that was, at least in these instances, embodied indifference to the drastic measures resulting from political reorganization, no less than the reorganization itself, following their political failure to infiltrate the NSDAP.

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<sup>56</sup> "Die Balladenliteratur um die Jahrhundertwende und die Literatur der Jugendbewegung, Teile des literarischen Expressionismus, die um 1920 entstehende Kriegsliteratur, schließlich die Zivilisationskritik bis hin zu Thomas Manns *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* und zum George-Kreis: Präcludieren nicht auch sie dem Nationalsozialismus in einem Maß, das es erlaubt, von Affinitäten zu sprechen? Man wird diese Frage vollends dann bejahen müssen..." (Schnell 115).

One hallmark quality of the conservative revolution was its insistence on a non-partisan depoliticizing of the masses. Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Max Kommerell stress the fundamentally literary-aesthetic nature of the individual transformations that will radiate into the broader German community. Jünger's notion of the "worker" has little to do with liberating the proletariat but rather concerns a literary, Dionysian utopia whereby "the hyperbolic expansion of collective powers and the enthralled rapture of individual service to titanic projects radiate a fascinating attraction over many people" (Bullock 470). Expressing firm disdain for the impulses of Marxist class struggle, "Edgar Jung looks back as far as the Middle Ages for his economic model and sees in this period an economy which was not governed by bargaining over wages but one which imposed a rigid system on all concerned" (Woods 68). In this sense, Jung's statement in a letter from 1929 that "the goal of my entire political life has been the creation of a dictatorship" (in LE Jones 148) ultimately amounts to his claim that the "aim of the national revolution must be the depoliticization of the masses and their exclusion from the leadership of the state... [it] must lead to an antidemocratic principle of governance or it is lost" (in LE Jones 164).

This depoliticization occurred coincidentally with the failure of conservatives to form a unified opposition to Hitler. Fritz Stern goes so far as to say that the defining feature of Imperial Germany after 1878 was "illiberalism" and "that German society, far from keeping down the illiberal impulse, fostered it and formed it into a habitual response" (Stern xviii). Furthermore, as Margaret Anderson argues, the institution of universal manhood suffrage in Imperial Germany created an atmosphere in which Germans could practice democracy. "More generally," she writes, "we shall see Germans rapidly transforming a segmentary, authoritarian, and communal culture that

professed to abhor partisanship of any kind into a nationalized, participatory, public culture, one in which partisan loyalties organized expectations and structured much of public life" (20). Conservative power gradually declined such that, "the fact that by 1912 the Conservatives felt it necessary to make their support for 'an unweakened Kaiser-power' their election them shows us how far the balance had tipped in favor of parliament (420). For Stern, the sheer fact that Germany had never had a successful revolution, in fact that "revolutions came from above," has long-ranging implications for the rise and success of conservative, neo-conservative, and fascist movements in between the wars. Such movements were a response to failure. "An illiberal regime had been established in Germany under the best of circumstances – and failed. A liberal regime was established in 1918 under the worst of circumstances – and failed" (xxvii). One might add to this the conservative revolution, which, in trying to overtake National Socialism from within, also failed.

In this sense, the conservative revolution did not actively fashion itself as complicit in the rise and success of National Socialism; quite the contrary, as a movement of the masses, many tenets of NS ideology were antithetical to the class-based aristocratic sensibilities of self-identified conservative revolutionaries. Their ideology of depoliticization, whether active and intentional or the necessary condition for spiritual and intellectual transformation, does, however, reflect one significant result of the National Socialist impulse towards disenfranchisement under the guise of empowerment. That is, the ultimate failure of conservative opposition is not the only means of understanding the relationship between the conservative revolution and the success of National Socialism. While Nazi terror worked against the conservative push for public influence, Nazis were also opportunistically able to benefit, however

unconsciously, from the conservative move, following their political failures, to imagine political revolution literarily. Through both close and distant reading methods, I will argue in Chapter V that the work of conservative writers embodies this desire in such a way that makes possible the argument for the unintentional complicity of the conservative revolutionary movement in the success of National Socialism to which many were so vehemently opposed.

Drawing on the affective and psychological conditions that contributed to the rise of fascism, J. P. Stern writes, "Hitler exemplified the projective quality of modern politics. For decades all manner of resentments had pervaded Germany's political culture. Hitler, suffering these resentments himself and sensing them in others, demonstrated how politics could serve as an escape from boredom, from failure, from self" (xxxix-xl). One could say the same for literature. The seeming interchangeability here between these terms, politics and literature, will be the focus of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### THE OPPORTUNISM OF FASCIST LITERARY AESTHETICS AND CULTURAL POLICY

“Every true work of art has, what one might call malevolently a manipulative element about itself. But it makes all the difference whether this manipulative element remains a means of realizing the essence of the work, or whether it is put into the service of molding public opinion.”

-Theodor Adorno, “What National Socialism Has Done to the Arts,” 1945<sup>57</sup>

While witnessing the trial of Adolf Eichmann, Hannah Arendt was struck by Eichmann’s distortion of Kant’s categorical imperative. “What [Eichmann] failed to point out in court was that in this ‘period of crimes legalized by the state,’ as he himself now called it, he had not simply dismissed the Kantian formula as no longer applicable, he had distorted it to read: Act as if the principle of your actions were the same as that of the legislator or of the law of the land – or, in Hans Frank’s formulation of ‘the categorical imperative of the Third Reich,’ which Eichmann might have known: ‘Act in such a way that the Führer, if he knew your action, would approve it’” (Arendt 136). Arendt’s argument that Eichmann was unable to think is based in part on this seemingly willful misreading of Kant whereby the individual (fascist) agent legislates morality through the anticipation of laws made universal by the decree of the Führer. While Stanley Milgram cited “the banality of evil” in his studies on obedience, Arendt insists that the moral failings of those involved in the Holocaust were a necessary part of their

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<sup>57</sup> This epigraph immediately raises the question of whether I consider the Nazi poems examined in this chapter to be “true” works of art. To this question, I will simply say here that they were considered true works of art by those writing and publishing them, and likely by many of those reading them as well. In this sense they endeavor toward the status of art. This dissertation argues, broadly, that there are aesthetic means of disambiguation between fascist and conservative, “proto-fascist” poetry. In this sense, I do in fact consider these poems to be poems, and therefore art. This is in fact central to the argument outlined here. I do not, however, consider them to be worthy of recognition or praise; if by “true” is meant “good,” then I would most certainly reject such an assignment.

compliance, specifically because those actions occurred and must be judged in the political sphere. “[T]here still remains the fact that you have carried out, and therefore actively supported, a policy of mass murder. For politics is not like the nursery; in politics obedience and support are the same” (279).<sup>58</sup> This chapter will consider the imperatives of obedience and support as they manifest in the aesthetic sphere, particularly its role in the process of total mobilization and the proliferation of an inability to think (empathically) from the perspective of another, what I have been referring to throughout my dissertation as indifference.

The previous chapters posit that the conservative use of poetry to think through the political viability and ethical imperatives of fascism affords the possibilities of both complicity and resistance through poetry’s unique relationship with the emotion of indifference or disinterest, what Arendt calls “obedience and support,” as opposed to the emotion of empathy. The lyric contains the conditions whereby both the irrational fascist goal of such indifference and the anti-fascist imperative to embrace indeterminacy (Arendt’s call to think) can be rhetorically dramatized per de Man’s understanding of allegory. Primarily by surveying contributions to the conservative-turned-Nazi literary journal *Die Neue Literatur* (formerly *Die Schöne Literatur*), this chapter will explicitly consider the first of these conditions, namely, the question of what makes a poem fascist. Following Jan-Pieter Barbian’s argument in his recent and thorough account of literary politics under National Socialism, I will argue that the difference between a fascist and non-fascist poem has nothing to do with an overt declaration of politics and everything to do with the role literary aesthetics play in the

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<sup>58</sup> Invoking Kantian logic, she continues by saying that, “just as you supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations... we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you.”



political goal of total mobilization. This resonates with Adorno's warning, cited in the epigraph to this chapter, concerning the status of art after National Socialism. Adorno writes that all art manipulates; over engaged art "in the service of molding public opinion" he privileges autonomous art, that whose "manipulative element remains a means of realizing the essence of the work." In this chapter, I will consider a de Manian alternative to this dichotomy that nonetheless draws on Adorno's presupposition of manipulation. Whereas the NS poem manipulates teleologically, the conservative poem manipulates intentionally, in the de Manian sense of indeterminately. By this, I mean that the NS lyric need not be politically engaged to nonetheless produce political manipulation, in this case the reproduction of the effects of entertainment literature, namely unempathic disinterest. Whereas many conservative revolutionaries' efforts to theorize revolution in literary-aesthetic terms border on reproducing this same rejection of failure, the indeterminacy of the conservative lyric opens itself to empathic readings through its manipulation of language and simultaneous presentation of multiple perspectives, its ability to be read against itself.

By disavowing the possibility of indeterminacy – in other words, by performing certainty – the fascist lyric is one that, within the socio-historical context of fascist movements such as National Socialism, rejects the differentiation of lyric modes. It also rejects that which Paul de Man claims makes a poem modern: incomprehensibility, "the more [the poet] is compulsively misinterpreted and oversimplified and made to say the opposite of what he actually said" (de Man, "Lyric and Modernity" 186). Specifically, de Man argues that, "the cause of the specifically modern kind of obscurity... resides... in a loss of the representational function of poetry that goes parallel with the loss of a sense of selfhood" (172). If the modern lyric is thus marked by loss or absence, by

“Entrealisierung” and “Entpersönlichung,” then the seeming truism that the fascist lyric is anti-modern can be grounded on its being marked by the destruction of representation and selfhood, or pure presence itself. It irrationally “coordinates” (in the sense of *Gleichschaltung*) lyrical subgenres, like the ballad and the ode, as well as theories of the lyric, invoking at once Culler’s apostrophic “you” and Abrams’s illuminating “I,” in a mode that is utterly transparent and immediate. In this sense, to combat the violence performed against the genre of lyric, Virginia Jackson’s project of reading the historical process of “lyricization” helps to illuminate the way in which fascism coopts the lyric, or rather, how the lyric becomes subject to the expanding program of cooption integral to fascist politics. Specifically, by forswearing the mutability and multiplicity of language, its capacity for representation, the fascist poem undoes lyric incomprehensibility and (re)produces the conditions of the possibility of the proliferation of fascist ideology. In other words, it destroys the possibility of Arendtian thinking and makes of its message of support the utterly comprehensible imperative to obey.

To begin, it bears emphasizing that while until recently critics have emphasized the prominence of visual art, film, and architecture both in the Nazi propaganda machine and as the objects of censorship, there was a large market for books in Germany even throughout the Second World War. While many of these books were concerned primarily with *völkish*, nationalist, and national socialist themes such as heroism and sacrifice, there were also large markets for adventure and crime thrillers as well as for “high” foreign literature by authors such as Hemingway, Yeats, Joyce, Proust, Dostoevsky, and others. In his book *Reading under Hitler*, Christian Adam has come to similar conclusions, showing that books on topics such as funny war stories and the birth of organic chemistry had print runs on par with, if not exceeding, those of the

immensely popular, anti-Semitic *Myth of the Twentieth Century*, which outlined much of nazism's "intellectual" groundwork.

Recent research by Jan-Pieter Barbian suggests that the Nazi fascist desire for total control was in part facilitated by its manipulation of reading practices. Besides the negative influence of book burnings and increasingly harsh censorship laws, however, the National Socialists also tried to positively influence what people were reading, and by 1941 memberships in book clubs rose considerably to 173,912 members in the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (DAF), facilitated in part by the forced participation as a result of the program of *Gleichschaltung*. These memberships were both a means to circulate works by national socialist and national-conservative authors, many of whom were placed alongside writers like Rilke or Goethe in collections and anthologies. However, such books were not the only ones sold (Barbian 413).

Jedes Mitglied musste pro Jahr mindestens acht Bücher kaufen. 1938 wurden 75% und 1940 immerhin noch 50% der Buchproduktion der Hanseatischen Verlagsanstalt über diese Buchgemeinschaft vertrieben, insgesamt in jedem Jahr mehr als eine Million Exemplare. Dabei verbreitete das DAF-Unternehmen seit 1935 keineswegs nur die nationalsozialistische Belletristik... sondern vor allem Bücher nationalkonservativer Autoren... und selbst Romane von Werner Bergengruen und Ernst Jünger, die als Regimekritik gelesen werden konnten. (469)

In fact, as research by Tobias Schneider shows, of forty titles with printings between 300,000 and 920,000 copies, "sind zwar zwölf vertreten, die dem offiziell verordneten literarischen Kanon zugerechnet werden können.... Eine Detailanalyse für die Zeiträume 1933 bis 1935, 1936 bis 1938 und 1939 bis 1945 ergibt jedoch eine deutlich

abfallende Absatzkurve für diese systemkonforme Literatur und einen kontinuierlichen Anstieg der Unterhaltungstitel, wobei Heinrich Spoerl mit insgesamt fünf Bestsellern, darunter sein 1934 im Droste Verlag erschienener Roman *Die Feuerzangenbowle*, zum meistverkauften und wohl auch meistgelesenen Autor der NS-Diktatur avancierte" (473). The point here is that few if any critics have associated the work of Hermann Spoerl with national socialism; his name is absent from the indexes of major texts on fascist literature, including Loewy's *Literatur unterm Hakenkreuz* (1969), Ketelsen's *Literatur und Drittes Reich* (1992), and Schnell's *Dichtung in finsternen Zeiten* (1998).

The argument that Barbian makes here speaks to the arguments being made by the recognized conservative and National Socialist "literati" of the 1930s. The party, in fact, tried to make this very argument, that there were social implications from reading that coincided with various missions of the party, in this case the fostering of a law-abiding (a suspect term in light of Eichmann's self-defense) German youth. "Das Reichssicherheitshauptamt wollte sogar einen Zusammenhang zwischen der Lektüre von Abenteuer- oder Kriminalromanen und der Neigung von Jugendlichen zu Straftaten erkennen" (471). Barbian's argument, on the other hand, is that reading patterns derived from book sales indicate a similar social function with a much more dangerous outcome: complacency, a withdrawal from and even willing ignorance of social realities. "Wer aus der Realität des deprimierenden Kriegsalltags fliehen wollte oder im Luftschutzkeller die Angriffe überstehen musste, griff allerdings bestimmt nicht zu schwerfälligen Blut- und Boden- oder zu Kriegsromanen und schon gar nicht zu Propagandaschriften, sondern suchte in der Literatur 'Unterhaltung, Ablenkung und Distanz'" (473).

It is important to keep in mind that the war years of the late 1930s and early 1940s were a considerably different period in Germany than ten years prior during the

ascension of the national socialists. However, the trends in book sales during the latter part of the decade do speak to the type of literature that was being produced by those preaching of the “formend” role of literature and the writer in building a new Germany. For while many conservative writers were eventually forced to either flee the country or conform to more explicitly political writing, most of them did not start their careers with – or at least their careers were not defined entirely by – war mongering, anti-Semitism, or overt nationalism. This, however, as Ketelsen argues, does not mean their writing was not political.

Weinhebers Odenproduktion und ihre Rezeption verweisen einmal mehr darauf, den Begriff von politischer Lyrik nicht zu eng zu fassen und die politische Qualität nicht allein im Inhalt der Texte zu suchen... Literarische Verhaltensweisen wie Reproduktivität, ‘dichterischer Gestus’ und Traditionalität werden im außerliterarischen Kontext zu politischen Handlungen, zum Bewahren, Rechtfertigen und Verteidigen. Solcherart rücken Weinhebers und [Herybert] Menzels Gedichte – jedes auf seine Weise – neben die lautstarke Produktion der ‘jungen Mannschaft.’ (312)

Ketelsen’s expansion of the notion of political lyric beyond the content of the text can be read in the context of an at times mythical discourse on poetics that, rather than emphasizing political content, focused instead on the relationship between writer, text, and reader. One striking iteration of this relationship is the notion of the writer as leader, a concept with roots in the romantic notion of genius that conservative-turned-Nazi writers increasingly compound with the racialized ideology of *Volk* in the 1930s. Conservative revolutionaries like Hofmannsthal theorize this idea such that, unlike the prophetic/vatic power ascribed to the poet by George, the poet articulates collective

experience so that the nation, or spiritual community, can be incited to change.

“Significantly, [Hofmannsthal] also begins to reverse the image of the poet-genius that has been cherished by the *Bildungsbürgertum* in the wake of German Classicism. In this vision, the poet cannot create or lead the nation, but must rather embody and articulate what the nation already is on the basis of its history and experience. The nation, not the poet, is the agent of national formation or change” (Arens 191). In the work of George, the “political poet” is a public prophet emergent in language (and restricted to an aesthetic space) who prophesies or “creates” the nation; for Hofmannsthal, he is an arbiter of language whose inner, private transformation will radiate into the community, thereby effecting that transformation on a national level. This tension between public and private, leading and embodying, persists in critical reflections on the role of writing into the 1930s, and the notion of the writer as leader of the racialized *Volk* in particular becomes more overt with the rise of National Socialism, with the important distinction that the fascist writer was to destroy either aesthetic (George) or metaphysical/spiritual (Hofmannsthal) mediation.<sup>59</sup>

The notion of the writer as a political leader derives in part from the concept of “radiation” as the mediating principle between writer and *Volk*, one that conservative critics were employing before Hofmannsthal’s 1928 speech. In 1924, for example, Hans Brandenburg articulated the anti-expressionist argument that the writer is a product of his age, rather than a subjective reflection of it. In an open debate about the socialist and expressionist Johannes Becher’s new book of poems, *Hymnen*, he argued with the poet and critic Paul Reiser about the role of the modern poet. Reiser’s initial review of the book argues that the “Unvollkommenheit” of Becher’s art is a result of the

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<sup>59</sup> For more on the public and private in the work of George and Hofmannsthal, see Adorno, “The George-Hofmannsthal Correspondence, 1891-1906” 213-226.

“Unvollkommenheit” of the age that the poetry reflects; modern artists are excused from modern art’s misgivings because they are a product of the historical epoch in which they live. Brandenburg, however, could not disagree more. He cannot excuse Becher’s poetry, claiming that poets are the heart of their historical epoch, which is situated in and indebted to a long historical tradition.

[D]er Dichter ist nicht so sehr ein Spiegel als vielmehr das Herz seiner Zeit und sein Gedicht eine Form und *Ausstrahlung* von ihr, welche ihre Oberflächenerscheinungen, das sogenannte ‚Zeitgemäße‘, überdauert... [W]enn ich einen Vers und eine Prosa schreibe, die nicht Schrei und Gestammel des Augenblicks ist, sondern mit unseren alten Meistern wetteifert, so bin ich natürlich ein viel kühnerer, radikalerer, modernerer Dichter als Johannes R. Becher.” (Brandenburg 145, italics added)

Expressionist poetry is more an affront to than a mirror of modernity, which Brandenburg sees as an extension of older poetic traditions. The poem, in Brandenburg’s argument as in Hofmannsthal’s, embodies what the “age” is already determined to be, a line of thinking that will ultimately work in the service of propaganda, which employs registers of purification and cleansing.

This notion that the poet is the heart of his age and the poem a “form and emanation” of it was echoed by Will Vesper in 1924, who published a short article comparing works of art to modern technological advancements such as the telephone. In the essay, “Strahlenergie der Kunst,” he argues that works of art are radioactive, that they have their own particular energy. “[I]ch meine nicht jene äußerliche, der Spannung der Handlung, der Diktion usw, sondern ein inneres geheimes Fluidum, auf dem die Wirkung aller Kunstwerke auf die Hörer oder Seher beruht. Kunstgenuß ist Reaktion

auf diese aktive Substanz." (2). In Vesper's analogy, these viewers or listeners are the "receivers" of signals, or the mysterious inner fluid, of the work of art. Each work of art has a "Hauptschwingung," or main effect, and, depending on the strength and richness of the artist, can have a varying number of "Nebentönen," or minor tones. Vesper, however, places a heavy emphasis on the artist, whom he refers to as the "Sender" with his own wavelength that can be picked up by a variable number of "receivers." For an especially strong *Sender*, Vesper uses the example of Schiller, who he says sends out so many waves that it could take centuries before "eines Tages die ausgeruhten Wellen, wie ausgeruhte Akkumulatoren, mit neuer überraschender Kraft wirken [werden]" (3).

Amazingly, Vesper's argument here borders on an anticipation of Walter Benjamin's discussion of a work of art's afterlife, of the flares that the artwork emits to be rediscovered through interpretation by later generations. For Vesper, however, the work of art is subordinate to its creator, whose own particular abilities and sensibilities will determine who is moved by it. In both the case of Vesper and of Brandenburg, the poet - always the classical, German poet - is seen as a product of his historical period whose work serves as a transmitter of those values onto particular historical subjects. As with Hofmannsthal's *Lord Chandos Letter*, Vesper describes a "Fluidum" in a text that implies the internal unity that the "Wirkung" on the listener or reader is based (quite the opposite, then, of Benjamin's claim in the translator essay that no work of literature is intended for a reader and no symphony for a listener). Rather than an anticipation of Hofmannsthal's speech, Brandenburg and Vesper represent a different but related strand of determinist thought that was based on a text's effect (*Wirkung*) on the individual and its emergence from the historical, rather than the inverse, its emergence from the individual and effect on history.



Hofmannsthal's speech moves George's poetic mantra out of the poetic realm and into an embodied space, taking emphasis off the poet and directing it onto the chosen individuals, "die Suchenden." Other conservative critics – many of whom would eventually become allies of the National Socialists – were pushing the ideal towards community further, even before the speech, literalizing George's Poet-Führer while espousing a rhetoric of "effect," that transcendent literature would both affect and effect subjects and thereby effect, or create, a new Reich. The doubling of *Wirkung*, both of the individual and the community, is, like this distinction, ultimately collapsed into one category, namely, that of Hegelian *Vollendung*, the resolution of historical forces in the new German state.<sup>60</sup> That is, the movement is from a personal experience of overcoming to a public one.

One primary aspect of this "effect" of Dichtung was to connect individual readers through texts to the timeless and eternal, qualities ascribed to the German *Volk* and the German soul, an idea championed by Hofmannsthal in regards to the nation as a community united by language. Ralf Schnell argues that the disintegration of the distinction between art and politics in a community of readers was captured in fact by Hans Grimm's bucolic concept of the "Weihefeier." "Der Glaube an die Trennbarkeit von Kunst und Politik entlarvt sich durch die beabsichtigte wechselseitige Erhöhung beider Bereiche selbst als Lüge. Grimms Konzept einer dichterischen Weihefeier erweist sich als Betrug an der erhofften gläubigen Gemeinde der Leser" (Schnell 81). In an essay on the writer Heinz Steguweit from 1932, Lothar Schreyer describes the "task" of literature (Dichtung) to be making public the experience of the inexplicable, the

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<sup>60</sup> Andrew Hewitt has made a similar argument with regards to the avant-garde. "As the moment of 'full unfolding' [whereby the conditions of possibility of a specific historically constituted discourse become simultaneously present and possible], the avant-garde, no less than fascism, could think itself as both the completion and the liquidation of historical sequentiality" (7).

“Unendlichkeit des Lebens,” and by making public, throwing us into that eternity. It is this process of making public that will double for the individual, whose private fate will be made impersonal and given fateful meaning.

So ist man versucht zu sagen, daß die Dichtung das Erlebnis nicht verdichtet, sondern weitet in das nicht mehr Faßbare hinaus. Wie der Mensch in einer Gestalt der Natur, etwa in der Betrachtung einer Blume, die Unendlichkeit des Lebens zu erleben vermag, so erlebt der Dichter in der Gestaltung eines Erlebens die Unendlichkeit des Lebens und zeugt in seinem Schaffen diese *Schwingungen*, die uns in die Unendlichkeit des Lebens *hineinschwingen*. So wird persönliches Schicksal unpersönlich, und das persönliche Schicksal erhält erst dadurch allgemeinen Wert, also schicksalhaft Bedeutung. Solche schicksalhafte Bedeutung soll die Dichtung haben, wenn sie ihre Aufgabe erfüllen will. Manche Dichtung unserer Zeit dient dieser Aufgabe. Einer der liebenswertesten Dichter, dem es gegeben ist, dieser Aufgabe gewachsen zu sein, ist Heinz Steguweit.

(Schreyer 154, italics added)

That is, literature – as it was for George and Hofmannsthal – is a means to achieve transcendence. However, Schreyer’s argument for how literature can attain this transcendence is unlike George’s, whose poets are bound by and constituted by the union of the aesthetic and the linguistic (the poetic), and also unlike Hofmannsthal, who argues that external dualities, “im äußeren Zerklüftete,” must be poetized (“gedichtet”) in individuals, from which radiates and is “formed” a new united community. Rather than “Einheit” to describe community or *Volk*, Schreyer speaks of “Unendlichkeit,” the eternity or state of being eternal that is a quality of life. The writer experiences this “Unendlichkeit des Lebens” in the “Gestaltung” of his experience, and he then shows in

his writing these movements (“Schwingungen”) that bring others into (“hineinschwingen”) this “Unendlichkeit des Lebens”.

For Schreyer, literature “weitet in das nicht mehr Faßbare hinaus,” it must expand into the ineffable and the inexplicable, what he calls the immeasurable. That is, the measurable qualities of an aesthetic work do not represent its true value; this value is its ability to reveal the immeasurable, the infinite, through the aesthetic. Furthermore, this immeasurable quality of art is actually a quality of life, and art’s value is marked by its ability to lead us back to that eternal life. “Der Wert der Dichtung nämlich, ob es sich um ein Kunstwerk handelt oder nicht, ist also kein ästhetischer. Das Ästhetische, der formale Bestand des Werkes, ist meßbar. Die Kunst aber ist durchaus unermesslich, wie das Leben, das sie kündigt. In meßbarem Gefäß das Unermessliche darbringen, ist das Geheimnis der Kunst.” [The word “kündigt” here is important to note, as it is the same word that George uses to describe the poet: a Kündler, or prophet.] Not only does art shape life, but it foretells it, it collapses the boundary between what it is and what life is, as both are subsumed under the mystical category of “Unendlichkeit” or the “Unermessliche”. Furthermore, the verb Schreyer uses to describe art’s task, “darbringen,” is a neologism that connotes the idea of an ancient ritual and means something like to offer or to present (more literally to bring out). That art then presents (“darbringen”) the immeasurable connotes in the language itself this timeless and mystical power that art is supposed to reveal and affirm as inherent in life.

This says a great deal about the relationship between aesthetics and politics and Walter Benjamin’s famous claim that fascism is the aestheticization of politics, or the turning of the political experience into an aesthetic one. For that does seem to be what Schreyer is advocating; that art itself contributes to a politically-committed and

ideologically-motivated action of submitting/subsuming one's individual identity to/under a collective one known as National Socialism. But that is not all art does. Art also represents and reflects this process. It is itself this process. That is, poetry does not just tell one what to do, but it models and thereby enacts this process in the moment of reading. It brings the reader somewhere while representing both that bringing and that somewhere. That is why the tension that George maintains among the aesthetic realm inhabited by the poet, the aesthetically-constituted prophesied future, and the real Germany outside that – in short, the tension between the secret and the real Germany – is resolved in the 1930s by the idea that the writer actually was a leader of the people. Of course, the Nazi irrationality and ideology of *Gleichschaltung* complicates this seemingly simple resolution, which results in another vein of theorizing in which the poet is a leader insofar as he is not a leader, that he leads back to Germanic roots, back to what real Germans already are – farmers, etc. And this, seemingly unpolitical, act is the most political act of all.

One manifestation of the specifically literary goal of proliferating and harnessing apolitical indifference occurs in the speech by Hans Friedrich Blunck from March 21, 1935, cited in the previous chapter.

Bewusst, nennen Sie es selbstbewusst, hat sich das Schrifttum der Gegenwart, hat sich das kämpfende Schrifttum, wie es sich um die Wartburg sammelte, wie es in den Kräften einer neuen Jugend aufwächst, verbündet und will mitten im Volksleben stehen. Es hat die Pflicht zu dieser Neuordnung erkannt, sie ist aber auch sein Recht. Der Dichter weiss schmerzlich, dass er damit an persönlichem Behagen, an Lebensfreude des kleinen Daseins und an betrachtlichen Stunden lyrischer Deutung der Welt verliert. Er weiss aber auch, dass sein Volk ihn

braucht, er steht und ist bereit, sein Geschick anders als in der Zeit eines übersteigerten Einzelwillens zu seinem eignen zu machen und die Volksgemeinschaft aller, auch der Schaffenden, zu bejahen, gläubig zu läutern und zu erfüllen.

If we take Blunck's argument to represent a position not at odds with Nazi ideology, and we consider the conception of the political role of poetry to derive in part from a particular way of thinking, then we can also speak of considerable shades of difference between the arguments about radiation made by conservatives and those arguments about sacrifice made by National Socialists. Despite the general attack on "materialism" put forward by his party, Blunck conceives of the literary in a materially political sense, impelling writers to sacrifice the subjectively lyrical in the service of strengthening the secular state and affirming its racist/racial(izing) ideology. This conception of the relationship between literature and politics is markedly different from those of Hofmannsthal and Kommerell, however, who conceive of political transformation as an inevitable, albeit necessarily positive, outcome of precisely that lyrical refinement and subjective experience that Blunck calls on writers to sacrifice. Whereas Blunck demands the suppression of lyrical subjectivity for concrete political ends, conservatives such as Hofmannsthal and Kommerell sought what Martin Travers, borrowing a term from Klaus Landfried, has called, "an ethos [that] might best be described as 'the politics of the apolitical,' a transcendence of reality that paradoxically, at the same time, allowed, under certain historical circumstances, for its greatest penetration" (Travers 11).

This term attempts to reconcile both Ernst Nolte's argument that fascism is the "resistance to transcendence," or modernity, and Jeffrey Herf's argument that fascism represented a kind of "reactionary modernism." That is, the paradox that Landfried and

Travers identify is one that, broadly speaking, concerns the Nazi fascist embrace, at times, of the very ideas they purported to reject. Like Herf, I contend that this paradox can be traced from conservative revolutionary literary aesthetics to Nazi literary aesthetics, but that there is in fact an important distinction between the two. While Hofmannsthal and Kommerell consider the development of a new collective ethos to be an aesthetic project experienced internally by the individual engagement with language, Brandenburg and Wehner imply the urgency with which poets must work to inspire and enact material social and political reform at the expense of aesthetic autonomy. While Hofmannsthal upholds this tension between the *völkisch* expression of collectivity and the lyrical expression of individuality, Hans Friedrich Blunck intones its collapse, insisting that the latter must be directly served, and even effected by, the former. In this formulation, and the poetry that ensued, the thematization of transcendence is really a thematization of the materialism Nazi ideology rejected. Though an autonomous transcendent experience is of primary importance for Hofmannsthal, such autonomy becomes further assimilated to and instrumentalized for the ultimately racialized and nationalist conception of the *Volk*.

Several articles from *Die Neue Literatur* on the evolving role of the writer in society help to sketch this regression, articles that anticipate the instrumentalization of literature and its collapse into political will as described in Blunck's speech. In 1930, for example, the critic Hasso Härlen published a laudatory review of *Grundlagen der neuen Gesellschaft*, a newly published volume of theoretical writings by the neo-classical and conservative German writer Paul Ernst. Titled "Der Dichter als Führer," the review argues that political action, namely that of the "Staatsmann," must stem from sources

“jenseits des Vernünftigen.”<sup>61</sup> Free from the limits of scientific inquiry and discourse, the creative writer alone is able to lead the leader, and thus the nation, towards a new political ethic by creating, and thereby preparing the nation for, this ethic.<sup>62</sup>

While Härten conceives of the writer in more explicitly political terms – he says, “in einem hohen Sinne ist deshalb gerade der klassische Dichter ein politischer Dichter” – he nonetheless insists that the writer must actively create a sense of the possibilities, or “images,” of a different, spiritually richer, world.

[Paul Ernsts Dichtung] gibt neue Bilder und Möglichkeiten des Menschentums, und sie scheint berufen, aus der Hölle der Formlosigkeit und der toten Formen herauszuführen... Der Mangel des Gefühls für die Dichtung ist Ausdruck eines allgemeineren Mangels: wir leben in einer Zeit der falschen Gefühle und des falschen Denkens. Durch die Schöpfung neuer Gefühle überwindet der Dichter die Welt der falschen Gefühle. (Härten 334)

Like Hofmannsthal, Härten emphasizes the need for a new social formation; like Kommerell, he conceives of poetic language as the means to social transformation. However, rather than inspiring transformation through modeling the possibilities enabled by it, Härten claims that the poet directly implants this motivation to transform in the people. He creates a new ethic in us rather than for us. “[H]eute kann nur noch der Dichter uns sagen, was wir tun sollen, indem er in uns eine neue Gesinnung schafft. Etwas Neues,” Härten concludes, “kann aber nur kommen, wenn eine neue Gesinnung

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<sup>61</sup> This argument can be compared with the Reich Production Director of Radio Eugen Hadamovsky’s 1936 description of catching a glimpse of Adolf Hitler’s hands during a speech. See Hadamovsky, “Die Hände des Führers” 747.

<sup>62</sup> “Der Dichter [schafft] Empfindungen, [drückt] nicht etwa nur [aus]. Dadurch bereichert er das Leben der Menschheit und wird zur wichtigen Triebkraft ihrer Entwicklung. Er ruft eine neue Gesinnung hervor und bereitet so den Boden für neue Formen der Gesellschaft” (Härten 334).

aufkommt, aus der es entspringt. Hier wiederum stehen wir vor dem Beruf des Dichters" (338).

The conservative revolutionary Wilhelm Stapel expresses a similar sentiment regarding the role of the *Dichter* in the establishment of the abstract notions of "order" and "form" in a speech from June 1931 during the "Deutsche Dichtertagung" at Schloss Osterstein. The speech, which was reprinted in Vesper's *Die Neue Literatur*, distinguishes between *Literatur*, which Stapel argues is propagandistic and overtly political, and *Dichtung*, which is itself in danger of being corrupted. In warning against popularity and success, he establishes three stages, or *Stufen*, that a text can achieve: success (*Erfolg*), effect (*Wirkung*), and fame/glory (*Ruhm*). Success, which Stapel equates with Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, is grounded in the material. The emerging Nazi party loathed Remarque's pacifist critique of World War I, and the accusation of materialism was a common critique waged against the author.<sup>63</sup> According to Stapel, only four thousand people out of millions read Hölderlin, whose genius eclipses the opportunistic Remarque. And while *Wirkung* is something "seelisch," it is not enough for a text to affect someone – it must also achieve a state of glory that is a truly metaphysical, or transcendent, stage of literary production: "Der Sinne aller echten Dichtung ist allein der Ruhm" (416). This transcendent omnipresence, however, must ultimately serve the very materialist ends of which Stapel is critical.

The burden of establishing order is a public endeavor ultimately in the service of authority, which does not limit freedom but makes it possible through the institution of both moral and political order by an authority. This is not unlike Eichmann's distortion

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<sup>63</sup> Hans Reiser, in an anti-intellectual review from 1929, complains that a professor like Remarque profited by writing about others' experiences in the war and even proposes the author give his profits to those soldiers who served in the war and didn't go on to write books and capitalize off of their experiences (555).



of Kant. Stapel continues by insisting that German writers must win the natural “Rangordnung” of *Dichtung* and stabilize the “real authority” through a “pure separation” from literature like Remarque’s, elsewhere referred to as “Asphaltliteratur,” a blanket term for anything that challenged party orthodoxy.

Aber all diese Bemühungen sind nicht das Wichtigste. Worauf es ankommt, ist, daß wir die natürliche Rangordnung der Dichtung gewinnen und die echte Autorität stabilieren. Es gilt Grenzen zu ziehen und Abstände zu wahren. Wir haben nicht eine Gruppe oder eine Richtung ‚durchzudrücken‘, sondern wir haben eine Ordnung zu finden. Unsere Bemühungen liegen nicht in der Richtung auf größeren Betrieb, sondern auf reinliche Scheidung. Vor allem müssen wir wissen, daß es heut und immer nichts Wichtigeres für die Dichtung gibt als Rang und Autorität. (416)

Not unlike Paul Ernst’s “anderer Führer” in the “Vorhalle von Gottes Tempel,” Stapel’s notion of a transcendent authority is rooted precisely in the desire to transform material reality, distinguish it from modern technocracy, and therefore reject the possibilities of both mediation and representation.

This call for “effect,” “glory,” “authority,” “form,” and “order” occurred against an increasingly partisan political backdrop that saw the escalation of censorship measures and the founding of a government department openly committed entirely to propaganda. Desirable literature was defined negatively, as the opposite of *Im Westen nichts Neues*.<sup>64</sup> As the National Socialists took control of the government, they began to strictly monitor and control language. The Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda (RMVP) overseen by Joseph Goebbels was focused above all on controlling

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<sup>64</sup> Of course, the justification is in terms of form, but the actual distinctions are often in terms of content. War diaries were immensely popular, as Christian Adam’s research demonstrates, though pacifist war diaries were obviously not.

rhetoric, the underlying purpose of which was ultimately to silence detractors, create scapegoat enemies of the state, and garner and bolster support for the National Socialist platform and agenda. It also focused on amplifying aspects of the party ideology that conservatives found appealing, such as anti-Semitism, traditionalism, and authoritarianism more generally. Such rhetoric notoriously devolved into dichotomies that championed whatever it was the Nazis stood for and denigrated everything else.

Perhaps the most examined of these dichotomies is that of timeless, Germanic, spiritually enriched *Kultur* and the Western, spiritually bankrupt, democratic and cosmopolitan *Zivilisation*, a dichotomy that Jeffrey Herf thoroughly complicates in his book *Reactionary Modernism*. Another dichotomy that arose alongside that of *Kultur/Zivilisation* was that of *Literatur/Dichtung*. The word *Literatur* was generally associated with the concept of *Zivilisation* and the evils of the bourgeois West. The preferred alternatives to this term for those on the right were the terms *Dichtung* and *Schrifttum*, which were made into pseudo-mythical and mystical terms and can be found in the vitriolic rhetoric that accompanied the attempted purge of such “evil” influences as Jews, Socialists, gays, and “Bolsheviks.” This debate, which also played out in conversations regarding censorship, also shaped theories of writing and the writer that resolve ultimately in the significance of order, manipulation, and effect mediated by the library.

In 1930, three years prior to the book burnings, in an editorial from the conservative journal *Die schöne Literatur*, an unnamed contributor (presumably the editor and future Nazi Will Vesper) anticipates what eventually becomes a much

sharper divide between *Literatur* and *Dichtung* in party rhetoric.<sup>65</sup> The opinion piece, though not as vitriolic as essays that appear in later years, has this to say about Thomas Mann in response to his winning the Nobel Prize for literature:

Natürlich hätten wir auch heute andere Dichter mit einem umfassenden Lebenswerk aufzuzeigen. Wir nennen vor allem Paul Ernst, Wilhelm Schäfer, Ricarda Huch, Hermann Stehr. Aber alle vier haben offenbar, und z.T. naturnotwendig, noch nicht die europäische, ja noch nicht einmal die deutsche Geltung, die Thomas Mann errang. Wenn wir wollen, daß die Bedeutung dieser Dichter von Europa und der Welt erkannt wird, müssen wir dafür sorgen, daß sie erst einmal in Deutschland die Stellung einnehmen, die sie verdienen. Erst dann können wir verlangen, daß auch das Ausland sie wahrnimmt. Immer aber wird der urbane, zeitgemäße, allen leicht zugängliche und offene Geist schneller erkannt werden, als der eigenwilligere, schwerere, verschlossener, tiefere und charaktvollere. (60)

While the author of these lines is arguably content to see a German win such a prestigious award, it is telling to look at how this award is thought of: as something cosmopolitan, worldly, and bourgeois, stereotyped again and again as vapid and weak. It also follows that an established and celebrated writer would be in a position to win the award. But this celebrated writer is “der bedeutendste Vertreter des bürgerlichen liberalen Schrifttums von gestern, das – wie das gewöhnlich geht – heute seine großen Erfolge einheimst, für die es gestern gearbeitet und gestritten.” Thomas Mann, unlike Paul Ernst, Hermann Stehr, and other writers eventually embraced by the National Socialists, represents an older generation: the liberal bourgeoisie of yesterday. And

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<sup>65</sup> For more on how Nazi writers characterized *Dichtung*, see Wulf, *Literatur und Dichtung im Dritten Reich* 317-323.

because of the association of these qualities with the threatening spread of “modern values” throughout Europe, it follows for the author of this editorial that the Nobel Prize would be awarded to an “urbane, zeitgemäße, allen leicht zugängliche und offene Geist” such as Mann.

The language here also reinforces a dichotomy between “Schriftsteller” and “Dichter.” “Wir begrüßen es, daß wieder einmal einem deutschen *Schriftsteller* von Rang zuteil wurde. Gewiß wüßten wir deutsche *Dichter* von wesenhafterer Bedeutung zu nennen...” (italics added). To quote from an editorial in response to Mann from a year earlier in the same journal: “Unsere Augen sehen die Treuen im Lande; es sind die großen Stillen: Spitteler und Rilke unter den Toten; Hermann Stehr und Hans Carossa unter den Lebenden... um nur diese zu nennen.” These “living Dichter” were considered to be somehow more essentially German. The repetition of the comparative “-er” in the final description from the article about Mann’s Nobel Prize implies this hierarchical dualism; the “lebendige Dichter” wrote literature with a “wesenhafterer Bedeutung” and were “eigenwilligere, schwerere, verschlossener, tiefere und charaktvoller.” That is, not only were their works more profound, but they were themselves better people, more “iron-willed” with “better characters.” In 1933, the president of the RSK and Deutsche Akademie der Dichtung (DAD) Hanns Johst wrote, “Thomas Mann, Heinrich Mann, Werfel, Kellermann, Fulda, Döblin, Unruh, usw. sind liberale-reaktionäre Schriftsteller, die mit dem deutschen Begriff Dichtung in amtlicher Eignung keineswegs mehr in Berührung zu kommen haben” (in Wulf 17).

In the final issue of *Die schöne Literatur* in 1930, before the name change, there is a brief explanation of the change presumably written by the editor Will Vesper. He says on behalf of the journal: “Wie bisher werden wir in erster Linie mit allen Kräften für ein

freies, reinliches und wesenhaftes deutsches Schrifttum kämpfen, dafür daß es die Stellung bekommt, die ihm im Leben des Volkes gebührt und die Wirkung, von der die Beseelung und Rettung der Nation abhängt." The journal is therefore positioned to fight for a desirable literature, one that is "free, pure, and essential," relatively empty qualifiers that do more to imply something undesirable, unfree, impure, and inessential, than they do to describe what the journal hopes to promote. As Gisela Berglund writes, "Die Neue Literatur war seit ihrer Gründung (1923) ein Kampforgan der 'völkischen Dichter,' insbesondere ihres Herausgebers Will Vesper, gegen die Literatur der Juden und Judengenossen" (7).

Vesper here also uses a third word for literature, "Schrifttum," which also saw usage during this period. The -tum suffix is like the English -dom, found in words such as kingdom or freedom. It implies an essential state or quality of being - the state of being free, or an extension of the king's rule, which is what makes him the king anyway.<sup>66</sup> The National Socialists were fond of words such as "Schrifttum," "Deutschtum," or "Volkstum" in part because it imputed this notion of essence to the category in question. In 1933, a month before the first widespread book burnings, German students in the Deutschen Studentenschaft (DSt), under the auspices of the Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (NSDStB), wrote and circulated "twelve theses against the un-German spirit," drawing on similar rhetoric as Vesper's journal. The first of these theses makes use of such rhetoric: "Sprache und Schrifttum wurzeln im Volke. Das deutsche Volk trägt die Verantwortung dafür, daß seine Sprache und sein Schrifttum reiner und unverfälschter Ausdruck seines Volkstums sind." These theses, which were hung around campuses across Germany and published in a range of

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<sup>66</sup> The word was used both positively and negatively, as in the case of the "Liste des schädlichen und unerwünschten Schrifttums" which was created in 1935.

newspapers and periodicals, inspired over sixty book burnings in the following months. Rather than the spiritual space of the nation, per Hofmannsthal, not to mention a revolutionary means of displacing reality, per George, literature is the “pure and true expression of the Volkstum.” It must express the will of the people, must therefore emerge from the people and reflect their collective will – towards revolution, transformation, anti-Semitism, etc. This echoes Brandenburg’s argument that the writer is the heart of his age and “sein Gedicht eine Form und Ausstrahlung von ihr.” The modern is an imposition on the “real” German tradition and history that must be rescued but is not yet lost.

In a speech printed in the party organ the *Völkischer Beobachter* on May 12, Joseph Goebbels explained the reasons for the book burnings as a response to the “modern” adulteration of German literature. “In den letzten vierzehn Jahren, in denen ihr, Kommilitonen, in schweigender Schmach die Demütigungen der Novemberrepublik über euch ergehen lassen mußtet, füllten sich die Bibliotheken mit Schund und Schmutz jüdischer Asphaltliteraten.” Like publishing houses and bookstores, libraries were perceived in Nazi propaganda as threatened by Jewish, liberal, cosmopolitan, Marxist, Communist, decadent, and democratic evils. Goebbels lumps these writers into the category of “asphalt literature,” a term that predates the Nazis but which has achieved notoriety through their particular usage of it. This “trash and dirt” threatened the sacred space of the library, a symbol and archive for German culture as well as a major contributor to the purity of that culture. “Die Zustände in den gewerblichen Leihbibliotheken scheinen ähnlich wie im Buchhandel gewesen zu sein, wahrscheinlich sogar ‘noch schlimmer.’ Im Oktober 1935 klagte die *Neue Literatur*, daß hier vor allem das ‘kitschig verlogene Sofa- und Sensationsbuch’ angeboten werde. Die Verheerungen,

die dieser Schund anrichte, seien weitaus größer und gefährlicher als die Wirkungen der 'unterirdischen Literatur,' die ja nur kleinen Kreisen zugänglich sei" (Berglund 17). The public accessibility of such *Asphaltliteratur* was therefore a considerable threat to the potential of the library as a disseminator of propaganda.

In January 1933, the same year and month that Hitler was sworn in as Chancellor of Germany, the literary critic Walter Hofmann published an essay in *Die Neue Literatur* entitled "Das Gedächtnis der Nation: Ein Wort zur Schrifttumspflege in Deutschland." In the essay, Hofmann discusses what he sees as the central role of the library in German culture, linking its ability to archive and "remember" cultural history with its ability to construct national identity.

Damit ist der Ort der öffentlichen Bücherei in der Gesamtlebensordnung der Nation bezeichnet. Denn nicht Bücher ausleihen, unentgeltlich oder billig, ist die Aufgabe der öffentlichen Bücherei, sondern nationale Schrifttumspflege in Auswahl, Ordnung, Vermittlung... Die öffentliche Bücherei, die mit Auswahl, Ordnung, Vermittlung das Unübersehbargewordene wieder übersehbar macht und damit das echte Gedächtnis der Nation wieder zu lebendiger Wirkung bringt, - diese öffentliche Bücherei ist also nirgends dringlicher als in Deutschland. Auch in dieser Zeit, auch in dieser Stunde. Gerade in dieser Zeit, gerade in dieser Stunde. (12)

Hofmann focuses on the library's ability not to loan out books but rather to foster a sense (or the essence) of national literature through a familiar set of terms: selection, order, mediation, and a "lebendige Wirkung." This active role of the institution of the library recalls Vesper's admission upon changing the name of his journal: that it will fight for literature (*Schrifttum*) to have the position it is due in the life of the Volk and the

effect (*Wirkung*) upon which the animation (*Beseelung*) and salvation of the nation depends. Both authors argue in a familiar vein that literature must have a particular effect on the people who read it, an effect that will help elevate the spirit and protect the eternal German nation from its foes.

It is the *Wirkung* of literature itself that is preconditioned by the selection, mediation, and order that Hofmann discusses. That is, the library and the journal serve as euphemisms for censorship, the selection of admissible literature by the state. This censorship is couched in the positive rhetoric of “*Wirkung*,” that it is enabling the nation to be moved towards a higher, if illusory, transcendent ideal. Vesper writes that his journal will ensure a “free, pure, and essential” German literature upon which the soul and salvation of the nation depends. Hofmann writes that the library will ensure the “selection, order, and mediation” necessary to cultivating and invigorating national memory and, presumably, national and cultural (national/cultural) identity. Both institutions, while serving the interests of the state, purport to do so in an effort to preserve the effect of literature on the individual consumer and citizen. And only permissible literature – whether deemed so by a literary critic or a government supervisor – can therefore contribute to the goal of establishing a new German nation and reclaiming traditional and “pure” German culture from the “trash and dirt” of “Bolshevik” and democratic influences.

While censorship wears various masks – of a literary journal, for Vesper, and a library for Hofmann – serving the higher cause of guaranteeing the triumph of the myth of the Third Reich, two opinion pieces from Vesper’s journal from four years prior indicate the growing conservative appreciation for the need of the censor. One of these, a direct response to some protests against censorship, takes a predictable position: that



ensorship actually serves as a kind of protection against those forces that seek to adulterate spirit, culture, and that which is holy. The free and natural development of art, the authors argue, must be reigned in as a form of preemptive defense. Another take on the question of censorship, however, makes the argument that censorship, while a restriction on freedom, actually helps to cultivate the spirit by keeping it from becoming “clumsy and aloof.” That is, censorship somehow mobilizes and energizes the spirit rather than facilitating groupthink and herd mentality. The individual soul and intellect (*Geist*) are then enriched as the spirit is forced to “bound over” any barrier put in its way.

And this rather positive argument for the transformative power of literature, paradoxical as it seems in the context of an increasingly regulated and censored book market, seems to be the “Wirkung” that Vesper and Hofmann both discuss. While they both seem to advocate the euphemistically-named “fostering” of literature, this fostering of literature, like the literature itself, will both affect and effect the individual National Socialist citizen, interpellating and transforming him into the German he already is and embodying the Germanism that already constitutes the State (enemies of the State, however, as a threat to this anti-transcendence, must not be transformed but annihilated). Such “Pflege” enables literature to interpellate and yet, by enabling, contributes to such interpellation. The journal and the library therefore precondition (and allow) the “Wirkung” of the literature itself. One need not think very metaphorically to see how concepts that apply to a library, such as “order” and “selection,” could be incorporated into Nazi party rhetoric.

The “Wirkung,” the desired effect that distinguishes party-approved *Dichtung* from *Literatur*, is therefore one that will reinvigorate a “Germanic” ethos by remaking

German subjects not into something new, but into what they already are, and therefore bringing this to consciousness. Vesper's journal argues that this process involves infusing the nation with a soul and thereby saving it from damnation. For Hofmann, it involves cultivating a particular national memory – a bastardized Nietzschean reclaiming of what has become obstructed or lost in the national history. In both these and the other cases I have described, literature has a more public and social role, as opposed to a privately aesthetic one per George. In the essay "Dichter und Öffentlichkeit," the Christian literary critic Hans Brandenburg makes this argument, responding directly to – and even Orientalizing – "esoteric" movements like George's brand of aestheticism. "Wir haben heute schon Ansätze zu einer esoterischen Kunstsprache, zu einer Literatur für Literatur, wie sie in China besteht. Der wahrhaft deutsche Dichter wird sich dieser Sprache niemals bedienen" (cite). The writer then, as Ernst argues, becomes a public figure leading people to that symbol of transformation back to one's deepest being, the Führer.

While indebted to a crude understanding of German idealism, there was no room in the evolving National Socialist ideology for Kant's notion of a natural genius outside of society, not to mention of art for art's sake, but rather for his claim that judgment is a fundamentally collective undertaking. Kant's understanding of the sublime is grounded in this notion of agreement by a social collective; rather than the pleasureable universality of subjective understanding and taste, however, the sublime is determined by the universality of a collective experience. It is this universality that the National Socialists and many of the conservative critics I have cited here strove to represent and the experience of which they promised. An example of this is a short piece from 1936 by Eugen Hadamovsky, who had the opportunity to sit near enough to see

the hands of Adolf Hitler as he was giving a speech. In the piece, called "Die Hände des Führers," Hadamovsky describes an experience of overwhelming awe that recalls the close up shots of Hitler's hands in *Triumph of the Will*. Precisely as Hitler speaks of a great reconciliation in the German people, Hadamovsky observes the Führer's hands, "als forme er ein kostbares Material zu einem Kunstwerk." They are themselves an artwork, but they are also the hands of an artist, the artist who will call the German people to working together and to reason. The final line of the account is a quote from Hitler, who also expresses an appeal to reason as an agent in overcoming and transcendence. "Niemals werde ich mich von jemand unterdrücken lassen, und stets will ich in einem ewigen Appell an die Vernunft und an die Einsicht und an den Verstand das ganze Volk zusammenfassen."

Reason is, of course, like most Nazi rhetoric, pushed to the limits of meaning so that it becomes meaningless, and concepts like conflict are entirely eradicated in the process of reasoning that Hadamovsky describes. Rather than diagnosing the idea of collective experience, or investigating it, by striving to restore some notion of an original, nearly primitive German society, the Nazis thematized it. An example of this is the "Thingspiel," developed by the Nazi Youth leader Baldur von Schirach, Reich Theater dramaturgist Rainer Schlösser, and the playwright Eberhard Wolfgang Möller in 1934. The *Thingspiel* was performed outdoors so that the Volk could equally partake and then reflect on what they had seen in a natural setting. "Its curious name stems from the days of the Germanic tribes, when clan members gathered in sacred assembly ("Ding") to make a judgment on an issue of great importance" (Baird 181). Events such as the staging of a *Thingspiel* or the mass rally strove to offer a sense of order, community, and homogeneity/similarity that many writers also ascribed to the function

of literature. However, because reading and writing are generally solitary endeavors, there was the need to figure out how the enterprise of writing fit into the ideology of the *Volk*. The writer was going to be a leader on issues of ethical significance, guiding humanity through the sublimity of their art to some higher ideal, but he must also remain a member of the people.

Hans Brandenburg tried to articulate his thoughts of the role of the writer in the *Volk* community in a speech printed in *Die Neue Literatur* in 1932 entitled “Der Dichter zum Tage.” In the speech, Brandenburg focuses specifically on the writer who, he says, stands opposite the liberal, democratic, godless *Zeitgeist*. The writer, in fact, is he who can restore a “kingdom of faith” to the German people once again. After quoting two stanzas from Eichendorff that end with the line “der Dichter ist das Herz der Welt” (an echo from arguments he makes against Becher in 1924), Brandenburg writes, “Verschönung und Verklärung durch den Dichter ist nicht verblasener Idealismus, ist nicht fauler Zauber, Tünche, und Firnis, es ist Wesenschau und Wesenschöpfung. Sie bringt das göttliche Erbarmen, durch das sie ward, in die Welt zurück und baut das geendete Reich des Glaubens wieder auf” (492). Rather than a political kingdom, the writer builds a kingdom of belief; for someone like Brandenburg or Paul Ernst, this belief was one in the “göttliche Erbarmen,” a phrase easily applicable to the eternal more generally, which was imputed to the *Volk*, the *Führer*, German-ness, etc.

Indeed, “Der Dichter ist es, der nichts beschönigt, aber alles verschönt” (491). The distinction made between “beschönigen” and “verschönen” is significant; while “beschönigen” implies making reality merely palatable, “verschönen” implies the glorification (*Ruhm*) of that reality. And such “essential” glorification is what the writer makes possible by creating, as Brandenburg says, a “Gegenwelt” to that very reality “in

der unsere wirkliche Welt aufgehoben ist: aufgehoben in dem doppelten Wortsinne von ‚bewahrt‘ und ‚vernichtet‘ (490). By this, Brandenburg seems to mean two things. On the one hand, recalling the closing line of Yeats’s “Sailing to Byzantium,” the writer imbues the momentary with the eternal, an extreme metaphysics of presence. “Die Gegenwart ist in dieser Welt des Dichters zugleich auch Vergangenheit und Zukunft. Es ist eine Welt erhöhten Gedächtnisses und doch auch des Vergessens, es ist die Welt, die war, ist und sein wird” (490).<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, the writer seems able to compare and discern that which is detestable or “feindlich” and those very highest ideals of an age, ideals to which he has access.

And in an age of crisis that has completely disavowed God, belief (in God, the State, or both) remains the last refuge of the writer. “In dieser Haltung steht er dem Tage, steht er der ‘Haltung der Zeit’ gegenüber” (493). And it is here at the end of his speech that Brandenburg begins to employ the infamous sensationalized rhetoric of sickness that became a later staple of National Socialist propaganda. He does so, however, not in an explicit attack on those threats to the German *Volk* but rather in a defense of the need for the writer specifically at this moment in time.

Auf Poesie ist die Welt gegründet. Nur ein im Kerne gesunder Organismus kann lebenbedrohende Krisen bestehen, zur Gesundheit aber gehört der Ausgleich der niedrigeren mit den höheren menschlichen Fähigkeiten, das Gedächtnis, das Erbe, das Wort, der schöpferischen Sinn – kurz, die Welt des Dichters. Völker, die des Dichters entraten zu können glauben, gehen zugrunde. (493)

Once again Brandenburg places emphasis on the writer’s ability to compare the lower human faculties with the higher ones, implying the xenophobia that seems to underlie

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<sup>67</sup> In a speech to students at Munich University in July 1934, Paul Alverdes, a representative of inner emigration, makes a similar argument in an individualist vein, saying that students should turn to “great works of art and literature which make the transitory eternal” (Baird 260).

his argument without stating it outright. The writer therefore serves, as he says earlier in the speech, as a “Vorbild,” as a model of the heights of human capability which, when set alongside the “feindlich” and “niedrig,” would help to renew the German *Volk* and restore it to a community built ultimately on faith. More than the heart of his age, the writer is the heart of the world, echoing Hofmannsthal’s argument that the nation becomes such through a common, eternal language.

Although Brandenburg also makes this connection, Josef Magnus Wehner more explicitly describes such pure inner spirituality in terms of an “eternal Reich.” Two weeks before Hitler was named Chancellor, Wehner was selected to give an address at the Berlin Philharmonic Hall. This address, titled “Das unsterbliche Reich,” harkens back to Hofmannsthal’s speech from 1928; it offers a glimpse into how the National Socialists wanted to represent their understanding of cultural and political revolution. In the speech, as Jay Baird has evidenced, Wehner claims that

Germans were to turn to the Reich within, their link to the heavenly realm where Christ and the emperors ruled over the cosmos, surrounded by great ancestors who have gone home before them. Only then would they find the totality that their lives lacked, a wholeness guaranteeing them a life of real meaning.” Above all, Baird emphasizes, “he was convinced that for the Volk to become the nation, Germans had to be changed from within. (Baird 84)

Although this position echoes Hofmannsthal’s discussion of inner transformation, Wehner’s conception of the nation was not grounded on the eternal German language but rather on the eternal German *Volk*. And unlike Kommerell’s purely spiritual conception of the *Volk*, Wehner ties it intrinsically to nationality. Similarly, Wehner does not conflate such nationality with race, though he does seem to be anticipating this

understanding more directly than Kommerell or Hofmannsthal. As Baird says, “‘The Eternal Reich’ was in essence an exercise in secular religion... In this address, echoes of the deep spirituality of his pious Catholic boyhood in the Rhön – bordering on superstition and animism – could be heard, as well as the nationalism of the front soldier. He submitted that the state must become the outward manifestation of the pure inner Reich” (79).

In a brief essay from October 1933, ten months later, Wehner draws a similar connection between the writer and the eternal spirit. “Die Frage nach dem Dichter also ist die Frage nach der Ewigkeit... Die Dichter sind dem Volke Bürger seiner Ewigkeit... Durch den Dichter hat ein Volk Teil am Geiste” (Wehner 609-610). He also pointedly clarifies the difference between the short-lived State and the eternal *Reich*, asking, “Wer gründet das unsterbliche Reich über dem vergänglichen, wenn auch notwendigen Staate.” (609)? Poets do this, Wehner claims, by reflecting and giving voice to the spiritual unity and feeling of the *Volk*, the *Volksgefühl*. He emphasizes that poetic language is the “geistige Heimat” of the *Volk*, that poets are “Brunnen, in denen die Sprache immer neu und lebendig aufquillt,” and are therefore “der Ausdruck eines tiefen Gemeinschaftsgefühles.” That is, the poet, master craftsman of language, serves to reveal to the *Volk* what it already is. “In den Dichtern hört das Volk sich selbst in seiner Tiefe und Schönheit reden, in ihrem Spiegel schaut es sein Doppelantlitz, das ewige, unveränderliche, immer wiederkehrende, seine geprägte Form unter den Völkern, seinen Charakter – und das werdende Gesicht des Tages, der Geschichte, der Krise, der Verwandlung” (609). Like Hofmannsthal, Wehner considers poetic language not only the catalyst for political and cultural transformation, which he saw as inextricably linked, but also as the substance of that transformation. Insofar as the German people

have always reflected and been reflected in their language, have always determined and been determined by it, so is the writer able to awaken in and reveal to them the immortality of which they are heir.

One example of this comes from the poetry of Josef Weinheber, which was some of the most reproduced in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>68</sup> Like many other poets of the period, Weinheber proclaimed a deep indebtedness to Hölderlin, whose style and meter he strove closely to emulate; his understanding, however, like Nazi appropriation of the Nietzschean “Übermensch,” was an oversimplification. “Was Weinheber an Hölderlin glaubte erkannt zu haben, konzentriert er zu einer generellen Ansicht vom Dichter: ‘Aus dem Wort, dem Dienst an der Sprache, ergibt sich dem Dichter der *Sinn* seiner Sendung, über die Zeit hinaus.’ Daran bindet sich für Weinheber der Mythos des Dichters als des sehenden Sängers” (Ketelsen 307). Hölderlin, the “poet of poets,” exceeds his historical and literary context to become the transcendent or archetypal “seeing singer.” This mythical figure then serves as a model for all poets, and his poetry, by which Weinheber means primarily poetic form, serves as the highest standard. Like the quotation of Hölderlin that opens Wehner’s essay on the relationship between the writer and the people, Weinheber argues that making poetry, or language, itself the subject of poetry provides an anchor for what is fleeting. “Was bleibt aber stiften die Dichter,” says Hölderlin; “Die aber die Sprache stiften, damit das Flüchtige bleibe... das sind die Dichter,” says Weinheber (in Ketelsen 307). And for Weinheber, as for many other conservative poets from the period, such constancy in the face of turbulent change can be located in or “given face” through poetic order and form. As Weinheber writes, this

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<sup>68</sup> For example, Weinheber was paid 250 RM in 1940 to do readings at the “Kulturwoche” organized by the Reichsschrifttumskammer under the auspices of Goebbels and the RMVP



poetic form is so transcendent that it can only be given by God as the face, or appearance, of a dream.

Du gabst im Schlafe, Gott, mir das Gedicht.

Ich werde es im Wachen nie begreifen.

Nachbildend Zug um Zug das Traumgesicht,

Nur sehnen kann ich mich und Worte häufen.

The poet and his poetry, therefore, play an important social function in such a period of unrest, and once again – in this case through the mythologizing of Hölderlin – the role of the writer is represented as a particular kind of leader in a particular relationship to the people. The writer and his work do not directly lead as a politician would do but rather assist the people in discovering something fundamental about themselves and motivating them to realize the eternal form that can unite them. Against a backdrop of anxiety, the myth writers help to establish leads the people both to this form and to their role in a newly ordered German society. “Gegen die Ängste vor den Erschütterungen seiner Zeit formulierte Weinheber noch einmal den Mythos vom sinnsetzenden, sehenden Sänger, der – wenn er das Schicksal schon nicht bannen kann – das Ausharren unter seiner Gewalt doch ermöglicht” (311). Ketelsen calls this social and political function a “Zusammenhang von Leseerwartung und Poetizität.”

There was of course an active effort by those writers appointed to political, government positions to establish the relationship between the writer, literature, the *Volk*, and the state. This relationship was institutionalized in the form of the Reichsschrifttumskammer (RSK), a department of the Reichskulturkammer (RKK), which was opened in November of 1933 with ceremonial fanfare in the *Philharmonie* attended by Hitler, Goebbels, Göring, and a long list of subordinate party dignitaries. It

was quite the affair. "Wände, Podium und Galerien verkleidet und geschmückt mit den Emblemen des Nationalsozialismus sowie mit Kranzgewinden, Herbstblumen und Immergrün. Gedämpfte Farben, gedämpftes Licht. Im Raume eine Stimmung von zeremoniöser Gespanntheit." The speech that Goebbels delivered, as well as the events planned for the evening, sought to both acknowledge "the revolutionary ethos [Gesinnung] of National Socialism" and to robustly celebrate masterworks of German culture.

Furtwängler dirigierte die Egmont-Ouvertüre Beethovens, den Freiheitsgesang eines unterdrückten Volkes, der Goethes Drama auf seine Weise gleichsam umdichtet. Dann sprach Friedrich Kanzler Schillers, des Klassizisten, strenggefügte Prosa "Über das Erhabene", deren subtile Begriffsdramatik freilich in dem großen Raume nicht voll zur Geltung kam. Den stärksten Erfolg hatte wohl Heinrich Schlusnus mit dem Schubert-Lied "An die Musik" und dem "Heimweh" von Hugo Wolf sowie der als Zugabe gespendeten "Zueignung" von Richard Strauß. Strauß selbst leitete mit seinem "Festlichen Präludium," das gleichfalls fast klassisch anmutet, prunkvoll zu der Goebbels-Rede über. Den festlichen Ausklang der Feier bildete der vom Bruno Kittelschen Chor gesungene "Wacht-auf"-Chor aus den "Meistersingern."

The RSK was not the only organization that the Nazis employed to control the arts, however. In May of the same year as the celebration at the *Philharmonie*, the four-hundred-year-old Preußische Akademie der Künste was purged of forty artists, who were replaced with artists approved of by the party.

In a December 1933 letter to Hans Johst, a prominent writer and member of the new Prussian Academy of the Arts, Hans Friedrich Blunck, the president of the RSK,

expressed the nationalist motivation behind the purging. "Wir Dichter kennen nur Deutschland. Mögen wir auch aus unserer Landschaft gewachsen sein und weiter in ihr wurzeln wollen, wir kennen als unseren magischen Kreis nur das deutsche Volkstum und seine führende Staatliche [sic] Form, das Reich... Aus der Preussischen Akademie haben wir die der Deutschen Volkschaft gebildet." These institutional changes, such as the development of the RSK and the purging at the Preußische Akademie der Künste, were justified in terms of the writer's relationship with and responsibility to the *Volk* and the Fatherland. The institutional reforms, he seems to argue, mirror the spiritual reforms of the German people, leading towards their unity and the undertaking of a new social order. "Die Reichsreform, die unser aller sehnlichster Wunsch ist, läßt auf sich warten. Wir wissen, dass wir Geduld haben müssen, und dass eine Umwandlung der ja seit Jahrhunderten bestehenden Unordnung zur endlichen Einheit unseres Volkstums Zeit der Erwägung und der Unterbauung der neuen Formen verlangt."

Realizing these nationalist convictions was going to take not only patience but also sacrifice, as Blunck articulates in a speech from March 21, 1935. One radical conclusion of this speech was not just that the writer needed to give himself fully to the cause of the German people and their new order, but that this would involve painfully losing that poetic subject dear to so many writers: themselves.

Bewusst, nennen Sie es selbstbewusst, hat sich das Schrifttum der Gegenwart, hat sich das kämpfende Schrifttum, wie es sich um die Wartburg sammelte, wie es in den Kräften einer neuen Jugend aufwächst, verbündet und will mitten im Volksleben stehen. Es hat die Pflicht zu dieser Neuordnung erkannt, sie ist aber auch sein Recht. Der Dichter weiss schmerzlich, dass er damit an persönlichem Behagen, an Lebensfreude des kleinen Daseins und an betrachtlichen Stunden

lyrischer Deutung der Welt verliert. Er weiss aber auch, dass sein Volk ihn braucht, er steht und ist bereit, sein Geschick anders als in der Zeit eines übersteigerten Einzelwillens zu seinem eignen zu machen und die Volksgemeinschaft aller, auch der Schaffenden, zu bejahen, gläubig zu läutern und zu erfüllen. (15)

The duty and right to contribute to the establishing of a “Neuordnung” entails losing a purely lyrical appreciation of the minutiae of the world and a personal sense of well-being and satisfaction. Rather, the writer must direct his work towards publicly uniting the German *Volk*.

As Uwe-K. Ketelsen argues, there is a strong tendency towards sentimentalism and nostalgia in much party-approved literature of this period, the representation of contentment with the banalities of life, particularly in the turbulent years before the 1932 elections.

‘Kultur’ wurde als ein Praxisfeld eingeschätzt, das jenseits der unruhigen und unerfreulichen Sphären des Alltagsleben liegt... Wer [Texte wie *Auf den Marmorklippen* oder *Wem die Stunde schlägt*] las, dem ordnete sich eine bedrohlich erfahrene Erlebniswelt zu Deutungsmustern; er erhielt Worte, Sätze, Bilder, Gedanken, die das Chaos der außer aller persönlichen Reichweite sich abspielenden historischen Ereignisse zu muster einer akzeptablen Lebensdeutung ordneten und das eigene Leben integrierend anschlossen an Bereiche, die der historisch-gesellschaftlichen Realität übergeordnet sein sollten. (71)

Building cultural norms and saving one from cultural crisis, he argues, led to the active canon-building that was facilitated through increasing censorship measures, book

burnings, the purging of the Preußische Akademie der Künste and subsequent founding of the RKK, and the propaganda that accompanied each of these acts, rhetoric that elevated literature that either celebrated German culture (experienced or not) or provided escape from the turmoil of the age.

As the Austrian poet Josef Weinheber wrote, "Was noch lebt, ist Traum." In a society under increasing government control and oppression, Germans had few choices. Those who decided to stay in Germany, support the party, and believe in the party - unlike those who sought an "inner emigration" - by definition needed to believe in the fantasy version, the dream, of Germany on which the rhetoric and ideology of National Socialism depended. And rather than transcendence, such belief reinscribed the materiality of the fascist metaphysics of presence, its necessary articulation in and on the racialized body that culminated ultimately in the Holocaust.

In 1935 Richard Euringer described German "Dichtung" as above partisanship and material politics. "Damit ist nun nicht gesagt, daß die nationalsozialistische Dichtung 'Parteidichtung' sein müsse; denn für den Nationalsozialisten ist die Partei ja nicht 'Partei', sondern Sauerteig des Lebens. Sie ist das ewig wirkende Deutschland dieser Zeit und ihrer Zukunft. Sie ist nicht allein der Staat des Dritten Reiches, sondern das Volk in seiner Verkörperung, und sie ist das werdende Reich" (in Wulf 318). In 1937, he exemplifies this understanding of Dichtung in his poem "Nun sag ich ja," which also models the expression of embodied affirmation in the register of sacrifice.

Nun sag ich ja zu Trieb und Drang!  
Will wuchern, nicht mehr geizen.  
Welt, der dich ruft, ist nicht mehr bang  
Vor Reibung und vor Reizen!

Nun heiß ich erst die Segel hart.

- Herr Gott, gib guten Segen! -

Wir stoßen ab zu großer Fahrt

Sternwärts dem Sturm entgegen!

...

Und ist das Werk hier nicht getan:

Hier sang ichs doch voll Hoffen an

Mit Weinen und mit Lachen.

...

Das wird ein lustig Bauen

aus Erde, Holz und Stein!

Die keuscheste der Frauen

soll eure Mutter sein.

Der hab ich mich ergeben

mit Haus und Hof und Spind;

das wird ein lautes Leben

von Kind zu Kindeskind,

ein Sparen und Verschwenden

auf gute deutsche Art,

ein Schaffen und ein Spenden

für Zeit und Gegenwart!

The poem hopefully celebrates sacrificing oneself “mit Haus und Hof und Spind”; this sacrifice creates a “lautes Leben,” a life worthy of remembrance. Contentment with one’s individual sacrifice, which is “good” and “German,” derives from the knowledge that a loss of the self, both literal and figurative, enables the life of the Volk, which is predicated on “ein Sparen und Verschwenden,” “ein Schaffen und ein Spenden.” These euphemisms serve to mask the process underlying the meaning of an eternal Volk, which equates the process of saving and disappearing, creating and donating. Both of these are necessary for the survival of the Volk. As David Pan argues, the life of the Volk is only made possible through the cultivation of the individual, despite Nazism’s seeming anti-democratic anti-individualism. Pan writes, “that the Nazi vision was in fact an individualist one in which the free development of individuals, without the interference of the state, should lead naturally to the growth of the nation as the collective embodiment of individual development” (11). The sacrificing subject depicted by the poem can thus be thought of as opposed to “Jews and Communists that have been defined as unsuitable for sacrifice within the German national project [and] are violently eliminated” (12). Therefore the making public of individual sacrifice, the “yes-saying,” becomes a means of concealing the violence that Nazis sought to enact in secret and in cultivating a “thoughtless,” in the sense of Arendt, subjectivity.

In his essay on the George-Hofmannsthal correspondence, Adorno focuses on Hofmannsthal’s own sense of sacrifice.

In the name of beauty [the poet] consecrates himself to the preponderant thing-world as a sacrifice... The estrangement of art from life urged by George and Hofmannsthal, intended to elevate art, changes into unlimited, adaptable proximity to life. In truth, it is not the aim of symbolism to subordinate all

material moments as symbols of an inner sphere. It is just this possibility that is subjected to doubt, whereas it is the absurd, the estranged thing-world itself, in its impenetrability for the subject, which endows the latter with its dignity and meaning on the condition that the subject dissolve itself in the world of things. Subjectivity no longer regards itself as the animating centre of the cosmos. It abandons itself to the miracle that would happen if the mere material, divested of meaning, were on its own to animate waning subjectivity. Instead of things yielding as symbols of subjectivity, subjectivity yields as the symbol of things, prepares itself to rigidify ultimately into the thing which society has in any case made of it. (223)

What Adorno identifies here is what I have isolated as the continuity from conservative to fascist poetics, the latter as represented by Hans Friedrich Blunck's assertion,

Der Dichter weiss schmerzlich, dass er damit an persönlichem Behagen, an Lebensfreude des kleinen Daseins und an betrachtlichen Stunden lyrischer Deutung der Welt verliert. Er weiss aber auch, dass sein Volk ihn braucht, er steht und ist bereit, sein Geschick anders als in der Zeit eines übersteigerten Einzelwillens zu seinem eignen zu machen und die Volksgemeinschaft aller, auch der Schaffenden, zu bejahen, gläubig zu läutern und zu erfüllen.

The difference between sacrificing lyrical subjectivity for the world of things and for the world of the *Volk*, however, marks the fundamental discontinuity between conservative and fascist poetics. The difference lies in the process of sacrifice itself. George and Hofmannsthal, as Adorno observes, do not merely "refuse to accept the status quo, in contrast to the naturalists who are always tempted to affirm the horrors seen by their acute artistic eye, as simply existing – now and always.



George and Hofmannsthal curried favour equally with the established order. But it remained an order which was estranged from them. Organized estrangement reveals as much of life as can be revealed without theory, since the essence itself is estrangement. The others represent capitalist society, but allow human beings to speak fictitiously as though they could still talk to each other. Aesthetic fictions speak the true monologue, which communicative speech merely conceals. (224)

The fascist poem, however, operates communicatively; like Adorno's reading of naturalism, it does not operate within the order from which it is estranged. Rather, it strives to annihilate that from which it is estranged. It sacrifices lyrical subjectivity in the service of rejecting estrangement, whereas the conservative poem sacrifices polemical, "engaged" dissent for an aestheticized dissent that reveals the inadequacies of that which it challenges. In the conclusion, I will consider a poem by Friedrich George Jünger that I think operates in a more ideally Adornian sense by actually ventriloquizing and operating within the ideological logic that it subverts.

In any case, by sacrificing transcendent lyrical subjectivity for material racializing ideology, Euringer's poem thus performs the means by which Nazi ideology strove to annihilate representation and embody pure presence. Another example of this in lyric poetry comes from Hermann Claudius, a writer typically associated with inner emigration. In 1933, eighty-eight writers published a pledge of support for Adolf Hitler in the Berlin-based newspaper *Vossische Zeitung*, which was replaced one year later with the NSDAP party organ the *Völkischer Beobachter*. One of the names attached to the "Gelöbnis treuester Gefolgschaft" was that of the 54-year-old poet Hermann Claudius, whose embrace of National Socialism exemplifies the movement's widespread appeal.

Claudius, who was honored by Willy Brandt in 1973 and died a month short of his 102<sup>nd</sup> birthday in 1980, served in World War I and had been involved with youth movements and labor unions affiliated with the social democrats before gradually becoming both more religious and more conservative. During the 1930s and 40s, he published more than ten books with the Nazi publisher Verlag Albert Langen-Georg Müller, was invited to participate in several of the so-called “Dichtertagen,” or “Dichtertreffen” organized by the party, and won two national literary prizes. In a letter from 26 June 1946, Hans-Friedrich Blunck, the second chairman of the Deutsche Akademie der Dichtung of the Preußische Akademie der Künste and the first president of the RSK cited earlier, wrote to Paul Alverdes, the former editor of the then recently-dismantled literary journal *Das innere Reich*, “Hätte ich einen Preis für deutsche Lyrik zu verteilen gehabt, hätte ich ihn Weinheber und Hermann Claudius zuge[geben].”

Claudius therefore represents the opportunistic conservative writer who benefited from the rise of National Socialism by not actively resisting it. Of Claudius and his poetry, Ernst Loewy writes, “Der naiv-apolitische Gehalt und die intellektuelle Anspruchslosigkeit seiner Werke gewannen den Nazis eine anerkennende Haltung ab, die er seinerseits durch ein vielzitiertes ‘Führergedicht’ belohnt; das brachte ihn zu Unrecht in den Ruf eines ausgesprochenen Nazi-Dichters.” Loewy also explains, “Während der Zeit des Dritten Reiches war Claudius Mitglied der Deutschen Akademie der Dichtung.”<sup>69</sup>

Claudius published often in *Die neue Literatur*, and the poems in question, which concern the role of the writer and the lyric in mediating between the internal and the communal, the German citizen and the German State, are from the February, 1935 issue.

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<sup>69</sup> “The naïve-apolitical content and the intellectual modesty of his work won the Nazis’ acceptance, which he praised through a much-cited “Führer poem.” This has caused him unjustly to be characterized as an outspoken Nazi poet.”

They raise a number of questions about the nature of complicity by staging the attempt to assimilate conservative (embodied by “Der Dichter”) and Nazi fascist (embodied by “An Hans Grimm”) conceptions of the writer as leader and the clash of conservative ideals with – but also the concession of those ideals to – Nazi idealism. This is because as the poems strive to uphold the precarious tension or distinction between the lyrical and the racial-ideological, the poetic subject in each instance completely lacks a sense of political (or lyrical) agency, failing to maintain this tension and helplessly witnessing its (fascist) collapse.

An Hanns Grimm

Dein Schwert ist breit und blank und sah die Welt,  
Kreuzfahrer du des deutschen Wandermutes,  
du später Enkel eines edeln Blutes,  
der seinen Schild in müden Händen hält.

Nach innen sucht dein Aug den steilen Pfad,  
da dir dein Herrgott einsamlich begegnet  
und deine Mannesseele dir gesegnet,  
mit strengen Händen dir gesegnet hat.

Du Gläubiger am Wort, ich grüße dich.  
Du schaust mich lange an und lächelst bitter.  
Du letzter, lieber, treuer, deutscher Ritter,  
du Don Quichotte deines eigenen Ich.

Der Dichter

Ich habe so oft  
nach Licht und Raum begehrt –  
nun bin ich fast erschrocken,  
daß man mich ehrt.

Daß man vor allem Volke  
mich erhöht.

Ich falte meine Hände  
wie zum Gebet.

Daß meine Seele vor Gott  
einsam sei,  
daß sie nicht willig werde  
dem Taggeschrei.

Es kommt der Abend, es gehen  
Baum und Vogel zur Ruh.  
Der Tag hat ausgesungen.  
Seele, bleibe du!

The poems invite being read together. On the one hand, they physically appear on facing pages and both thematize praise for the writer. More importantly, though, where the first poem leaves off – the word “Ich,” lyrical subjectivity – the second poem

begins. Likewise, where the second poem ends – the word “du” – the first begins (“dein”). Both poems are framed by and related through their positing, and thematizing, of this fundamental dialectic. The fascist and conservative perspectives embodied by each poem exist in relation to each other, but so too is each perspective immanent to each poem: the conservative speaker addressing the fascist writer, and the fascist people addressing the conservative writer.

Over both poems, multiple conservative representations converge on the singular fascist attempt to annihilate such representation. For example, in “An Hans Grimm, the poet is the witness to and benefactor of Grimm’s linguistic weaponry, which recalls the argument of Max Kommerell. In this case, however, the weapons are inflected both nationalistically, “Kreuzfahrer du des deutschen Wandermutes,” and bio-racially, “du später Enkel eines edeln Blutes,” evoking the argument of someone like Blunck. The poet also praises Grimm for being introspective, “Nach innen sucht dein Aug den steilen Pfad,” which recalls Hofmannsthal’s “in eines gedichtet werden.” This treacherous path, however, leads to the discovery of a “strong, masculine soul” blessed by God with the courage to protect the German *Volk*, once again resolving in the anti-lyrical and anti-representational materiality of “race.” The final stanza stages the confrontation between the poetic subject and Grimm, “Gläubiger am Wort.” His belief in the power of language, however, renders him a “Don Quichotte des eignen Ich.” By this reference, Claudius does not seem to mean that Grimm is “quixotic,” or irrationally idealistic (though this double sense is not lost), but rather the practitioner of an antiquated chivalry, modestly willing to sacrifice himself, and his poetic and lyrical subjectivity, in order to “save” the German soul.

“An Hanns Grimm” is an address from a poet to a poet, but in the final line these distinct subjectivities begin to dissolve, rhetorically, through the use of the genitive: “deines eigenen Ich.” Whereas each line of the poem begins with the repetition of the word “you,” the final stanza ends with the word “I,” which is repeated as the very first word of the following poem, interrupted only by the reflexive title, “Der Dichter.” In this poem, the lyric voice responds to his exaltation by folding his hands in prayer. Like the trees and birds that have gone to sleep, his soul does not aspire to the daytime clamor but rather acts through relative inaction. In addressing his soul in the final line, he ascribes to it the same sense of permanence that is associated with his writing. The final word “du” directs us to this content by referring back to the previous poem, which is saturated by the word “du.” It also draws a relationship between the collective “du” of the German *Volk* and spirit and the individual self who, folding his hands in prayer, gives himself, and his lyrical subjectivity, over to such permanence. This “resolution,” or “dissolution,” destroys the tension that conservatives such as Hofmannsthal and Kommerell believed underlay the dialectics of self and other, individual and *Volk*, poesis and praxis, the inner-spiritual and the outward-ideological.

And whereas conservatives such as Hofmannsthal and Kommerell valued the lyrical potential of this tension, Nazi fascists like Blunck sacrificed such potential by collapsing the dialectic in the name of racial ideology. This collapse is what occurs in these two poems. The abstract *Dichter* becomes the embodied, real Nazi Hans Grimm, a collapse does not happen consciously or willingly. Continuous between the poems, then, is a self-conscious sense of helplessness to stop this dissolution. Exemplary perhaps of the perspective of “inner emigration,” the poems demonstrate the difficulty of simultaneously preserving lyrical integrity and autonomy – “Ich” – and reproducing

fascist ideology – “du” – as the poetic subject alternates between a helplessly reluctant agent of political transformation, in the conservative poem “Der Dichter,” and a gracious yet helpless witness (he can say nothing else, cannot resist) to that transformation, in the Nazi fascist poem “An Hanns Grimm.” This helplessness, then, present in both poems, speaks simultaneously to the historical conservative subject’s arguably self-conscious passivity, opportunism, and complicity.

With regard to conservative political aesthetics in the late Weimar and early National Socialist periods, there is thus a continuity onto which the work of Hofmannsthal and Kommerell can indeed be mapped, but this continuity is marked by differences fundamental to the question of the extent to which conservatives (or conservative writers) were complicit in the rise of National Socialism (or Nazi conceptions of the poet). On the one hand, the texts all privilege the writer’s access to some eternal spirit that is greater than the individual. They discuss the internal process necessary for a national transformation and the need to draw on literary tradition. Each text conceives of the writer heroically, as one who fights for or defends the German spirit. Härlen, Wehner, and Brandenburg, however, express the urgency for this defense in more actively political terms, whereas Hofmannsthal and Kommerell seek to invigorate German letters by returning to German classicism, which will revive a general relation to literature as was experienced during that period and thereby remake German society. Härlen and the others, however, are explicit about the political and spiritual stakes of heeding the classical writer, stakes that under Blunck involve preserving the “purity” of the German race. While Hofmannsthal and Kommerell nowhere imply this connection, a point that should not be overstated, they also do not explicitly deny it, a point that should be critically considered.

While both of these men concede that the recognition of a German will may serve to restructure German society, they remain indifferent to the specifics of this reorganization, no less than the historical process of the reorganization itself. The positions of Wehner and Brandenburg represent a possible transition between the permissiveness implicit in this position and the active political role of the writer espoused by officials such as Blunck and Goebbels. For Wehner and Brandenburg, the writer must deploy his ability to inspire individual transformation for the justification, protection, and proliferation of the *Volk*. And this revelation was one that—if their biographies are any indication—both men, as well as Kommerell, saw reflected in the social transformation brought on by Hitler and the NSDAP. The difference, albeit slight, is that for Kommerell and Hofmannsthal, the resurgence of classicism as a literary form is primary and the social transformation secondary, whereas for Brandenburg and Wehner, who seek to instrumentalize this resurgence, the reverse is true. In other words: the conservative position articulated here states that the *Volk*, which emerges from poetic German language, is ephemeral and finite, whereas the Nazi fascist position articulated by Blunck and anticipated by Wehner and Brandenburg states that poetic German language emerges from and in service to the spiritually-infinite *Volk*.

It therefore seems an incomplete accusation to claim that the two texts by Hofmannsthal and Kommerell, not to mention George's poetry, provided the politically-engaged intellectual groundwork that morphed into active National Socialist extremism. Rather, they would more aptly be classified as emblematic of a brand of national conservatism, prominent also among many Christian intellectuals of the period, that, relatively indifferent to activist partisan politics, encouraged the return to literary classicism as a means of externally transforming the German *Geist* via the



metamorphosis that occurs, internal to the individual, in the experience of reading. While the Nazis certainly appropriated this discourse, and while many prominent national conservative writers did join the Nazi party, the texts themselves do not invite such appropriation or make such allegiances. That is, while critical attention has been given to the political dimensions of each text, less has been said about how the arguments' fundamentally aesthetic concerns – arguably a withdrawal from political activism – constitute a political non-orientation, permissiveness, or vague and aimless desire for revolution that would reinvigorate the *Volk*. In light of studies associating Stefan George and his disciples with National Socialism, it therefore seems necessary to consider how this political passivity may both characterize the conservative position and arguably have contributed more to the rise of National Socialism than the active espousal of “pseudo-fascist” ideology.

While Hofmannsthal and Kommerell may not have had genocide or any of its necessary precursors in their minds when they spoke of a conservative revolution and “deeply-buried weapons” – while they seem most likely to have had in mind nothing other than the immensely transformative power of language – their arguments nonetheless reflect a widespread reactionary impulse among conservative aesthetes and intellectuals. Whereas they largely turned away from politics as the realm in which a social revolution must be imagined and pursued, in this retreat from politics they, like practitioners of “inner emigration,” simultaneously forewent the political resistance necessary to prevent Hitler's rise to power and offered another avenue for his regime to justify the urgency of its existence. That Kommerell, as well as Wehner and Brandenburg, then went on to join the Nazi party provides further evidence that the appeal of the movement was widespread, and that it, like the poet, reflected the desire

for community and immortality common among conservatives, National Socialists, and those who embodied the gray area in between.

In his collection of essays *At the Mind's Limits*, the Holocaust survivor Jean Améry made the following statement on complicity and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* with which I would like to conclude: "Es geht nicht an, nationale Tradition dort für sich zu reklamieren, wo sie eine ehrenhafte war, und sie zu verleugnen, wo sie als die verkörperte Ehrvergessenheit einen wahrscheinlich imaginären und gewiß wehrlosen Gegner aus der Menschengemeinschaft ausstieß. Wenn deutsch sein heißt, der Nachkomme des Matthias Claudius sein, dann meint es doch wohl auch, daß man den NS-Parteilryiker Hermann Claudius in der Ahnenreihe hat."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Jean Améry, "Ressentiments," in *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne: Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1977), 136.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION: THE RESISTANCE OF SIMULATION: FRAGMENTATION AND TOTALITY IN FRIEDRICH GEORG JUENGER'S "DER MOHN"

[Ernst] Jüngers Plan geht auf die Planeten, nicht auf eine Nation. Die totale Mobilmachung, sinnvoll für einen konkreten politischen Zweck, etwa für den deutschen Freiheitskampf, erscheint gerade als totaler planetarischer Vorgang sinnlos.  
-Hans Bogner, "Der neue Übermensch," 1932

My dissertation compares the poetry and poetics of T. S. Eliot and Stefan George, situating these poets in the context of the Conservative Revolution and "low" fascist cultural productions. One way of conceiving of this comparison is in terms of how conservative and fascist writers poeticize fragmentation and totality. In this sense, I might also refer to engaged and autonomous art, as I am using the term "fragmentation" to imply the disruption of poetry by political engagement and the term "totality" to imply the assimilation of political engagement to the poetic sphere. Whereas each conservative poet examined in my project may tend more towards fragmentation or totality, towards engaged or autonomous art, I insist that in their poetry, national politics finds poetic expression in terms of an unstable and unfixed distinction between these terms. The conservative indeterminacy that I identify in even the most unexpected of poets, Percy Shelley, thus reveals a hybrid art that strives both for autonomy and engagement.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> For a more thorough discussion of fascism and the totalizing aesthetics of Eliot, Pound, Yeats, and Lewis, see Stanfield, "Modernist Poetics and Fascism: The Caliph's Design." Scott argues against the post-modern tendency to forget the significance of modernist aspirations for totalization, to which he refers, following Deleuze and Guattari, as "molarity." He writes, "A totalizing aesthetic made these writers susceptible to the appeals of fascism; we can read their texts without at all invoking that aesthetic, if we choose; the modernists themselves apparently became disenchanted with it. A case for history's dustbin, apparently: We may eventually want to ask, however, whether we want to dispense entirely and forever with the idea of aesthetic totality" (168). The argument presented here explores the possibility that political resistance can

On the one hand, the byproduct of this hybridity is a kind of disinterest in material political concerns similar to that fostered by entertainment literature, thus an unintended and indirectly facilitated source of fascism's success. On the other hand, this conservative aesthetic tendency is discontinuous with fascist poetics precisely because it demands an instable distinction between fragmentation and totality, because it admits and affirms both aesthetic and human failure. It is precisely such failure that fascism demands be overcome, a demand that manifests in poetry through the collapse of the dialectical tension between fragmentation and totality. For the fascist poem, such a distinction threatens its very existence. This is why in expressing the difference between national and planetary mobilization, Hans Bogner, a conservative revolutionary who joined the NSDAP in 1937, insists that total mobilization is meaningless in terms of the planetary (aesthetic) totality of Ernst Jünger. Because such totality admits the possibility of the distinction between autonomy and engagement, Bogner assimilates it to the national (political) fragment, thereby rejecting this distinction and making such a fragment the only possible site of meaning.

The poetry of Stefan George and T. S. Eliot, however, upholds the dialectical tension between meaning and its other, between autonomy and engagement or between aesthetics and politics, which the fascist poem collapses. Eliot's poetry from the 1920s and 1930s codes his denunciation of liberalism, his attraction to and later disillusionment with fascism, and ultimately his withdrawal from material politics altogether. Unlike Nazi fascists, who encourage and instrumentalize this withdrawal, Eliot's poetry demonstrates the humility necessary for its avowal. It depicts the relationship between the fragmented political subject bounded by temporality and the

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reside in the parodying of aesthetic totalization, a parody that reveals the impossibility and failure of such totalization.

impossible totality of (Christian) eternity speciously offered by fascism. Those metaphors that posit the adequacy of this relationship ultimately give way to the failure of metaphor, in the form of paradox, and the affirmation of post-lapsarian human, by which Eliot means political and poetic, failure. Eliot's poetic indeterminacy functions much like the Nietzschean imperative to challenge values that have been ossified in and by language, resulting in the poetic affirmation of human (poetic and political) failure and, more than that, the ethical affirmation of such failure.

In one sense, then, Eliot's political aesthetic does not simply reproduce or anticipate literary tropes popular among fascist writers. One prominent example of this is the presentation of one's ancestry, ubiquitous in *Four Quartets*, to allegorize eternity. Unlike the myth of "blood and soil" that formed the ideological basis for Nazi Germany's race laws, Eliot's language insinuates the impossibility of accessing the eternal and the inevitable failure of this for mortal man. For Eliot, art offers us a way of conceiving and affirming this impossibility, whereas for Nazi fascists, art is a means of affirming its possibility in the form of something like racial wholeness. A more provocative comparison, however, would consider the representation of ancestry from the early 1930s in the conservative and eventually fascist German literary journal *Die Neue Literatur*, which frequently began with idyllic, nostalgic autobiographies. Written by writers and poets, these vignettes sought to demonstrate how the romantic movement of aesthetic experience doubled that of overcoming the self, experiencing oneself as the totality of one's lineage, itself always rooted in the myth of the Aryan race. This idea of totality, however, is conspicuously void of political commentary; it is the fascist depoliticizing of politics *avant la lettre*. While Eliot's metaphors challenge

fascism's stabilizing of the totality/fragmentation dialectic, they nonetheless avoid the subject of material politics altogether by withdrawing into poetry.

This move is particularly fraught in the German tradition, where the concept of "inner emigration" – a term that has come to signify Germans who physically remained in Nazi Germany but covertly resisted the regime – has come under serious scrutiny. My dissertation pursues two lines of inquiry in order to address the extent to which conservative poets perform and promote passivity during the rise of fascism. The first of these is focused on the poet Stefan George, whose political poetry I argue dramatizes a privileging of aesthetic experience at the expense of political activism. As the inverse of my reading of Eliot, there is a noticeable shift in George's poetry from the desire for aesthetic totality in his early poem *Algabal* to the fragmented form of "Einem jungen Führer im ersten Weltkrieg." Like Eliot, George's poetry thematically demonstrates his fascination with fascism. Whereas Eliot's use of the totalizing trope of metaphor reveals his ethical critique of the material impossibility of fascism to be what it promised, George's use of fragmenting metonymy demonstrates his understanding of fascism as a fundamentally aesthetic, and therefore ideational, phenomenon. I derive this reading from Paul de Man's notion of allegory, the indeterminacy of which I argue is immanent to the critical disagreement surrounding George's relationship to fascism. In this sense, George's poetry performs his own political ambivalence, particularly through the tropes of deferral and prophecy, promoting the primacy of aesthetic experience – those humanist concerns that Eliot calls the "pre-political" – over political engagement. As with Eliot, poetically rendering the subjection of social and political concerns during a period of such rapid social and political change amounts to a kind of passivity that Nazi fascism later sought to produce in its ambitions for total mobilization.

In this conclusion, I would like to gesture towards one possible lyrical model for rejecting rejection, so to speak, that follows from my dissertation's primary two conclusions. The first of these states that the distinction between the lyric expression of conservatism and (proto-)fascism can be understood in terms of the de Manian poetic image, namely regarding the inadequacy with which it renders the opposition between fragmentation and totality. The second, arguably more experimental, claim is that the promotion and affirmation of this inadequacy does not free the poetry of Eliot or George from accusations of aesthetic or ideological complicity, whether in the case of George's millenarianism or Eliot's anti-Semitism. In order to posit what a resistant conservative poem might look like, I would therefore like briefly to consider Friedrich Georg Jünger's poem "Der Mohn." The image of the poppy, I contend, neither affirms the inadequacy of the fragmentation/totality dialectic nor fixes its terms, performing instead a violent challenge to (proto-)fascism from within while nonetheless drawing on the formal and philosophical tenants of classicism and conservatism.

In this sense, it seems necessary to introduce the concepts of "inner emigration" and resistance more specifically. Is it uniquely possible for poetry to embed a parodic critique of nazism, one that undoes the logic of fascist tropes from within? The counterpoint to Jünger's poem "Der Mohn" is Josef Weinheber's "Das Gedicht," which in Chapter V I argue performs the intoxicating dream of totality offered by fascism by conflating the poem itself with that dream and thus disallowing rhetorical indeterminacy. Jünger's poem, however, fragments the utopian vision upheld by Weinheber such that the passive inner emigration valued by Weinheber is rendered impossible. Still working within the neo-classical conservative model of securing the permanence of poetic tradition, Jünger's poppy is a violently urgent image that captures

the dynamism of Eliot's metaphor and the indeterminacy of George's metonymy while also rejecting the passivity the possibility for which their poetry allows. Jünger's poem therefore presents a mode of political resistance unique to the domain of poetry: the ability to interrupt one's own withdrawal from political pressures in order to critique the political activity from which, and the passivity with which, one withdrew. This is the lesson of Nietzsche and the later de Man, both of whom were drawn to fascist and proto-fascist ideology, and who located in poetic language the power to inhabit fascism, and to expel it.

Furthermore, this reading of Jünger's poems seems to be less a challenge to Adorno's argument in his essay on Stefan George, in which he also likens George's poetry to Nietzsche's project, than an extension of it. On the one hand, Adorno writes, "George verblendete sich dagegen, daß, was ihm morbid und dekadent dünkte, auch in ihm das Stichhaltigste war. Einer dialektischen Spannung, die Nietzsche noch austrug, zeigte dessen lyrischer Erbe schon nicht mehr sich gewachsen" (528). In the essay, Adorno focuses on poetry that is "unallegorisch," absorbed in "sinnlichen Situation," and "speichert... gedrängt bis zum Schweigen... das Gefühl eines Weltalters auf, das den Gesang schon verbietet, der noch davon singt" (529). While he argues against a dialectical or allegorical tendency in George's poetry, Adorno insists that this poetry, as well as George's translations, resolve into a kind of Benjaminian "pure language." "Manchmal redet wirklich aus George, wie ein letztes Mal, und wie andere es nur vortäuschten, Sprache selber... Mit dem Fremdwort peinen für peine wird, wie Benjamin vom Übersetzer es forderte, die eigene Sprache durch die andere erweitert" (529-532).



Rather than indeterminacy, it is violence itself that George impels to language, or poetic signification. “Die Gewalt, die noch einmal zum Wort zwingt, ihr Sieg und das maßlose Grauen, das dieser Sieg als selbstvernichtender bereitet – das ist Georges Rätselfigur” (535). Despite claiming that George does not admit dialectical movement in his poetry, this process nonetheless seems to entail a process of creation and destruction, of violence turning against the very language it is forced into creating. “Der gewalttätige Wille reicht bis in die rein lyrisch intendierten Gebilde hinein” (525). In his essay on the correspondence between George and Hofmannsthal, Adorno characterizes this instead as a negative impulse. “Was immer [George und Hofmannsthal] der herrschenden Gesellschaft positive kontrastieren mögen, ist ihr untertan als Spiegel des Individuums, so wie Georges Engel dem Dichter gleicht, so wie der Liebende im *Stern des Bundes* am Geliebten ‘mein eigen fleisch’ errät. Was überlebt, ist die bestimmte Negation” (237). The “puzzling” nature of George’s treatment of violence, or its “determinate negation,” allows the grounds for aesthetic disambiguation between the fascist and the conservative poem.

While he presents a close and careful reading of George’s poetry, albeit not the political poetry on which my dissertation focuses, Adorno does not take his own argument this far.

Georges bündischen Liturgien paßten trotz oder wegen des Pathos der Distanz zu den Sonnenwendfeiern und Lagerfeuern jugendbewegter Horden und ihrer furchtbaren Nachfolger. Das angedrehte Wir der hier beheimateten Gedichte ist so fiktiv, und darum so verderblich wie die Art von Volk, die den Völkischen vor Augen stand. Wo George zum Preis von Führertum sich erniedrigt, ist er in Schuld verstrickt und nicht wiederzuerwecken. (524)

While I don't necessarily disagree with Adorno's unforgiving tone in instances where George does parrot the ideology of the *Volk*, I find this argument anachronistic enough to speak of multiple complicities, or a constellation of complicities, such that George did not promote the Holocaust but may have indirectly endorsed ideas that were instrumental in getting Hitler's party elected. Adorno does however approximate this argument, as well as my argument about conservative banality, in his essay on the "George und Hofmannsthal: Zum Briefwechsel: 1891-1906," concerned as it is with George's symbolist phase and insistent, as Adorno is in the "George" essay, on a discontinuity between his later political poems and early aestheticist ones.

Der Flügel der deutschen Rechten, mit dem Hofmannsthal sympathisiert, ist zum Nationalsozialismus übergegangen, soweit man es ihm erlaubt hat, oder tobt sich in jener geistigen Handweberei aus, deren Figuren Lorenz und Cordula heißen. Sie dienen der Propaganda auf eigene Weise: ihr besonnenes Maßhalten dementiert das maßlose Grauen... Die Georgesche Schule hat, bei geringerer Weltläufigkeit, mehr Widerstand aufgebracht... George selber zumindest blieb unverführt von einer mondanité, die auch über Hitler internationale Gespräche zu führen verstand. Das 'geheime Deutschland,' das George proklamierte, vertrug sich weniger gut mit dem aufgebrochenen als das legere Einverständnis, das von Anbeginn sich nicht durch die Landesgrenzen beengt fühlte, die später revidiert werden sollten. Er hatte den Blick für die fatale Toleranz, die ihm die maßgebenden Salons hätten bewilligen mögen. (205-206)<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Walter Benjamin, in a letter from 1940, critiqued this perception of Hugo von Hofmannsthal. "Demungeachtet geht es meiner Überzeugung nach nicht an, [Hans] Carossa einer 'Schule', deren Haupt Hofmannsthal gewesen sei, zurechnend, von der Gleichschaltung der deutschen Schriftsteller *im Zeichen dieser Schule*, das heißt Hofmannsthals selbst zu reddem. Hofmannsthal ist 1928 gestorben. Er hat ein non liquet in der Strafsache, die Sie gegen ihn vertreten, wenn es ihm

Following from Adorno's sense of George's "negative" poetics, I contend that his political poetry also disrupts the passive, fixed, and unallegorical nature of fascist poetry. In any case, Adorno's argument that George's poetry lapses into this mode in his least political poetry is consonant with my argument. His readings primarily focus on these moments, which, while guilty of the associations of which Adorno accuses them, fail to include in their analysis those poems that I argue allegorize the indeterminacy that fascism rejected, thereby negating this rejection. In Adorno's words, "Darum überschlägt sich der Georgesche Heroismus. Seine mythischen Züge sind das Gegenteil jenes Erbgutes, als welches die politische Apologetik sie beschlagnahmte. Sie sind Züge von Trotz" (215-216).

In this broader context, Adorno's argument that George's poems impel violence to language provides a useful formulation for thinking about "The Poppy." First, Adorno's claim about self-destructive language recalls Barthes's claim that language is inherently fascist insofar as it compels speech, and that literature provides the means out of this power structure by destabilizing meaning. That is, literature is able to perform an act of violence, or revolution, against the very meaning that it purports to impel. When this is done within the bounds of a particular ideological lexicon, its potential for resistance is amplified. It is for this reason that the "conservative" poem, with recourse to exerting power, is arguably more revolutionary than the "liberal" or leftist poem, with recourse most generally towards engaged, if revolutionary, polemic. It is this approach that Friedrich George Jünger's poem "The Poppy" takes in its critique of National Socialism.

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sonst nicht gesichert wäre, mit seinem Tod erkaufte. Ich würde meinen, Sie sollten diese Stelle nochmals überdenken; ich bin nahe daran, Sie darum zu bitten" (449).

In its time, Jünger's poem did not escape Nazi authorities. In fact, following its publication in 1934, the Gestapo searched Jünger's Berlin apartment, pressured him to move back to Überlingen on the Bodensee and issued him a "Schreibverbot." The poem addresses several subjects of intertextual relevance, including the authoritarian Roman general Coriolan, the main subject of Eliot's only meditation on fascism. In addition and related to Coriolan, "Der Mohn" thematizes "Ruhm," or glory, with which the fascists were obsessed. Its opening lines read,

Scharlachfarbender Mohn, ich sehe dich gern auf den Gräbern,

Wo du den schlafenden Ruhm alternder Gräfte bewachst.

In loose dactylic hexameter that occasionally substitutes a spondee for the more traditional dactyl, these lines present a poppy that rests atop the graves of fallen heroes, its bright scarlet color symbolizing, or "awakening," those heroes' past, or "sleeping," glory. The poem immediately evokes both the conservative penchant for neoclassical, in this case elegiac, form alongside the fascist themes of sacrifice, ancestry, and hero worship. While the poppy seems to capture the fascist proliferation of these symbols, however, the following stanza begins turning critical not only of such particular symbolism, but also of the symbol more broadly. Here, the poem associates the milk of the poppy with the easement of pain, "Mohnsaft, du stillst uns den Schmerz," which over the course of the poem becomes intoxication, ignorance, and delusion, "das kindische Lied rumhloser Trunkenheit."

This line also alludes to F. G. Jünger's brother Ernst's essay "Über den Schmerz," which was published in the same year. In this essay, Ernst Jünger makes a similar association, albeit with a more celebratory, if equally catastrophic, tone. In describing what he considers to be a "new kind of security," the illiberal and antibourgeois

integration of pain into human subjectivity, Jünger writes that “the human will disciplines and outfits this flesh with such painstaking care that it now seems more indifferent to injury. Today, we again are able to bear the sight of death with greater indifference, since we no longer feel at home in our body as we did before.” In drawing a parallel between this irrational willingness to sacrifice the body and the rise of technology, Jünger continues by writing that, “it no longer accords with our style to stop a flying show or a car race simply because of a deadly accident. Such accidents lie not outside but inside the zone of a new kind of security” (43). Ernst Jünger diagnoses a particularly modern and illiberal self-objectification, a detached “second consciousness” of the self that integrates pain and sacrifice and rejects the liberal, bourgeois values of security and comfort. While Ernst Jünger is enchanted by this emerging stage of human history (at least at this point in his life, as he criticized this position following the Holocaust), his brother Friedrich Georg is explicitly critical of indifference at the sight of death, an indifference he sees ultimately yielding to either applause or permissiveness, both of which would be facilitated through propaganda from the top as well as the lateral dissemination of that propaganda among an uninformed and unquestioning populace.

In recognizing that the progression of history is marked by war and violence, the unending search for “die gewaltigsten Kränze,” the speaker of the poem criticizes the political ends for which the concept of glory is marshaled. While the poem opens by evoking “schlafenden Ruhm,” it ends with “ruhmloser Trunkenheit.” Meanwhile, the scarlet of the poppy gradually fades throughout the poem into the deep red of the Nazi flag.

Feste seh ich und Feiern, ich höre Märsche, Gesänge,

Bunt ist von Fahnen die Stadt, immengleich summet der Schwarm.

Following a description of the senseless violence perpetuated by those dead historical figures who would occupy the old graves of the opening lines, the poem takes an explicitly political turn. Parodying Nazi rhetoric of hero worship, the speaker is transported from the wastelands of history to the wasteland of Germany particularly through the invocation of the Volk.

Widrig ist mir der Redner Geschlecht. Kalekutische Hähne

Höre ich kollern am Markt, höre ich scharren am Platz.

Gaukler treiben mit Worten ihr Wesen, Lügner sie deuteln,

Retter, sie retten den Trug, Ärzte, sie scheuen den Tod.

Wollt ihr betrügen das Volk, so schmeichelt ihm schamlos und lobt es,

Dient ihm mit Worten zuerst, eh ihr es redend beherrscht.

Hört, es schmeicheln Tribunen dem Volk, es jubeln Betrogne

Laut den Betrügnern zu, die sie mit Netzen umgarnt.

Volk, wo sind deine Toten? Sie schweigen.

Here the image of the Indian market reveals itself as an allegory, doubling the manipulation of language that has seduced and deceived the German people into obedience. The abrupt apostrophe invoking the people, asking them where their dead are, reveals the poem's political import. This import is amplified by the allusion to the parable of the ring from Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*, specifically the moment in which the judge, in reference to which of the three brothers possesses the "true" ring, says to them, "O so seid ihr alle drei / Betrogene Betrieger!" (82). Like the poppy seduces the poetic subject, so too has the Nazi banner seduced the Volk; like poem misleads us through

language, so too has National Socialism. Those who have been deceived into parroting its ideology deceive themselves and others in turn into believing the truth of that ideology. This is not dissimilar from what Ernst Jünger, in his essay on pain, calls the “manufacture of consent” that “signifies nothing other than the transformation of the masses from a moral agent into an object” (30).

The silence of the dead, their absence of language, resonates all the more powerfully in the context this stanza establishes of speaking and serving with words. In a line reminiscent of the *Mann* from George’s poem “Das Neue Reich” who “sprengt die ketten fegt auf trümmerstätten / die ordnung,” Jünger’s poem asks the people,

Habt ihr feindliche Heere geschlagen, die Fürsten gefangen,  
Risset ihr Ketten entzwei, die euch der Sieger gestückt?  
Nein, sie bejubeln den Sieg, der über Brüder erfochten,  
Süsser als Siege sie dünkt, die man in Schlachten erstritt.

In this moment, the speaker reflects on the “Begeisterung” that accompanies the incomprehensible clamor (“Taumel,” “Lärm,” “Geschrei”) of the masses championing war. By rewriting (or more literally, renaming) the word from “Begeisterung” to “Trunkenheit,” the speaker excises the association of anything spiritual (geistig) from total mobilization that would lead to conquest and war.

Schmerzend hallt in den Ohren der Lärm mir, mich widert der Taumel,  
Widert das laute Geschrei, das sich Begeisterung nennt.  
Wehe! Begeisterung! Silberner Brunnen der Stille, du klarer,  
Du kristallener Born, nennt es Begeisterung nicht.  
Tiefer schweigen die Toten, sie trauern, sie hören das Lärmen,  
Hören das kindische Lied ruhmloser Trunkenheit nicht.

The poem thus ends by rejecting the propagandistic overtones of the word “Begeisterung” but also by stating that the dead reject the “kindische Lied ruhmlöser Trunkenheit.” In this double act of negation, the poem rejects rejection, challenging fascism’s impulse, which is also language’s impulse per Roland Barthes, to compel meaning. Jünger’s allegory, however, is something altogether different from fascist propaganda and what I have called conservative indeterminacy (which can give way to passivity and indifference). It neither invites nor disavows interpretation but rather draws simultaneously on the conservative redemption of high art and neoclassical form as well as the fascist tendency to power implicit in language itself. In this way, Jünger’s poem represents a lyric mode unlike traditional or avant-garde poetry of both the right and left, thus rejecting the complicity of indeterminacy and modeling instead the resistance of simulation. It marshals the fascist collapse of racial totality and national fragmentation, Germanness itself, in order to reassert both the very human failure, death, and aesthetic failure, rhetoricity, the disavowal of which the fascist poem necessitates.



**APPENDIX**  
**ABBREVIATIONS**

CNBL	Christlich-nationale Bauern- und Landvolkpartei
DAD	Deutsche Akademie der Dichtung
DAF	Deutsche Arbeitsfront
DNVP	Deutschnationale Volkspartei
DSt	Deutsche Studentenschaft
NS	Nationalsozialistisch
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
NSDStB	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund
RKK	Reichskulturkammer
RMVP	Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda
RSK	Reichsschrifttumskammer
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei
VKV	Volkskonservative Vereinigung

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