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Modernism and the Classical Tradition

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Modernism and the Classical Tradition

by

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Modernism and the Classical Tradition

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This dissertation seeks to abolish the inherited cliché that the Modernist writers and artists rejected earlier art and literature, particularly that of the classical tradition. In fact, both literature and art of the early 20th century made widespread use of the inherited Greco-Roman tradition in a myriad of ways. Moreover, beginning after the First World War and maturing in the 1920s, a demonstrative Neoclassical "movement" appeared across different types of art and different nations.

A neoclassical or classicizing style or form is inherently malleable, an empty signifier that can, through an artist or writer's emphasis, point towards any number of meanings. This allowed a classical style to become widespread along with its seeming resiliency as the ordered, traditional bedrock of the West. In the 1930s, however, the fascist parties of Germany, France, and Italy began to appropriate the neoclassical as a state- or party-style because of the ease with which politics could be incorporated into a relatively vacant form. Their systematic use of the classical tradition in large part "tainted" classical subjects and styles, which allowed for the post-World War II institutionalization of the avant garde.

I argue that texts which used the classical tradition could do so in four distinct manners—four types of classicism. Symbolic Classicism controls its classical material by using it only at the level of hollow icon which pregnantly gestures towards antiquity. Traditional Classicism, like an adaptation of a classical narrative particularly in drama, becomes completely dependent on its borrowings. Formal Classicism borrows an inherited, vacant form which can then be injected with Modernity. Finally, Synthetic Classicism necessitates a careful balancing of the classical material, not reducing it to symbolic meaning, but producing a novel narrative or mirroring-effect, that controls its various elements designed into a modern theme or objective.

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Introduction:

Modernism and the New Classicisms

I. Introduction to 20th century classicism

The cliché that the Modernists completely turned against the art and literature of the past emerged from the first major avant-garde movement in the polemical manifesti of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti which called for the destruction of museums and the abandonment of all art predating his own novel movement.[1] Throughout his career Marinetti made sweeping rhetorical gestures, and these became central to the narrative of Modernism. Yet taking him for his word is problematic because the major Modernists in fact tied the past, and particularly classical antiquity, inextricably to their artistic output. Consider for a moment, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Pound, Joyce, Yeats, Cocteau. Surely a narrative that finds their work anomalous in the context of the early 20th century is fallacious at best. Rather, artists such as those above sought to incorporate the past into modernity, to combine classical material with Modernist techniques. In short, the mainstream of Modernism synthesized the avant-garde with the classical tradition. More accurately, Modernism emerged directly from the classical tradition.

How these artists dealt with classical material, how they saw it, and what they sought to do with it varied considerably from artist to artist. Simply taking those mentioned above, Picasso returned to traditional figurative painting and drawing after Cubism. It offered something new, something different form everything he had produced

before. Picasso avoided stagnation and reification in his art through continual change. His classical work emerged during the First World War and continued into the 1920s before he would yet again change his style.[2] Stravinsky made his reputation with ballets like *Le Sacré du printemps* (1913), which emerged like Cubism from the Primitivist search for an originary culture. Yet from about 1920 until 1954, by far the longest phase of his compositional career, Stravinsky explored a neoclassical style that included works like *Pulcinella* (1920), *Oedipus Rex* (1927), *Apollon musagète* (1928), *Le Symphonie des Psaumes* (1930), and *Orpheus* (1947) which used this neoclassical style often in conjunction with classical subjects. For Eliot and Pound, the cultures of the past, particularly classical antiquity, is central to their poetic output where fragments and allusions in large part construct their poems. *The Waste Land* (1922) beings with a quotation from Petronius' *Satryricon*; his later plays are invariably based on classical narratives. Pound translated and adapted the Latin poet in his *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1919), one of his three most important works. The other two, *Mauberley* (1920) and *The Cantos* (1915-1968), make systematic use of classical material throughout. Pound also translated regularly, from Sophocles, Catullus, Horace, and others. Joyce's most important novel, *Ulysses* (1922), is structurally built upon the *Odyssey*. *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man* (1916) is rife with classical allusions, opening with an epigraph from Ovid and lending a name to his protagonist. Yeats not only adapted *King Oedipus* (1926) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (1927), but also used classical material and allusions as much if not more than the other poets. His theosophical system, propounded in *A Vision* (1925) and throughout his poetry, is a syncretic combination of

classical mythology and Christianity. And Cocteau, more than any other artist of the 20th century, made neoclassicism his dominant style in every genre he tried—plays, films, poetry, drawing, even in his role as musical impresario. Artistic, avant-garde experimentation never necessitated a rejection of the past.

Largely in response to the destruction of the First World War, classicism seemed to offer a solid, resilient ground, a return to clarity and order, to values in the face of European destruction. It in larger part can be considered the antithesis of Dada, which responded to the same stimulus with absurdity, chaos, and anarchy. Classical ideals and an overarching classical stylistic seemed to provide security.

Emerging in the 1910s, this new classicism always coupled with a return to traditionalism, figurative painting, and formal poetry after the first phase of Modernist experimentation, has been successfully charted by Kenneth E. Silver in *Esprit de Corps*, which focuses on the Parisian avant-garde during the First World War until 1925,[3] by Elizabeth Cowling and Jennifer Mundy in *On Classic Ground*, a survey of visual art from 1910-1930,[4] across the visual arts in the exhibition catalogue, *Les Réalismes, 1919-1939*,[5] and by Jane F. Fulcher in *The Composer as Intellectual*, which concentrates on the intersection of music and politics from 1914-1940.[6] The new classicism became widespread only in the 1920s *rappel à l'ordre*, but never codified into a large, international artistic movement like the other major, 20th-century avant-gardes.

In Paris, the *rappel à l'ordre* was typified by Cocteau's aphoristic manifesto on music, *Le Coq et l'arlequin* (1918), and was collected in a volume entitled *Le Rappel à l'ordre* (1926). Cocteau's manifesto rejected German music almost completely[7] and

argued for a national, French style marked by traits typical to neoclassicism and typified by Les Six for whom Cocteau set about becoming the spokesman. At the same time the Italian journal *Valori Plastici* (1918-1922), edited by Mario Brogli, a painter and critic, espoused the same return to representation and classicism. In Germany, the Neue Sachlichkeit or New Objectivity (1920s-1933) emerged from the mainstream of Expressionism, while reacting against it in some respects, with a call to a more traditional style.[8] The classicism of the latter and much of the French work of the 1920s resided mostly in its figurative style, avoiding classical subjects in general.

However, with the exception of the German variety, these movements within the complex of the rappel à l'ordre, had a strong tone of nationalism, where style, subject, and national identity all became interdependent. Cocteau's manifesto argued, namely, for a French music that equated neoclassicism with France, as its heritage and defining characteristic. The movement centered around *Valori Plastici* urged for an Italianate art steeped in a Latin heritage. When the journal stopped publishing, the movement termed the Novecento (1923-1943) began. Carefully constructed around a nationalist goal to elevate Italian art, the name looked backwards to the Italian Renaissance Trecento, Quattrocento, and Cinquecento. The Novecento was in large part designed by Margherita Sarfatti (1880-1961), an art critic, patron, mistress of Mussolini, and writer for his mouthpiece, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, as a fascist artistic movement that rejected the avant-garde and sought a return to classical, history painting. The Fugitive poets of the American South, beginning as an informal reading and thinking group in 1920, then publishing a journal called *The Fugitive* (1922-1925), and morphing into The Agrarians

in 1930, reacted against avant-garde Modernism with a return to formalism. Associated as strongly with political conservatism as any of the other movements, the movement is in large part a provincial example of the same trend towards classicism and conservatism.[9] The Neue Sachlichkeit, tainted by its origins in and similarities to Expressionism as well as a general leftism, disintegrated in 1933 with the fall of the Weimar Republic and the rise of National Socialism. In *Guide to Kulchur* (1938), Ezra Pound, in typical Poundian fashion, writes a chapter that begins with the classical Greek dramatists, moves into recent dramas on classical subjects, then music and the American composer George Antheil. This triggers an allusion to Cocteau's *Le Rappel à l'ordre* which leads directly into an appreciation of Mantegna. However, its utility to us emerges thereafter. The mention of Cocteau's book triggers a brief Poundian history of Modernist culture. "If I am introducing anybody to Kulchur, let 'em take the two phases, the nineteen teens, Gaudier, Wyndham L. and I as we were in *Blast*, and the next phase, the 1920's…The sorting out, the *rappel à l'ordre*, and thirdly the new synthesis, the totalitarian."[10]

Yet the equation of nationalism with classicism was in no way new. Germany's infatuation with Greece is well known—Winckelmann, Lessing, Goethe, and Hölderlin all worshipped Greek art.[11] The French held their neoclassical plays up to the Greeks, found them better, and declared that they represented the continuation of the classical tradition. The Italian Renaissance viewed itself as a return to the order of the classical past. During the 18th century, Neoclassicism became the dominant movement. While the 19th exhibited frequent returns to antiquity, varieties of Neoclassicism, and mythological

subjects from the academies to the Symbolists. In the United States, the American Renaissance (1876-1914) was in large part a neoclassical style, typified by a sculptor like Augustus Saint-Gaudens whom we shall find later inspiring the greatest ode of the 20th century.[12] In England, the Victorian neoclassicism of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Lord Frederic Leighton, and John William Godward,[13] led and reduced significantly into Georgian poetry (1911-1922) conjured out of a series of anthologies reacting against the pervading Symbolism and burgeoning Modernism with a return to a "neoclassical" formalism.[14] There was even a Russian Neoclassical Revival (1905-1914) in architecture.[15]

In short, classicism never vanished from European art, but it was obscured by the explosion of avant-garde movements in the first two decades of the 20th century, many of whose artists later turned to a classicism which incorporated the advances of Modernism, or did their best to ignore them, into a figuration equated with classicism. Such a history has necessarily been muted by art historical narratives which valorize progress and experimentation.

Furthermore, the politicization of the classical had taken place long before the 1920s and 1930s. During the First World War, nationalism obviously exploded, but in France it was coupled with classicism seen as a birthright, and a defining national characteristic to be defended from Germany. The defense of France was projected as a salvation of European values and culture, particularly classical history, aesthetics, and inheritance.[16] Numerous artists like Picasso and Stravinsky did undergo a classicism in no way tinged by nationalism, but they were not of French origins. Thus, because of this

equation of national pride and classical ideals, it was easy for the 1920's *rappel à l'ordre* to veer towards a political, nationalist goal even though it was an international trend.

At the same time that the avant-gardes were flirting with the classical *rappel à l'ordre*, a new political movement was emerging in France from a variety of different sources both left and right but unified by a strong nationalism and the desire for a return to classicism, the birthright of the nation, to counteract contemporary decadence and decline: fascism was being born. Virtually every single fascist intellectual praised classical ideals, celebrated classicizing artists like Maurice Denis and Aristide Maillol, and associated order, unity, form and measure with both the classical past and France. In Germany, Greece was again seen as a forebear, the avant-gardes were labeled degenerate, and neoclassicism became a state style of the regime personified by Albert Speer, Arno Breker, and Josef Thorak among others. Italian fascism was maneuvered as to become the continuation and culmination of the ancient Roman empire, with Mussolini become Caesar Augustus. Less vested in art, Mussolini allowed until well into the Second World War a policy of tolerance towards the various artistic movements as long as they were in line politically. Both Futuristism and the Novecento celebrated fascism, despite their different aesthetic programs. The Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista, the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (1932-1934), celebrated fascism, organized around an avant-garde style, while the later Mostra Augustea della Romanità, Augustan Exhibition of Romanness (1937-1938), commemorated the two-thousandth anniversary of the Roman Empire under Augustus with the clearest teleological goal that Mussolini was returning Italy to its past grandeur.

By the 1940s, neoclassicism had become confirmed as a nationalist, state style imbued with a reactionary ideology. As an artistic movement associated with the avant-gardes is was essentially dead. Even Cocteau abandoned classical subjects during the war, returning to Greco-Roman myths only in the 1950s. The politicization of classicism, combined with the continued decline of Latin and Greek in education,[17] quantifiably killed classicism. The classical tradition exerted the least influence on this time than any previous period since the Dark Ages. This is thus, a history of classicism's nasty end, its last few twilit decades, and the reprehensible politics which appropriated it.

II. How classicism worked

The political and historical significance of 20th-century classicism is where this study begins. Such a mapping is necessary to understand the context and the larger cultural matrix in which the neoclassical existed. This study examines how such classicism works in an aesthetic text, what an artist does with a material tradition, and how it influences a work. Needless to say, it does it in a variety of ways.

But first, we need some definition. The terms *neoclassical* and *classical*, and their constituent nouns, are problematic, each frequently used to refer to Classical Greece (essentially from Aeschylus to Euripides), to classical antiquity *in toto*, to the 17th and 18th centuries, in the 19th century in opposition to Romanticism, to late Victorian paintings of antiquity, and to any general engagement with the classical tradition after the fall of Rome. I would like to limit *neoclassical* to a work of art which uses a style that is generally regarded as more or less classical. One can speak of a neoclassical phase, or

rather particular works of Picasso[18] or of Stravinsky.[19] *Classical* or perhaps *classicizing* texts should thus be used to refer to the bulk of the texts here under study, representing however loosely those texts which engage the classical tradition in a modern idiom.[20] Referring to Joyce's *Ulysses* as neoclassical or even classical is inaccurate despite its formal use of the *Odyssey*. In texts such as those, *classicizing* becomes a useful term.

I argue that the classical tradition works in four major ways on texts of this period. My four types of classicism are **Symbolic**, **Traditional**, **Formal**, and **Synthetic**, to which might be added a conservative political type, but its presence is so widespread that it would be of little use categorically. These types can necessarily bleed into each other, or exist at the same time in a given text because they are concerned with how an artist makes use of classical material and designs it into his or her work. Symbolic Classicism corresponds to a text which makes use of some element of the classical past but is reduced to a simple signifier for an undifferentiated antiquity. An amphora in a drawing for example, refers to the Greco-Roman past but in no meaningful way. It becomes a signifier without a signified, the vehicle of a metaphor without a tenor, meaning nothing except the act of referral, a pregnant gesture the induces an antique cloud or the idea of antiquity. Thus, it is a simplistic, reductionary way to use a fragment of the classical tradition—a shortcut that does not function. Traditional Classicism, another mostly prosaic usage, adapts an original Greco-Roman narrative in a 20th-century text. This type includes the majority of Modernist, classicizing texts, which by far are to be found in drama. Plays and operas, and now films, on classical subjects have always been widespread in Western Europe because Greek drama offers a wide range of human

interaction, drama, and conflicts. The major benefit of this type is that it affords the author a pre-digested and model narrative for his or her new dramatic text. The majority of the work, the invention, has already been done. Thus, this type highlights the differences between a new version and the old. However, the great danger of adapting a classical text lies in the inevitability of an audience weighing the merits of the modern adaptation against the old. Some dramatists can succeed resoundingly, as can be seen in Anouilh, and particularly Racine and Shakespeare, but typically it is a perilous indeavor. There is a better chance of success when the adapted narrative comes not from an original play, but from another source, like Ovid, where the original is not as fully sketched.

Formal Classicism, on the other hand, can easily coexist in the other types because it represents a 20th century text which is modeled on a form inherited from antiquity. The century's greatest example of such is clearly *Ulysses*. However, that text has been so thoroughly examined that another analysis would offer up few revelations to a reader. Formal Classicism offers the writer, who is ostensibly reinvigorating an old form, a set of constraints which will send their text down a different path than one using a more habitual formal construction. In short, instead of limiting possibilities, it creates far more.[21] Furthermore, an artist can creatively undermine the inherited form, disrupt a reader's expectations, or fulfill them in startling ways.

My final type, Synthetic Classicism, is in many ways the culmination of this study, and the realization of a synthesis between classicism and modernity that various artists attempted and theorists articulated. Synthetic classicism balances both the classical material and the modern material, never reducing the classical to a simple

symbol, tool, or undifferentiated past space to be loaded with an invented significance, be it a golden age, an ideal, or a fabricated history. Both elements come together and critique not only the present but also the past.

20th-century classicizing texts should be recognized not differently from the main of classical influence on Western culture after the Middle Ages. Despite a verifiable return to tradition and the classical following the First World War, artists are able to choose their influences at liberty, at any time, and according to their own projects. Theorists, as we shall see in Maurice Denis, and critics, partial to a political project, lay down their proscriptions for what art should do and are far more limited by their own visions than artists. Excluding the post-World War I boom in classicism, classicizing texts outside of larger cultural trends appear consistently but unsystematically throughout the 20th century.

The 20th century's classicism, not a revival, but a continuation of the classical tradition, can be considered part of the earlier move towards primitivism, which sought an originary truth, an unmediated response to the human condition, and a radical return to the root of aesthetic construction. After the turn to Oceanic, African, or more native arts, as in *Le Sacré du printemps*, such models seemed exhausted, so artists who still felt the same need of a return, went to classical antiquity for their inspiration. It provided a less distant, European past.

Hugh Kenner argues that the decline of archaism in early twentieth century poetry occurred because of the tangibility of archaic Greece.[22] Implements such as a pin or a cup resisted such romanticization because of their visibility as an artifact. Ironically the

archaic made archaism antiquated. In essence, the past could no longer be romantically reproduced as an authentic past space as in Alma-Tadema, Godward, Leighton, or Puvis de Chavannes.[23] The classicizing paintings of Picasso like *Three Women at the Spring* (1921) or those mentioned above do not inhabit a specified landscape. Their clothes are vaguely classical, but there is no indication as to when or where they are set. Antiquity must be made anew. The authentic classical world is irredeemably lost, any reconstruction would be inauthentic. Any attempt to reconstruct prehistory is ultimately speculative, as the artists engaged in primitivism had already discovered.

Theodor Adorno, an opponent of neoclassicism,[24] argued that the trend was at heart not concerned with "the reconstruction of obsolete forms…[but] became an accepted style because it enabled individuals sated by their individuality to colonize the libidinous space of a past age not yet fully individuated."[25] In other words, artists could project into the past, using an old style, replete with its own conventions, as fertile ground to engage their own artistic preoccupations and aesthetic project. Concurrently, this process which Adorno observed is one of not simply ransacking a past age for raw material to be used by artists as the term colonization lends itself to interpretation, but rather it is of making a new, artificial past age which the work of art inhabits, not from the ground up, but fashioned out of pieces and tokens of the classical world. This is what occurs in all classical, neoclassical, and classicizing work; there are pieces of antiquity that an artist uses to fabricate their own aestheticized and imagined classical space.

However in Modernism, the artifice of this project is understood and exploited, valued for its very falsity of gathering fragments and making the new from and around

them.[26] For example, the Ballet Suédois, which was responsible for virtually all of the major Modernist ballets not produced by Diaghilev,[27] presented *Offerlunden* (*The Sacrifical Grove*) in 1923, a failed attempt at imitating the *Rite of Spring*.[28] Cancelled after five performances, it evoked the Bronze Age in Sweden and concerned a Viking king who must sacrifice himself for the survival of his tribe.[29]

The play was, however, not based on any extant myth, but rather a 1915 painting, *Midvinterblot* (*The Midwinter Sacrifice*), by Carl Larsson. The fictive history of the ballet written by the dancer Jean Börlin, was based on the fictive history of Larsson. The ballet's relation to classicism however is that Gunnar Hallström who designed the costumes and décor clearly used classical sources in his attempt to create pre-historical Sweden. In a watercolor costume design for a female figure in white with a drinking cup, the pseudo-Greek dress and crown of laurels are combined with a torc and Norse cup. The wide triangular dresses and hair styles on the female dancers are distinctly Minoan[30] with large, wide eyes while the lined dresses derive from the Geometric style (9th and 8th centuries BC) of Greek pottery.

Likewise, an author when adapting a classical text, myth, or narrative had the choice to present their modern version in either a fabricated classical setting or in a modern one, either necessitating invention. Beyond a novel like *Ulysses*, this is a widespread phenomenon in drama. Conscious slippage of the past and the present was a common trope, presenting intended anachronisms like cigarettes in Anouilh's *Antigone*. Such a play can be written in a particular locale, but the director can then set it wherever he might wish, and in cases like *Antigone*, shore up the artificiality of a modern play in a

classical setting with such slips as the cigarette, achieving in the production of a play, not simply in the writing, a mise-en-abyme of Adorno's colonization, personalizing the artificial past. The slippage of such fragments, while not necessarily "colonizing," inhabit the space of a past age through an artistic renewal which at once disturbs any interpretation of it as an authentic reproduction and makes the text viably contemporary with what amounts to the invention of an ahistorical, Modernized antiquity.

Another major trope of 20th-century classicism, as we have already seen in Symbolic Classicism, is the classical past evacuated of historical significance and turned empty sign or signifer. This is an important aspect of a classicizing style because it becomes flexible and wholly empty. It can be used to signify anything and can be imbued with ideology. Its meaning is contingent upon the context that an artist produces around it. This is the principle reason, beyond any association of the classical with an ideal of order, that it became a state style, not just in Italy or in the 20th century, but the acceptable style of the governments of many nations throughout history.

Jean Cocteau inhabits a special place in this study. He is both the most visible classicist of the 20th century and the most consistently classical Modernist. Cocteau's classicism united all of his exercises in different genres. Of his four films, three are deeply moored in antiquity. His drawings are scattered with lyres and laurels while virtually all of the figures are formally indebted and framed by the conventions of the Roman portrait bust. His most highly regarded plays are all based on classical narratives. His poetry is replete with odes and orpheuses.

Yet for all of Cocteau's work, he is remembered best as a figure of the period, a friend of most of the avant-garde, a liaison, not quite an impresario, but an arbiter of taste. I have afforded him a special position in this study; one who appears systematically throughout my chapters. His work is rarely of the first tier, but he defines Modernist classicism. During the First World War, Cocteau began to position himself as the spokesman of the avant-garde, and made his weakness, his vacillation between the avant-garde and the more traditional, his strength and defining aesthetic.[31] He called for an end to primitivism and le Jazz and offered classicism by his example and in his manifesto, *Le Coq et l'arlequin* as a viable alternative. Cocteau recognized when a movement was over and when a new mode of influence was needed. He did not suggest the classical as a source of inspiration, but understood what had been occurring in art and was able to supply direction for innovation. Picasso was a better draftsman, Anouilh a better classicizing playwright, Buñuel a better filmmaker, and Diaghilev a better impresario, but Cocteau, more so than any other artist of the period, completely embraced the idea of using the classical as the Modern.[32]

Cocteau's classicizing unites his disparate output and brings everything together under a style which is immediately recognizable today. This is his greatest triumph. He represents the triumph of contemporaneity, but now it is exhausted. Cocteau, in a sense, proves the flexibility of the classical because he used it so completely in his work, while it never actually means anything. The classical past while affording subject matter, theme, and style to the contemporary artist to choose at his will, offers no real content but a framework. Odysseus or Ariadne or Antigone mean nothing to a contemporary

audience except what the artist does with them. The classical past offers simply a fashion of navigating artistic subjects. Cocteau's use of it crystallizes that vacancy, showing that his art and classicism as mere style provide nothing coherent besides a theatrical, aesthetic moment.

III. Overview of the study

My first chapter, "From Conservative Classicism to Fascist Neoclassicism in France and Italy: The Political and Historical Context of the Classical Tradition in the 20th Century," attempts to provide just that—the historical and political background behind 20th-century classicism in general, a necessary starting point for its understanding in the period. It begins with a brief historical narrative of the influence and importance of the classical from the late 18th into the 20th century. It addresses classicism's relation to primitivism, and how the political became central to neoclassicism. The second section takes up the Symbolist painter and theorist Maurice Denis and uses him as a transitional figure. Deeply conservative and Catholic, Denis flirted likewise with the Action Française, but never really became a fascist. Classical subjects abound in his paintings, but the relatively early *Homère parcourant les campagnes* (1888 or 1889) and *Les Muses* (1893) are the most accomplished. Much like the British painter Stanley Spencer, Denis telescopes his classical subject into his own contemporary where Homer and the Muses inhabit the provincial landscape of Denis' own Saint-Germain-en-Laye. His theoretical texts are likewise of much importance because they are the first major articulation of a goal to synthesize the advances of modern art with the order of the classical past. While

his masters were the Post-Impressionists and he had little patience for Modernism, nevertheless his theoretical practice goes directly to the heart of Modernism's uses of the classical tradition.

In the third section of this chapter, I address Robert Brasillach, the only major literary figure executed after the Second World War for collaboration. A member of the Action Française and an ardent fascist, he turned consistently to Greco-Roman themes. His most interesting literary production is a relatively early biography of Vergil, *Présence de Virgile* (1931), written to commemorate the two-thousandth anniversary of the Roman poet. The novelistic biography concerns Vergil's maturation and projects him as a proto-fascist, enamored of Augustus as Mussolini. Brasillach's stated aim of the text was to present Vergil as a young Italian of the 1930s. I follow Brasillach with an analysis of Mussolini's imperial project and its relation to classicism. In the late 1920s, Mussolini began plans for the construction of a large athletic complex to be built outside of Rome; it was called the Mussolini Forum and consisted of a theatre, swimming pools, two large colosseums, and an entrance piazza. In 1937 a series of mosaics was made for the piazza. These adopted a black-and-white-figure style recently discovered in the excavations of Ostia. However, the subjects of these mosaics were not from antiquity. Rather they presented triumphal events from fascist history including the colonization of Ethiopia, tanks, airplanes and depictions of young fascist soldiers fighting socialists.

In the second chapter, "Symbolic Classicism: Empty Tropes and Cultural Literacy," I focus on the first type of classicism, treating the use of classical images, themes, and relics in Jean Cocteau's film *Le Sang d'un poète* (1930), Giorgio de

Chirico's painting, *Gli Archeologi* (1927), W. B. Yeats' poem "Sailing to Byzantium" (1928), and the third section of Ezra Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1919). The first two texts use vacant classical signs like statues, laurel crowns, columns, and arches to produce an aura of the classical with no inherent meaning. The second two texts transform classical space and time into mere signifiers for an ideal place and an ideal period, golden ages essentially.

The third chapter, "An Excursus on Traditional Classicism: Setting a Narrative in a Classical or a Modern Landscape," amasses the majority of 20th-century adaptations of Greco-Roman narratives. It examines the benefits and pitfalls of this type of classicism, what occurs when a dramatist appropriates such a narrative, the varied sources for the Modernist reinterpretation, and the significance of whether the writer sets the play in the past or in the present, and the concomitant impact that choice has on a given text.

In the fourth chapter, "Formal Classicism and the Ode," that type is pursued through the case of the Pindaric ode. I trace a brief history of the ode from Pindar and Horace into the Romantic period, and examine the poetic form's structural and rhetorical import. Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" (1928) and Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead" (1960), though not strictly an ode, offer an irresistible case of both intertextuality between the two poems and with the classical tradition. Tate's ode, concerned with the theme of decay, provides a half-decayed ode as metaphor for modernity and classical influence in this century. Lowell's public poem dispenses with traditional triadic structure in favor of a structuring Pindaric logic based on analogical

language and the repetition of key symbols, making a Pindaric, occasional, and public poem more like an ode than Tate's.

The final chapter, "Synthetic Classicism and Conclusion," provides a reading of Yeats' "The Statues" (1939) and W. H. Auden's "Shield of Achilles" (1953) as examples of Synthetic Classicism. Yeats' poem writes a fictive history of the classical tradition and Western aesthetics from Pythagoras and Hellenic sculpture to the Easter Rebellion, concentrating on mathematical form and incorporating most of the poet's major themes. "The Shield of Achilles," on the other hand, subverts the original Homeric episode by illustrating the shield with scenes of contemporary warfare and brutality, damning both the classical past and the present. Constructed in looser classical stanzas which treat Thetis and Hephaestos' interaction, and rigid "modern" stanzas which serve as the poem's ekphrastic core, Auden balances both the classical and the modern in a poem which serves as fitting conclusion to this study.

The final part of this chapter traces the post-war fortunes of classicism and its eventual disruption as a viable trend through its politicization and the master narrative of Modernism which privileged experimentation over the more traditional. This study attempts to demonstrate through carefully chosen exempla how Modernism intersected with the classical tradition both politically and formally. The 20th-century's classical tendencies represent, at least from the perspective of art, literature, and music today, the last blossoming of the classical tradition in Western culture. Antiquity provided and uninterrupted line of influence until the Second World War, where the taint of fascism fell upon the classical tradition and made it virtually irrecoverable. With the continued

decline in the study of Greek and Latin, the classical tradition will never likely regain even the withered heights it held in the 1920s and 30s. This study documents the descent of neoclassicism, its fall from grace, and the end of Greece and Rome's 2,500 year reign in the Western creative imagination.

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[1] See, for example, F. T. Marinetti, "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism," *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006), 11-17 and Marinetti, "Second Futurist Manifesto: Let's Kill Off the Moonlight," *Critical Writings*, 22-31.
[2] Kenneth E. Silver finds its first appearance in *The Painter and his Model* (1914), the portrait of Max Jacob (January 1915) and the portrait of Ambroise Vollard (August 1915). Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 63.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Elizabeth Cowling and Jennifer Mundy, eds. *On Classic Ground: Picasso, Léger, de Chirico, and the New Classicism 1910-1930* (London: The Tate Gallery, 1990).
[5] Pontus Hulten, et. al, eds., *Les Réalismes, 1919-1939*, (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1980).
[6] Jane F. Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France, 1914-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[7] Schoenberg was lauded as a master, but undercut in the same breath as "a musician of the blackboard." Jean Cocteau, *Le Coq et l'arlequin*, *Romans, poésies, œuvres diverses*, ed. Bernard Benech (Paris: Pocothèque, 1995), 434.
[8] The Munich gallery owner and exhibitor of many Neue Sachlichkeit painters, Hans Goltz, began publishing *Valori Plastici* in 1919. Carlo Mense (1886-1965), a Neue Sachlichkeit painter also based in Munich, even showed some of his work in Florence at a *Valori Plastici* exhibition. Sergiusz Michalski, *New Objectivity: Painting, Graphic Art and Photography in Weimar Germany 1919-1933*, trans. Michael Claridge (Köln: Taschen, 2003), 71 (Goltz) and 80 (Mense).
[9] The Fugitive poets included John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, and Robert Penn Warner. The Agrarians emerged from this group and also included John Gould Fletcher, a former Imagist. See Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
[10] Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1938), 95.

[11] See, for example, Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 367-386.
[12] See, Richard Guy Wilson, "The Great Civilization," *The American Renaissance, 1876-1917* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1979): 39-51.
[13] See, William Gaunt, *Victorian Olympus*, rev. ed. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975) and Julian Treuherz, *Victorian Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993): 159-185.
[14] Not really a movement, but a period in poetry contemporary to the more avant-garde movements of Imagism and Vorticism before transatlantic Modernism in English's showcase year of 1922, the Georgians emerged from the five anthologies of *Georgian Poetry* edited by Edward Marsh and published by Harold Monro. These anthologies included more traditional poets: Rupert Brooke, W. H. Davies, Walter de la Mare, James Elroy Flecker, D H. Lawrence, John Masefield, Siegfried Sassoon, T. Sturge Moore, Monro, Lascelles Abercrombie, Robert Graves, Isaac Rosenberg, Edmund Blunden, Vita Sackville-West and others.
[15] See William C. Brumfield, "Anti-Modernism and the Neoclassical Revival in Russian Architecture, 1906-1916," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 48.4 (Dec. 1989): 371-386.
[16] Françoise Waquet, *Latin, or the Empire of a Sign*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 2002), 199.
[17] The 19th century saw the advent of the deadly instructor of classics concerned solely with grammar or prosody (see Highet, 490-500 and, in film, Anthony Asquith's 1951, *The Browning Version*, an adaptation of a play by Terence Rattigan about such a Greek instructor at the end of his career who has accomplished nothing in his life or his professional career). Greek and Latin instruction was in total disarray, and it lost any relevance that it once had to the student and the academy.
[18] For example, 1914's *The Painter and his Model*, 1921's *Mother and Child*, or 1923's *The Pipes of Pan*.
[19] As in *Pulcinella* (1920), *Apollon musagète* (1928), or *Symphony of Psalms* (1930)
[20] I prefer that *Neoclassical*, capitalized, refer to the 17th century of Racine and La Fontaine in France and from the Restoration into the 18th century in England, from Dryden to Pope and Johnson as it were.
[21] In "The Neural Lyre," Frederick Turner demonstrates how formal constraint produces new combinations and new avenues for a literary text. Explicitly about meter, Turner offers an analogy: where there is a set of basic options (i.e., A, B, C, D), the imposition of a rule such as, they must be deployed in groups of two, provides ample new possibilities (i.e., AA, AB, AC, AD, BA, etc.). Frederick Turner, "The Neural Lyre: Poetic Meter, the Brain, and Time," *Natural Classicism: Essays on Literature and Science* (New York: Paragon, 1985), 79-80.
[22] Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 29, 42-44.
[23] See for instance, Vern Grosvenor Swanson, *John William Godward: The Eclipse of Classicism* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1997).

[24] Adorno had a vested interest in debunking classicism as a contemporary style. Adorno studied composition with Alban Berg and was devoted to the serialist aesthetic. Stravinskian neoclassicism struck Adorno as an inauthentic reaction to the modern experience. His criticism of music amounts to avant-garde jeremiads. The essay quoted here was written in 1962, long after serialism had won the battle with Stravinsky himself converted, allowing on Adorno's part for reflection rather than simple polemic.
[25] Theodore W. Adorno, "Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait," *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998), 155.
[26] Cf., Picasso's classical paintings in no identifiable setting as mentioned above.
[27] For example, Debussy's *Jeux*, Albéniz's *Iberia*, Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* of Cocteau and Les Six, Milhaud's *La Création du Monde*, and Satie and Picabia's *Relâche*, of which only the "Entr'acte" was perfomed.
[2828] The music was composed by Algot Haquinus, a relative of Jean Börlin, the greatest dancer of the Ballet Suédois, himself not inspired by the music.
[29] See Anna Greta Ståhle, "What Was Swedish about the Swedish Ballet," *Paris Modern: The Swedish Ballet, 1920-1925*, Nancy Van Norman Baer, ed (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1995), 62-65 and Bernt Häger, *Ballet Suédois* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 180-187.
[30] For discussion of the influence, or at least presence in memory, of Minoan art, the minotaur, and Knossos in Modernism see Cathy Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
[31] See Silver, 43-52.
[32] Cocteau published an encomium to Arno Breker on the occasion of Breker's exhibtion in Paris. His "Salut à Breker" drastically damaged his reputation. His journal shows that he was ignorant of the effect it would have and his astonishment at its repercussions. For those years it served as an excuse in his mind for every slight and critique directed at him and demonstrated an utter inability to take responsibility for praising "Hitler's sculptor" during the Occupation.

Chapter One

From Conservative Classicism to Fascist Neoclassicism: The Politicization of the Classical Tradition

There is nothing that could be called a universal law of the social history of art…[A]rt as social agency is implicated in a process that never repeats itself and constantly throws up new combinations. In consequence, it is always possible for the social significance of a style to change, even to take on a function the very opposite of the function that it fulfilled previously. One need only mention the metamorphoses to be observed if one traces the social role of classicism or romanticism through the centuries
Arnold Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History*[1]

Civis romanus sum.
Mussolini, April 21, 1922[2]

PART ONE:

Introduction

1.1 General introduction to the politics of 20th century classicism

The classical tradition, in short the history of the reuse of Greco-Roman material in art from the Middle Ages to the present day, serves along with Judeo-Christian tradition as the most important source and influence on all subsequent Western art, literature, music, that is the Western tradition springs from these two sources. The critical analysis of this and the classical texts themselves, formed scholarship, criticism, and literary and artistic history. My focus in these millennia of art, literature, and

scholarship is the permutations of the classical in the first half of the twentieth century, that is from the birth of Modernism to the Second World War. A discussion of the texts that this encompasses and their theoretical dimensions as creative tropes which combine for the production of meaning necessitates an analysis of the politico-historical context.

The most striking intersection of classicism and politics in the history of the classical tradition occurred when neoclassicism was adopted by fascism. The central importance of discussing fascism in a work on the classical in the twentieth century is that fascism is the watershed moment in both twentieth century neoclassicism and the century itself. Analysis of the classical tradition in the twentieth century must engage the political realities of its works of art. It is the background, the mid-century crisis to which classicism hurled itself. Afterwards, it was functionally dead.

One of the qualities that set Modernism apart from previous artistic movements was its very plurality of styles, its Modernisms. After the Second World War, there occurred the rejection of a style unlike any other in the history of Western art and literature. Art did not evolve away from neoclassicism; neoclassicism was, in fact, not even a dominant style. The neoclassical had become so tainted by its political associations that it was repudiated as "fascist"—a slur that would rapidly depreciate in meaning to simply that of which the interlocutor disapproved. The post-war avant-garde so adamant to be at the forefront, to define itself in opposition, to be established and morally right, forbid the classical and, ultimately, made it political or fascist by calling it so, when it was only certain artists and certain works which had any relation to the totalitarian regimes of Germany and Italy.

This is the history of the death of not just a style, but of an inspiration equal only to the Bible in Western art. Its posthumous existence, like that of Wordsworth's, kept struggling along despite the mortal wound that the subsequent generation dealt. As a mode of reference or allusion, it, of course, could not die.

1.2 Outline of material treated

This chapter attempts to give an analysis of the political uses of classicism. It is essential to start with some attempt at defining "classical" and "neoclassical," which will almost certainly necessitate subjective, proscriptive, idiosyncratic and debatable divisions. The understanding of such terms and of the importance of this topic is necessary to frame this politico-historical contextualization. A brief history of classicism will aide the understand of how a neoclassical style was used by the fascist regimes. Yet such a history, as has been intimated above, is much of the cultural history of Europe. My brief history begins not in the 17th or 18th centuries because the fortunes of the neoclassical are there relatively well known through the unities, Racine, La Fontaine, Dryden, Pope, clarity, order, measure, etc. My interest is not where a classical style is dominant and practiced by the majority, but where it is one among many. Any history can easily run back, tracing origins as far as one might want. My outlined history begins with the French Revolution and continues to our concerns proper with the emergence of the classical in Modernism.

After a brief discussion of certain trends in Modernism applicable to its use of the classical tradition, I make a further attempt at defining classicism in relation to the

Modernist pursuit of the Ur, meaning the primitive and earliest, and by extrapolation, an authentic past or the experiential core of an aesthetic text which might enable the contemporary artist to tap into some central truth of human experience deep in pre-history. Such a definition, however accurate, is too large and beyond the realm of utility. From this I move on to examine the politico-historical context of 20th century classicism through a series of examples.

I begin by looking at the career of Maurice Denis, a French painter initially of the Nabis movement in the last decade of the 19th century. His paintings on classical themes depict Homer (c. 1889) or the Muses (1893) in his contemporary Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Denis represents a conservative artists' engagement with the classical tradition intertwined in the early development of French fascism. He believed order and a classical purity were ideals with which to avoid the decadence of subsequent avant-gardes which followed the Symbolists and the Nabis. Denis is a transitional figure from the 19th century to the 20th and from conservatism to fascism, but he espouses a strikingly Modernist attitude towards the classical, arguing for a synthesis of the most recent artistic styles with the classical tradition. Denis articulated the Modernist use of the classical tradition thirty years before its flowering in the 1920s.

After my discussion of Denis, I examine Robert Brasillach's novelistic biography of Vergil, *Présence de Virgile* (1931), which casts the Roman poet as a contemporary fascist most reminiscent of the text's own author. Brasillach had explicitly stated that he wanted the reader of his volume to approach Vergil as if he were a young Italian of the 1930s. He presents Vergil as infatuated with Augustus as a strong leader, and believing

that his country could only be sustained by such. Brasillach made a clear parallel between Augustus and Mussolini, whose equation had long been a trope of Italian propaganda. Brasillach interpreted Vergil's literary work as a defense of despotism and imbued it with his own fascist belief system. Brasillach serves my study as an example of a fascist writer re-writing classical antiquity for political reasons, presenting the most esteemed Latin poet in a consumable form, already given a political, ahistorical interpretation.

From Brasillach's use of Italian fascism, I move on to discuss how Mussolini and Italian fascism used the Roman empire for mythic legitimacy and an imperial project. Mussolini was insistently equated with Augustus. He became the Emperor's inheritor and his quasi-Christian rebirth. I examine in particular the mosaics (1937) of the Foro Mussolini. These mosaics designed by Gino Severini among others depicted fascist subjects in a black and white figure form, a classical style only discovered in Msusolini's own excavations at Ostia.

1.3 Framing 20th century classicism

20th-century classicism is dominated by the fascist political appropriation of the style after it had already developed. Emerging in the 1910's and flowering in the 1920's, the classicizing element in Modernism was not tied to a specific political ideology until retrospectively after the Second World War. It was extolled in France by the political theorists of the Action Française, but it was not indubitably linked to them. What occurred is simply that as a style it was hijacked by the political right, particularly the

French right who turned abstract ideals like clarity, measure, and order into descriptive adjectives for the nation and a French, Latinate tradition. A classical style, as we shall see, is however conducive to such a political appropriation because it is so flexible and can be imbued with political signification dependent upon context, while it fundamentally offers little more than a few symbols, some narratives, and the above abstractions. Artists recognized that the classical past in providing relatively simple themes and narratives affords enormous liberty to their artistic production. They could ultimately provide the content, the perspective, the signification, the angling, while antiquity provided the raw, empty form to be thus filled out.

1.3.1 A style among many schools

The neoclassical in the 20th century should be recognized as an occasional predilection or even a mode, not a school. Never codifying into a real movement it had proponents across continents and media, blossoming at certain times particularly after the First World War in the tendency which Cocteau and Pound referred to as the *rappel à l'ordre*, but also in Italy surrounding the journal *Valori Plastici* which in turn led to the fascist Novecento, and in the United States around the conservative, Southern writers of *The Fugitive* journal who reacted against Eliotic Modernism in favor of a vague classicism. Modernism consisted of a variety of avant-gardes, artistic movements, and artists who were apart from or occasional members of these styles and schools. A Greco-Roman influence in subject, style, and preoccupation often occurred throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Yet this cannot be constituted as a school or movement

because artists and writers engaged the classical tradition only on occasions. The example of Picasso, mentioned in passing above provides a good working model. His classicizing paintings occur throughout his career, before, during, and after the Cubist moment. There is no neoclassical phase or period in his work.

1.3.2 Classicizing texts outside the master narrative of innovation

The traditional narrative of the development of art privileges innovation, justly, because of its ease in moving from one point to the next, that is narrative-production. However, such a narrative is by its nature a survey and not appropriate for a study as it disregards work which does not conform to its priorities. As such, a narrative will ignore both the traditional, the typical, and texts or examples of artistic work by major artists that do not exhibit such progress or innovation.

1.4 The importance of the classical in the twentieth century

1.4.1 Primitivism

In the search for new modes of expression, Modernism rapidly turned to primitive and exotic art[3] seeing there a fresh way of looking at the world and constructing representations of experience. Based on the experience of primitivism, artists turned to their own cultures and attempted to find an originary art, which was both true and new to contemporary eyes. The primitive influence on Modernism influenced Cubism, Stravinsky in the *Rite of Spring*, Surrealism, and much else. Yet after its explosion it seemed to vanish, along with this search for an authentic, immediate, and original art.

Such a search did not end but was re-directed to the European heritage, to classical antiquity.

Primitivism should not be seen solely as the influence of African and Oceanic sculpture on Modernist visual culture or Jazz in European music of the late 1910s and early 1920s. Roger Shattuck argues that primitivism also incorporated, "children's art; the art of the insane; a powerful wave of interest in the occult, the spiritual and magic; and the constant presence of Bergson's philosophy of non-rational ways of organizing experience."[4] All of these inspirations to Modernism exhibit a drive to return to the most basic, the original, the sincere,[5] even the naïve, in short, the Ur, all of which can be interpreted as the pre-rational.

Artists who infused their work with the air of the primitive hoped to achieve an immediacy and vigor that centuries of Western art had lost. When Modernists turned to the culturally, aesthetically, and artistically different, they sought a new way of seeing reality. Sated by centuries of Western art, mimesis had become stagnant, had ossified according to the avant-garde. Primitivism offered the new which the Modernists had been seeking; clearly, none of these influences were actually *new*, but they were *new to* Western artists. Primitivism, in the wider sense of the various types of different art, provided an immediate solution to not only the question of newness, but also to the calcification of the Western tradition. In *Primitivism*, Michael Bell argues, that this emphasis emerged from "the interplay between the civilized self and the desire to reject or transform it."[6] Escape from a dying culture through primitivism offered an escape from the traditional, Western self.

Primitivism must be considered in any discussion of Modernism because it clarifies the stylistic influences upon the search for the new. Artists read the art considered primitive as a vigorous depiction of the real and the fundamental, an immediate response to the universal human condition that was not mediated by an ossified culture. Primitive art was viewed as art at its most fundamental and natural form, the pure expression of humanity. If the Modernists were to tear apart and rebuild art, inspiration was to come from artifacts that were perceived as unadulterated artistic responses to the human condition.[7]

1.4.2 Classicism as primitivism

Twentieth-century neoclassicism is a logical extension of primitivism and the search for the Ur. If the pre-war era turned for one of its major inspirations to the "primitive" art of Oceania or Africa, after the First World War such primitivism had indeed run its course. But the search for the new continued, and artists turned to European antiquity to find that which could be combined with their own artistry to produce something novel. The fad over primitivism had died away. It had helped engender Cubism, but that was old hat now too. Classical antiquity, though of almost constant use in Europe, might provide the inspiration needed for another phase of modern art. And at the same time, it presented something sturdy, something that still remained through millennia, a solid, order after the turmoil of the Great War.

A most accurate definition of neoclassicism as a Modernist phenomenon would include primitivism and several other modes of radical (meaning a return to the root) and

reactionary (in its political sense) Modernism, making the term too difficult to actually use.[8] Such a definition, however accurate and useful for an understanding of international Modernism, is unwieldy.

Neoclassicism, thus, may be perceived as a movement within primitivism, or at least a contemporary movement with the same project. Neoclassicism too emerged as a reaction against ossified Western culture. Greece and Rome, and also pre-Romantic neoclassicism for the French and the Ballets Russes, served as inspirations and artistic models. Antiquity offered artists the same fount of ur-art with stylistic perfection. Still perceived at this point as man's greatest achievement, classical art provided Europe with its own primitives.

By 1920, Cocteau had called for an end to traditional primitivism: "The Negro crisis has become as boring as Mallarméan Japonisme."[9] Primitivism, like Impressionism and Cubism, had become ossified, so the classical past offered new inspiration for the modern artists in search of the Ur. As the allure of the exotic waned, artists looked to inspiration in their own cultures, modeling themselves in part on the Pre-war Stravinsky.

Primitive art and classical art exemplified for the Modernists artistic work which exhibited not only the source of art and the initial representation and interpretation of artists in response to the human experience but also inspired formal traits which could be appropriated and deployed in their own work. The fevered emphasis on the site of artistic inspiration is clear in Picasso's *La Source*, following upon Ingres;[10] the name Vortex which connoted a fecund site, like pre-history or Classical Athens as they were

interpreted, of artistic innovation and activity, proclaiming itself equal, and better, than the continental movements;[11] Paideuma, which Pound described as "the gristly roots of ideas that are in action"[12] more specific than zeitgeist, which he accepted with its traditional meaning; and the intense excitement produced by James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, which both celebrated the power of myths and their interconnectedness inspiring innumerable writers.[13] Both primitivism and neoclassicism provided material for subject and material for outward artistic form, in other words a subject matter and style or form for containing the subject matter.[14]

When neoclassicism is contextualized within Modernism, it emerges as a type of primitivism. Neither classicism nor primitivism coalesced into any school like Dada or Futurism, both were responses to artwork which artists studied and subsumed into their own work. A neoclassical tendency or mode takes up the very action that primitivism did: a careful study and exploration of non-Modern art so as to enrich the contemporary art and literature of the contemporary period, to go through the old to get at the new.

1.4.2.1 From the Ur to fascism

Through modern history, from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century, European nations had all variously claimed to be the "true inheritors" of Greece and Rome.[15] Each nation therefore felt justified in its bid to become the new empire that dominated Europe not only politically but also as the true heir to the West's cultural heritage. Neoclassicism and the works of the classical tradition, especially after World War I, were in large part politically tied to this ideology, as we shall see.

The history of classical influence from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment is well known;[16] each culture sought to imitate and emulate antiquity, despite their divergent manners of doing so. In Germany for instance, this attitude of classical inheritance becomes associated with blood, national culture, and national identity, paving the way for the 20th century's meeting between fascism and classicism. For Winckelmann, Raphael represented the reawakening or reincarnation of the Greek ideal in European art. Winckelmann too sought the primitive and original in art, so he turned to Greece instead of Rome. His project becomes clearer in the context of Herder's insistence upon the folk of the nation.[17] Having expanded the "volk" of Germany to incorporate the folk of all Europe, Greece immediately becomes the source of the truest and most original European culture. Nazi Germany turned to Greece because of this intellectual tradition. Although the nation-state is still of the utmost importance, for a European community or for a Europe under the Third Reich, ancient Greece becomes the definitive cultural ancestor. Neoclassicism's place in Nazi mythology is clarified by combining Winckelmann's Grecophilia with Herder's emphasis on the folk.[18]

France, on the other hand, had its own classical period, steeped in antiquity. There was no need to become the inheritors of the classical past by leaving its national boundaries, for, in effect, 17th century Neoclassical French literature already demonstrated it.[19] During the First World War, a classical France became the homeland, even the pinnacle of European aesthetic achievement, to be defended from Teutonic force.[20]

The classical past served as an original locus of creativity for the west, representing ancestral art of formal perfection. The search for the primitive led back to the classical because primitivism had been incorporated into Modernism and no longer offered the new, which classical antiquity seemed to be offering to some artists. On its circuitous journey back into art and literature as a major influence, classicism had gained a very definite political meaning during World War I and for groups that espoused what would become fascism. Classicism offered artists a style that could be explored and was markedly different from its immediate predecessors' cleaner break with the past. For conservative theorists, critics, and artists it seemed to provide a return to clarity and order, to established, national values against a wave of decadence in society and the arts. The trope of the source in Ingres and Picasso as a site of classical inspiration became the classical past itself, offering new art through classical tradition and modern innovation, just as primitivism had done. Antiquity, like tribal art, could be appropriated and re-deployed, the authentic texts of each used to produce a new "authenticity."[21]

1.5 Flexibility and empty signification

One of the reasons for the popularity of classical themes, tropes, figures, and styles is their very flexibility. It can be read as simply a text which returns to antiquity, or through a political context it can make the same text propound an ideological purpose. But it is not wholly dependent upon the artwork alone. The classical is a malleable mode which can reflect something as simple as tranquility or inspiration as in Picasso's *La*

Source, the freedom of the individual as in Sartre's *Les Mouches*, or celebrate the strength of a dictator or despot as in Brasillach's *Présence de Virgile*.

Because of the position of classical antiquity as a major source in the West, by the twentieth century it was commonplace and familiar. Its significations, the meanings to which classical objects were moored, erode with time. The discussion above of what constitutes classicism shows how the term has telescoped and hyperextended, signifying clarity and measure, the dawn of the West, rationalism, form, the antithesis of Romanticism or decadence, cold and intellectual art, etc.

Classicism provided ancient images and metaphors whose meanings were inherently malleable, providing new, old, partial, and non-meanings all dependent upon the artist's manner of using the stylistic. Daedalus could signify the artist, the minotaur could represent an aging painter, Propertius a contemporary poet, Antigone the French resistance, Augustus Mussolini.

For the Action Française, for instance, the ideal of "the classical" represented art that was morally and aesthetically good, as will be discussed below. "Classical" became an adjective to be used for approbation, though stripped of any signifying weight by contrasting definitions held by different critics.

Its very malleability lent itself to state art—of Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union, and the United States. It transitioned from offering a variety of recourses for the artist to offering nothing, to being utterly hollow. Arno Breker's sculptures of nude young men possess remarkably little inherent meaning derived from their neoclassical style. However, when positioned outside the Reich Chancellery or entitled *The Party* or *The*

Army, the nudes lose their signification as hollow men and become metaphors for the goals of fascism and allegorize the soldiers of the Third Reich. This metaphoric shift is central to the history of neoclassicism: a neoclassical sculpture invokes the antique past but without contextualization, the specific meaning is oblique. When placed in a political setting, the neoclassical sculpture can be imbued with specific meaning.[22]

1.6 A brief history of the neoclassical from the late 18th century to the early 20th

A brief survey of the use of classicism before the 20th century will give some historical context and background—showing how it worked before our period—but more importantly it demonstrates that the political dimension to classicism's symbolic system was well in use before the twentieth century. The classical represented the abstract ideals of order, clarity, and measure, and has long had a political significance, but one which continually shifted based on contemporary political realities. As the opposite pole of decadence, as the suppression of individuality, or as the visual metaphor for the strength of dictator and nation, such signifying baggage only developed in the first half of the twentieth century.

In nineteenth-century France, the import of neoclassicism gradually changed from being a manifestation of the Revolution to the Napoleonic Empire to an idealization of the individual, exemplified in painting by the shift from David to Ingres. For example, David's *Dead Marat* (1789) has the same austerity and simplicity as his earlier overtly neoclassical paintings such as *Andromache Mourning Hector* (1783), *The Oath of the Horatii* (1785), *Socrates Taking the Hemlock* (1787), and *Brutus* (1789).[23] But here the

implication of his classical style matter greatly. Used for the sake of contemporary politics, David presents Marat as a fallen classical hero. The stillness of the painting, the minute amount of blood, and Marat's composed face all present the revolutionary in the guise of the classical, all echoing the dicta of neoclassicism. David's construction of the rhetoric of neoclassicism in his depiction of Marat in the discipline and clarity of classicism, invested by the absence of other action, from the neoclassical rule of unity, David locked into the work of art the viewer's interpretation. Through David's design, it is possible to read the painting and understand the historicizing of Marat as a legendary, classical figure.

Neoclassicism for the French Revolution epitomized the ideals of virtue and liberty by focusing not on ancient Greece or Imperial Rome, but upon the Roman Republic as democratic inspiration. At Voltaire's funeral, in the procession towards his entombment in the new neoclassical temple of reason, the Panthenon, participants wore Roman dress.

David's Napoleonic art turned to the Roman Empire,[24] ideologically linking the two empires, which would become a common trope in twentieth century neoclassicism. With the fall of Napoleon, neoclassicism began its decline. David was ostracized because of his politics, and while large historical paintings were still prized by the salons, an interest in modern subjects emerged. Romanticism, the triumph of the bourgeoisie, and an extension of the ideals of the capacity and grandeur of man, enabled artists to view their work as more than simply second rate imitation of antiquity. Artists now could produce works which were not only as genuine as those of the classical world, but

which were also independent from it and had the capacity to surpass the Greco-Roman. While the immediate past of the Renaissance loomed over the artistic production of the eighteenth century as much as antiquity, the artist could still strive to express better than his forebears what had often been thought. The distinction between Greece, Republican Rome, and Imperial Rome as the direct source of inspiration clarifies an artist's political agenda. Artists of the French Revolution like David emphasized the Roman Republic, a model for their own Republic. With the ascendancy of Napoleon, the French Empire found the source of its own mythology in Imperial Rome.[25] Marat becomes a heroic figure equal to Pericles. And later Mussolini is given mythic legitimacy as a Roman emperor in the line of Augustus, a Caesar. A regime can attempt to legitimize itself through a historical or mythological metaphor or analogy.[26] This classicizing which sets the present in the context of the past defines the contemporary as, simply, important just like the Romans, Greeks, primitives, etc.

The triumphant individualism that prevailed in neoclassicism during the Revolution returned briefly with Ingres. His *Stratonice* (1840) was welcomed as a rejuvenator of art after the domination of Romanticism, evoking historical accuracy and realism inspired by excavations. The mid-eighteenth century excavations of Pompeii had been inspired, according to Arnold Hauser, by a "scientific pursuit of archaeology [which] first begins alongside the international movement of classicism."[27] While Pompeii went on to inspire paintings by Ingres' followers that displayed much the same archeological style and accuracy as *Stratonice*, Hauser argues that the excavations themselves were a phenomenon of the same larger movement of neoclassicism.

Stratonice's realism is tied not only to its emphasis on the source and a historical necessity for accuracy, but also to neoclassicism's celebration of individuality, which Romanticism, the artistic offspring of the Revolution, had in large part engendered. According to Hauser, this belief in the freedom of the individual is the "birthright of every artist and every gifted individual…All individual expression is unique, irreplaceable and bears its own laws and standards within itself."[28] Neoclassicism's individuality and its "simple, clear, and uncomplicated forms" led to its adoption by the growing middle class and bourgeoisie.[29] The strain of neoclassicism that followed from *Stratonice* led in turn to the "orientalist" and exotic classicism of later nineteenth century painters like Alma-Tadema and Puvis de Chavannes, providing an uninterrupted history of neoclassicism from Ingres to the twentieth century, usually ignored through histories more pursuant of "progress" in the arts.[30] As discussed previously, this strain of classicism, the reproduction of a vanished antiquity imagined by the artist, disappeared in the twentieth century.

Thus the semantic code of neoclassicism and politics had already well been established before the twentieth century. The political code of neoclassicism as a return to order personified by the Greco-Roman tradition is an aspect of the return to the folk or the ur-truth of the originary.[31]

1.7 The classical and the modern, from 1914-1939

As discussed previously, there was no movement of neoclassicism within twentieth century Modernism, however a pronounced tendency towards it appeared

during the First World War and continued in art until the end of the Second World War. Kenneth A. Silver traces its first genuine appearance in Modernism to Picasso's 1914 *The Painter and his Model* and continued in his 1915 portraits of Max Jacob and Ambroise Vollard.[32] Cocteau through the example of his art and in his nationalist manifesto*, Le Coq et l'arlequin* (1918)[33] which appropriated the rhetoric of classical inheritance disavowing international influence on French art, championed the new found classicism which Picasso had begun to engender. Collected in 1926 in Cocteau's volume *Le Rappel à l'ordre*, along with other pieces on music, a celebration of Picasso, and a memoir of his friend Maurice Barrès, Cocteau presented Le Six against Wagner and German music and as "the modern incarnation of the French tradition…[who] sought to 're-invent' French nationalism."[34]

Almost immediately after a viable Modernist classicism appeared it began intertwining with nationalistic sympathies. It was given a political interpretation almost as fast as it was spreading. General characteristics of art, clarity, measure, simplicity, accuracy became loaded as signifiers enlisted in the rhetorical landscape of twentieth century classicism. In France, where the classicizing began, it represented France. By the 1930s in Italy it represented the ancient past and the promise of a new order with Mussolini, and in Germany when the experimental became degenerate, such art locked into the established German predilection for the classical. Beyond the material artworks being produced, classicization began to represent simply ideals and national pride.

PART TWO:

The Conservative Classicism of Maurice Denis as Transitional Stage

2.1 Introduction to Denis

Maurice Denis was a member of the Nabis a late 19th century avant-garde of French painters. As a critic he wrote frequently on the previous generation of painters and singled out essentially those that history has as well—Cézanne, Gauguin, Redon, van Gogh, Pissarro, Maillol, and Sérusier. He was an important painter in the trajectory of the avant-garde on the way to Modernism, producing early in career several striking paintings including *Christ vert* (1890), *Les arbres verts* or *Les hêtres de Kerduel* (1893), *Le Calvaire* or *Montée au Calvaire* (1889), and *Tache de soleil sur la terrasse* (1890) which utilized the inheritance of Symbolism within the nascent Nabis aesthetics and point the way towards the innovations of Modernism that would emerge. However, art progressed without Denis, and as his style developed, it became more and more conservative.[35]

Denis amounts to a transitional figure who represents the conjunction of classicism and conservatism before classicism's appropriation by Fascists and proto-fascists. He is the century's first classical theorist. In his theoretical work, Denis articulates the combination that we will see throughout this study of the contemporary and the classical, articulating far in advance of Pound the necessity of the new along with the importance of the past. His own early art gives some indication of this as in *Homère*

parcourant les campagnes and *Les Muses*, but it is his theoretical work which sheds light on the aspects of antiquity which are appropriated in the 20th century and indicate how exactly classicism would become associated with reactionary politics.

2.1.1 Denis' classical theory

Denis' signal importance in twentieth century classicism lies in two domains: his classicizing paintings which consciously anachronize classical figures, Homer, for instance, in Denis' contemporary locale, Saint-Germaine-en-Laye and in his theoretical writings which argue for a synthesis of the classical tradition with modern innovations in technique. He asks the reader to imagine the ideal contemporary classicist, a Claudel who is not obscure, a Cézanne who paints history like Delacroix.[36]

The "aurore d'une période d'art classique,"[37] which Denis prophesizes, will be something new. It will not be a repetition of the Greek, Italian, or Gothic past. Though it will still draw on French sources, as it is going to be a French classical art. It will not be a national style, entwined in the dangers of nationalism. Denis' idealized classicism was beyond the reach of his own art. By the early 20th century his art had atrophied into paintings on religious and familial themes with a smattering of the nationalism he disavowed.[38]

For Denis, the classical was not simply a valorized ideal, it was a living force. Greco-Roman art was "la patrie de ma pensée."[39] All the forces of the past, the venerable examples and happy formulas on display in museums should provide the raw material for the artist.[40] Denis' espousal of a synthetic classicism occurred, later than he would have

wished and in a form different from how he envisioned, in the blossoming of the classical that occurred during and after the First World War, in the *rappel à l'ordre* of the 1920s.

Classicism provided order, the framework in which to construct new art, just as it offered a political order to consolidate the aesthetics which fascism would pursue, collecting all individuals, subduing all art, enlisting tradition into an ordered hierarchy dominated by metaphor. The classical tradition would be reduced to a vehicle for the tenor of fascist propaganda.

2.1.2 Maurice Denis' politics

Denis held deep seated conservative allegiances as a friend of George Sorel Charles Maurras, and Adrien Mithouard, a contributor to the conservative journals *L'indépendence* and *L'Occident*, the founder and president of Saint-Germaine-en-Laye's chapter of the Action Française, and an anti-semitism, though rarely displayed in public that made him an opponent of Dreyfus.[41] While classicism was intertwined with Denis' conservatism, he never articulated a connection between the two and went so far as to disapprove of nationalism in art, beyond an enthusiasm for French art along with that for classical and Italian Primitivism. The word "order" as an indisputable value systematically appears throughout his writings, but it is always limited to the context of art. Denis represents an artist who could be seduced by the conservative rhetoric that equated those politics with the aesthetic values he shared with proto-fascists.[42]

Despite an antipathy towards Italian fascism,[43] Denis wrote positively of the Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista (1932-1934). In an article for the 1935 *Encyclopédie*

française, Denis discussed the death of large historical paintings by cinema and photography, how recordings of the First World War in effect superceded paintings of the 1870 Franco-Prussian war. But he moved on to discuss the mobilization of art as propaganda in Fascist Italy. "Pour trouver un bon exemple actuel d'un art d'éducation et de propagande, d'un art partisan, on peut citer l'exposition de la Révolution Fasciste à Rome, 1933-1934…On y voyait l'emploi systématique de moyens nouveaux pour émouvoir et passioner un public[.]"[44] While Denis observes that the Exhibition does not appeal through the work of painters, but cineastes, photographers, and decorators through color and light, he neither celebrates nor denounces it. Denis recognized the "direct action on the nerves"[45] of the art exhibited, the artistic technique of propaganda and, elsewhere, the bravery of young fascists.[46]

2.2 Creative anachronism and classicism in two paintings

Denis' paintings on classical subjects are fewer than those on religious. Denis' paintings are riddled with nymphs in arcadian landscapes and sacred woods, women in the dress of korai. Like Ingres before him and Picasso afterwards, among many others, Denis painted eternal springs, sites of artistic inspiration.[47] The most striking aspect of these paintings, and, for that matter, some of those on religious themes, is where he set the narratives. Homer and the Muses are dressed in contemporary clothing, set, along with Nymphs in local, French landscapes. This creative anachronism[48] is a typical trope of Christian iconography where artists engage a Christian narrative, add their own elements, and set it in a Dutch room or an Italian portico. As in the example of Biblical

typology, the adoption of these tropes from Christianity is performed and acceptable because the classical tradition fulfills the same function, only in an aesthetic dimension, that the Biblical tradition serves spiritually.

Beyond Christian iconography, such creative anachronism is widespread. Shakespeare put his Romans in Elizabethan dress, and we put him in our own. Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius* is riddled with such conscious anachronism, which, by so flagrant an example as a cellar not equipped with a "frigidaire patent," demonstrates its nature as a form of juxtaposition—the antique with the modern. This anachronism for a Christian artist demonstrates the gospels as a living truth, something believed and believed to be alive in the present.

When applied to classical mythology, creative anachronism turns the Christian symbolism of a living truth into a metaphor for the experience of antiquity to be appreciated, conserved, and imitated, as a still profitable source of inspiration to contemporaries, as we shall see in Denis' Les Muses below. The anachronism, like breaking the "fourth wall" in a play, does not simply emphasize the artificiality of the work of art at hand, but accepts it as a given. The classical past has vanished and cannot be revived. But when recreated anew in a contemporary setting, the artist creates the past as meaningful for the present, for Denis Homer becomes a young, contemporary artist. It is a trope which announces the present validity of a narrative either believed to be true through a religion or symbolically true for the human experience, and forces the viewer to transcend the painting if faithfully inclined, or recognize the familiar from the Western tradition as still valid and evocative. The anachronism presents the work as a

reconstruction for a modern audience, a self-reflexive concession to its modernity while highlighting the symbolic importance of the artwork's theme or subject. The elements of the classical past operate on a symbolic level. Disabused of truthful accuracy, such mythological detritus attempts to convey the import of a given myth to a viewer's life, i.e., what do the Muses really represent to a late 19th century audience: artistic inspiration. The metaphorical core of a mythological subject—Homer as artistic genius, the Muses as artistic inspiration, or Christ as model for one's life—is revivified for an audience when the narrative is made contemporary.[49]

2.2.1 *Homere*

Homère parcourant les campagnes (1888 or 1889) avoids historical reconstruction and positions Homer in the French countryside around Saint-Germaine-en-Laye, influenced by his master Puvis de Chauvannes. Here, Homer, always bearded, is not the old blind poet, but an adolescent prophet and artist. The other figures in the painting regard him with awe from a distance. Homer looks toward the sun with his right hand raised, possibly the painting's sole relation, besides titular assignation, to any classical precedent. The poet is, after all, blind and senses through feeling the sun's heat, raising his hand towards it and the solitary path he makes. Thus Denis, as a painter, associates himself and the viewer with the poet through the material essentials of his medium, light. Denis' medium is exactly that which the poet cannot appreciate, but the two artists still look upwards, symbolically and literally, to the light of inspiration.

Homer represents an idealized artist, one with genius and great talent. But here, like the young Maurice Denis, he is in his apprenticeship, learning his craft. Homer is in the process of learning the world through his four senses, for the two poems that he would achieve. A century before Denis' painting, Friedrich August Wolf had disrupted the certainty that there had ever been a historical Homer,[50] but such a question in regards to the painting is moot as Denis has already dismantled any allegiance to historicity by setting his more-or-less mythological topic in the late 19th century French countryside. In fact the disruption of an authentic Homer made Denis' painting possible. The images we have of the poet are ancient inventions of a bearded, wizened old man that might as well be Tiresias. Denis' fictive painting thus disregards the question of authenticity in favor of positing a more important truth, that of the metaphorical truth of myth. It does not really matter if there was a Homer or not, rather Denis' figure represents the first genius of the West, out of time, but in his own beloved countryside. The painting dramatizes Denis' "aurore d'une période d'art classique" by making the site of this new dawn his own home and reflecting himself in the originary poet.

2.2.2 *Les Muses*

Denis other most successful painting on a classical theme, 1893's *Les Muses* also uses creative anachronism. Classicism in this painting as in *Homère* arrests time and presents the past in the present. Denis transforms the Greek Muses into French women, both representative of the national and classical ideals of order and clarity and metaphorically rich as the inspiration for art. The Muses, here with a shadowy tenth, are

again in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, the terrace supplying a Puvis-like sacred wood. The muses, all in contemporary garb recede throughout the painting from the three seated in the foreground, to six standing in pairs, to a final one seated in the distance. The ground, scattered with leaves, the mirror image of those unfallen from the trees, looks like an elegant bi-colored carpet and gives, along with the two simple chairs, the foreground a feeling of a room opening into the wood. As the viewer looks at the three seated muses, it becomes evident that all ten share the same features.

The muses are undifferentiated with the exception of two in the foreground and two in the rear looking at a role of paper. One sharpens a pencil while the other looks away from an open book. The muses are all unidentifiable. The open book on the lap of the pencil-sharpening Muse looks like a sketchbook with a drawing. The only symbol associated with a muse that Denis employs is the scroll (for Clio, of history) that the two distant figures examine.[51]

Denis' painting, devoid of the Muses' traditional symbols, is not concerned with which is which, just as he is unconcerned by the authenticity of Homer. Rather, the painting depicts the Muses at their leisure. They are home in the sacred wood, and most are, in fact, chatting. Each face bears the same expression, that of serenity and calm. Denis' use of anachronism makes them eternal and, thus, still giving inspiration in Denis' own time. The role of classicism here was to arrest time and transpose it to the present. To fulfill his project, Denis unlocked narratives and made them pertinent to any time.

2.3 Denis' Theory of Classicism

2.3.1 Engagement with the Greco-Roman

Denis' work and thought both became more conservative aesthetically as he aged. While the Italian Renaissance, particularly Fra Angelico, upon whose grave he always prayed, Poussin, Puvis, Gauguin, van Gogh, and Cézanne were his most important influences, the Greco-Roman tradition would play a central role in his life.

Denis was deeply moved by classical art. For example, in *Charmes et leçons de l'Italie*, he describes a trip to a Palermo museum and his enthusiasm for fifth century Greek sculpture. The metopes were

> [b]elles d'une beauté qui défie toutes les critiques, qui ne relève d'aucune école, qui d'épasse toutes les règles, au point de faire douter la valeur des règles, si l'on ne savait qu'on se trouve ici au point de perfection entre les lourdes traditions primitives, (encore visible aux métopes du temple), et l'élegance classique des siècles postérieurs. Tout dans cet art est d'une spontanéité admirable: tout y est vivant et tout concourt à traduire une vie intesse et supérieure…"[52]

So impressed as to even question rules and a structuring order, Denis recognized the living quality of classical art, what through the trope of creative anachronism, he sought to achieve himself.

2.3.2 Classicism opposed to contemporary decadence

His near renunciation of rules in this encomium to classical art becomes even more forceful in relation to his other critical texts.[53] His 1904 essay, "Enquète sur la séparation des beaux-arts et de l'état," is a shrill denunciation of the latest generation of painters

whom he upbraids for their seeming abandonment of the rules of art. In the short essay's four pages, there are 13 exclamation points. The first two pages are essentially a violent rant. Denis wants to reclaim tradition in the vacuum of no national art and no study. "[C]'est l'anarchie."[54] The young artists have never been more free, have never had less discipline. Antiquity and the classical tradition represent not only what should be studied by the young artist but also the opposite of the decadence which he denounces. Denis rightly sees developing a cult of personalities and temperaments developing in the art world, a cult that would not be rampant until after the First World War. They create through their personal experience, unmoored like "Robinson on his island."[55] Denis desperately wants the excess of liberty to give birth to constraints. Yet Denis' polemic is essentially the habitual rage of an older generation at the excesses of a younger. But beyond this he gives a sense of the cultural milieu as it became receptive to classicism, and the political as classical virtues transformed into markers of a French national identity. When such ideals become equivalent, a classicizing style evolves into a political statement faster than artists at odds with that political wing can shed it.

2.3.3 Remaking the past in his own image

For all Denis' theoretical writings, there is a great lack of consistency. His defenders like Bouillon observe an intellectual development, but in the preceding essay of the same year, he ascribes similar traits to classical antiquity: "[L]e classique fait non seulement des éléments d'objet d'art, mais des éléments d'une nature à lui, refaite à son image."[56] Denis ultimately makes a distinction between a realistic art concerned with a height of mimetic exactitude versus both art which brings everything under the subservience of an ideal and an art devoted to an individual style. Such a formulation, however interesting for its general theoretical import, is of rather little use in practice. After all, classical art,

comprised of both Hellenic and Hellenistic which can roughly correspond to his latter and former descriptions respectively, is not so monolithic. Denis' most interesting paintings of creative anachronism, for example, remake the past in Denis' own image of it. Classicizing texts usually forsake to one degree or another, historical exactitude for creative license, aware, at least in Modernism, of the inability to accurately reproduce the past.

2.3.4 The pull of nationalism

In the same essay quoted above, Denis explores the tendencies of appropriating past art for nationalist purposes, which led in turn to the fascist conception of classicism. Denis begins his essay with as much:

> Le sentiment nationaliste qui devient de jour en jour plus jaloux et plus exclusif chez les peuples civilisés provoque actuellement un renouveau de ferveur à l'égard des Primitifs. Chaque nation, chaque groupe ethnique veut avoir les siens, les découvre avec amour, les préfère à ceux de la nation rivale. On change les attributions, on débaptise les tableaux, sous le couvert de l'érudition, en réalité pour servir l'orgueil national.[57]

While Denis' definition of primitives is more akin to the Italian variety of the Trecento and Quattrocento and does not include the work of the classical past or the art objects termed primitive in the early twentieth century's enthusiasm for such, he observes early on a trend that would only become stronger by mid-century.

Denis' major essays espouse nationalism, reactionary artistic technique, and a fundamental belief in order, seeking a classical light instead of the decadence of Modern art. In "La Réaction Nationaliste," an essay from 1905 dedicated to Adrien Mithouard, who

founded the anti-Dreyfusard art journal l'*Occident*, Denis discusses classicism. "Une des caractéristiques du classicisme, c'est donc le respect de passé…l'esprit de reaction. Telle est la docilité des classiques que leur plus chère ambition est d'imiter les maîtres."[58] He goes on to suggest imitating Poussin's method of imitation: to recreate, according to extant descriptions, lost paintings from antiquity, and draw figures based on statues and then invent with liberty and abundance in the manner of La Fontaine translating Aesop.[59] Denis' descriptions of classicism seem altogether more a description of his own artistic project or at least his ideals, never quite rising to his dream of Poussin or La Fontaine.

2.3.5 Prescribing the classical

Later in an essay from 1916, Denis devotes his conclusion to various prognostications for the future of French art. He sees "un art qui corresponde à la renaissance des énergies et des amitiés françaises."[60] This art will emerge after "une guerre où chaque Francais aura compris la nécessité du sacrifice, le bien-fait de l'ordre, la valeur de la force organisée, nous voici à l'aurore d'une période d'art classique."[61] He then enumerates the qualities of this new classic art specifying that it will not be a repetition of the Greek, Italian, or Gothic past. While still drawing on French sources, it will not revive a national style, etc. It will try to demonstrate an eternal beauty. He asks the reader to imagine, as was said above, a Claudel who is not obscure, a Cézanne who paints history like Delacroix.[62]

Denis' most important article, "De Gauguin et Van Gogh au classicisme," published in 1909 and reprinted as the final work in *Théories* gave the volume its subtitle. In this essay, there is a more definitive engagement and praise of order for its own sake:

> Le fait énorme c'est que depuis ce temps [the last decade of the 19th century] une evolution s'est faite en faveur de l'ordre…[L]a jeunesse est devenue résolument classique. On connaît l'engouement de la nouvelle génération pour le dix-septième siècle, pour l'Italie, pour Ingres: Versailles est à la mode, Poussin porté aux nues; Bach fait salle comble; le romantisme est ridiculisé. En littérature, en politique, les jeunes gens ont la passion de l'ordre.[63]

Despite Denis' enthusiasm, his time frame was off. It would not be until after the First World War that a classicism, one quite different from that which he had in mind, one which the painter probably could not have recognized, attained the position that he gives it. Much less would he have expected classicism and order to become so dominant as state styles and ideals, even though he recognized political passion for order developing in the young, who would soon enforce through violence his very ideals.[64]

However, in this essay, Denis does distance himself from the nationalism of the extreme right. He argues that where Barrès, Mithouard, and Maurras tell French artists to search for rules in the past of their own race, a national tradition gives nothing more than vague generalities.[65] The art of cathedrals, that of Versailles, the uninterrupted succession of masterworks from Poussin to Corot reveal simply the French taste—clarity, measure, and Atticism. But they offer few methods to perpetuate this prestige.[66] Rather, Denis counsels his readers to look as he has done, to a larger tradition, that of Greek statues and Italian painting. Museums would provide the inspiration and the material for the new classical art. He always found his natural limits in the Greco-Roman tradition, "la patrie de ma pensée."[67] There the young artist reading his essays would find the right material for the new art he would produce.

2.4 Conclusion to Denis' synthetic classicism

Denis espouses synthesis through a study of tradition, here and there at odds with the French nationalists, but ultimately in alignment with their greater project and that which would emerge as fascism's. He clarifies his synthetic fusion through study of Cézanne and Gauguin.[68] He urges artists to seek the new order through combination of the past with the more recent past of the Post-Impressionists, to adapt the new elements introduced by Impressionism and use them. He counsels that the "fresh resources of modern art, *our realities*,"[69] permit artists to combine the example of the masters with the exigencies of our own sensibilities. His variety of Symbolism, "far from being incompatible with classicism, can renew efficacy and grasp admirable developments."[70] Thus, Denis' seeming conservatism finally comes around to the avant-garde uses of classicism that would develop in the 1920s. His classical theory prefigures that of Cocteau. Denis articulated the role of classicism within Modernism and became twentieth-century neoclassicism's first theorist.[71]

PART THREE:

Fascist Neoclassicism in Robert Brasillach

3.1 Introduction to Brasillach

Robert Brasillach, the only major artist executed for collaboration after the liberation, was enamored of the classical as an ideal and an idea. Brasillach's litero-critical output illustrates how classicism was used by the far right in France before the Second World War. He wrote novels, articles, plays, memoirs, critical studies, biographies, and poems, but despite its variety it was frequently moored to classical topics. His first work was a pseudo-biography of Vergil, the *Présence de Virgile* which explicitly told his audience to

read Vergil's life as if he were a contemporary, coming of age in a period that needed the strength of a dictator, and transforming him into a fascist artist before a reader's eyes.[72] He produced a study of Corneille, another of Chenier, and a play about Berenice, Titus' Jewish mistress. He edited, introduced, and translated a three-hundred page anthology of Greek poetry from Homer, through the tragedians and lyricists, to the sixth century AD. He wrote articles on Anouilh, Giraudoux, Gide and Cocteau. Brasillach saw classicism as the life-blood of fascism. Fascism represented a return to classical aesthetics and provided a model for the fascist work of art.

Brasillach matured in the environment produced by the Action Française, whose taste was usually defined by the political allegiance of an artist and always by classicism as an ideal and a goal. France was seen as not simply the inheritor of a Latinate sensibility, but as the only modern nation to produce a classical art of its own. Likewise the French Revolution was perceived as a continuation of the values of Democratic Greece and Republican Rome. World War I was viewed and presented by French scholars, critics, philosophers, and artists like Alfred Croiset, the French authority on Greek democracy,[73] René Doumic, the editor of the *Revue des deux mondes*,[74] Henri Bergson,[75] and Auguste Rodin[76] as a defense of classical virtues from German barbarism, engendering the environment that would lead through the Action Française to Brasillach's equation of classical and fascist values.

In *Présence de Virgile*, Brasillach announced his position as a writer of the far right, grounded in classical antiquity. His biography of the Latin poet displayed his ability as a writer unnoticeably intertwining lines of Vergil into his descriptive prose.

More important, the book's political project equated Vergil to youthful artists like Brasillach himself, and described a cultural milieu in Republican Rome like that in contemporary France. The great Latin poet is driven by both art and politics into praising Augustus as a savior for his nation, but presenting the poet as a contemporary engendering the clearly designed parallels with emergent fascism.

3.1.1 Flexibility of classicism as used by the right

Classicism and neoclassicism are inherently malleable. Works of art can be imbued with ideology. Arno Breker's sculptures, for instance, are hollow men, husks without much inherent meaning, but when entitled or positioned outside the Reich Chancellery, their meaning can be quickly identified.[77] The epitome of this mode of signification occurs when Brasillach writes the biography of an ancient Roman poet, turning the life of one of the most important poets ever into a fascist allegory. Classicism is a slippery term to define, as has been seen. For the Action Française, the classical simply embodied the good. Good art, good form, good tradition, the ideal to which one should strive.

3.1.1.1 Classicism and the Action Française

René Wellek, the émigré critic who in large part founded the discipline of Comparative Literature, analyzes and traces the development of classical criticism in "French 'Classical' Criticism in the Twentieth Century" focusing on its political use by the Action Française. Wellek argues that classicism is a native French invention; classics only existed in France after antiquity.[78] He opens the essay by exploring the development of the term classicism, created in opposition to Romanticism. "Classicism"

originated as a negative definition, opposed to something else, thrusting into high relief the constant problem of what it means. Typically, when assigned to a text, it vaguely signifies a general tradition to which the work is a part.

It was the favorite ideal of the critics of the Action Française, and it was always positive.[79] Wellek devotes two-thirds of his article to Maurras' circle which included Brasillach.[80] For the Maurrassians, classicism essentially became a synonym of tradition. It incorporated all of their tastes and predilections and was used as the opposite of all upon which they spent their vitriol. Certainly it opposed Romanticism with which the Action Française was unanimously disgusted (see, for example, Léon Daudet's *Le Stupide XIXe siècle*). Racine and La Fontaine were exemplars of the tradition; for Maurras, he found his ideal in Mistral, Moréas, and France (despite their political differences).[81] Their tastes were greatly motivated by their political allegiances (and those of the writers whom they critiqued). But both Maurras and Brasillach were critics capable enough to divorce their politics from their aesthetics, at least to an extent, and praise writers with whom they would certainly have disagreed.[82]

Problematically, Wellek adheres to a definition of classicism based solely on French culture, like the critics of the Action Française. He focuses on the taste of the critics, disputing their interpretation of the classical. However the signal importance of 20th century French classical criticism lies in observing the critics who believe themselves to be classical, and identifying their allegiance to tradition as a political one. Wellek's article remains a survey, as it was designed to be, of the critics who engaged the ideal of classicism in the early 20th century.

3.1.1.2 Arresting the Signification of the Classical

Classicism is reduced to simply the traditional, or some strain evolved from the traditional, as opposed to the excesses of something contemporary. This is in large part how the term has been used in practice among artists and professional critics in the battleground of high culture. Such an understanding of classicism emerges directly from the style's malleability. Simply put, it could represent whatever positive quality or ideal the artist of writer positioned it to mean.

It is the very flexibility of the term that allows for confusion and argument. Presenting a critical or artistic project as classical self-validates a writer's work, lodges it within the tradition, and ascribes the work to the amorphous ideal. In a landscape like that leading up to the Second World War, critics of the far right appropriated it for their own political project. Cocteau in positioning Les Six as inheritors of melody and clarity transformed them into saviors of a French, national identity. Bergson could claim that even French factory workers left a classical, Latin imprint upon their wares through simply being French.[83] The Action Française could claim d'Indy, Denis, and Maillol for themselves and as saviors of a national art.[84] Classicism had been deployed as a trait of France and the French in the First World War, in opposition to Germany. By the 1920s, a classicizing style had clearly emerged in Modern art, but its political import was not fixed. The critics of the Action Française, adapting the propagandizing wartime implications of the classical, codified its political implications in France at the same time as it was deployed in Italian state art. Where classicism had been an amorphous style not

irrevocably tied to any particular allegiances, as the 1930s continued its signification gradually reified into meaning the political right. And the term has still not been salvaged from the uses to which it was put in the first half of the twentieth century.

3.2 Significance of the *Présence de Virgile*

Brasillach's life of Vergil, written before his political beliefs had completely matured, presents Vergil in the same state as susceptible to the variety of influences at hand. Beyond the egotism of equating Vergil with himself, Brasillach produces a parable for the young artists of France. Brasillach attempts to make Vergil a living presence for France, within the project of prizing France as the present incarnation of the classical tradition. Brasillach deleted all specificities from the book's opening chapters, arresting time as Denis had done in his creative anachronism. Vergil's youth is made timeless and eternal, just as Vergil's texts are perceived as timeless works of art. With his elision of antiquity and the present, Brasillach consciously erases cultural difference making the narrative applicable to the present and his allegorical treating of Vergil revealed. This project coincides with the political import Brasillach inscribes into the text. As Vergil has moved forward in time, Brasillach's political allegiances move backwards—describing the perils of republicanism and the necessity of a leader, metaphorizing Augustus as Mussolini.

Brasillach presents Vergil's texts as the logical outcome of the various influences, literary, cultural, and personal, with which he brings the poet into contact. The *Présence de Virgile* is in truth a narrative of the maturation of Vergil, in which the poet's support

of Augustus is made an inevitable outcome of his intellectual formation. Brasillach forces the reader to understand Vergil's literary output in terms of Brasillach's own proto-fascism, understanding Roman culture in terms of the French right, transforming the Roman Republic into the Third Republic.

3.3 Background to the *Présence de Virgile*

While studying at the École Normale Supérieure, Brasillach produced, extra-curricularly, a life of Vergil, *Présence de Virgile* (1931), what Frank O. Copley called "a Virgil-for-the-left-hand-alone."[85] It is not critical or scholarly, not dependable, not original but deeply indebted to the older lives of the poet, from Donatus[86] (4th century) to André Bellesort (1919). Brasillach, unjudiciously, repeated everything to be found in the lives as if they were fact, aware that the earliest were written centuries after the poet's death and classical vitae were often spurious, presenting essentially a historical novel

The *Présence de Virgile* was most notably indebted in material to Bellesort's *Virgile: Son oeuvre et son temps*.[87] Bellesort was himself an ultra-right wing nationalist and would be a contributor to Brasillach's *Je suis partout*. Bellesort's text is marked by the same kind of project that would dominate Brasillach's. When Bellesort's *Virgile* appeared, Maurice Bardèche wrote that it made the *Aeneid* into "a sort of epic poem [épopée] of the Action Française."[88] Gérard Sthème de Jubécourt has shown the amount of textual influence of Bellesort upon Brasillach, giving roughly three pages worth of examples of what amounts to line-for-line plagiarism.[89]

There is a thorough attempt to modernize Vergil in both texts, to display him as familiar and of the hour. Bellesort grants at the very beginning that it is not a proper critical book, proffering no new readings, which Brasillach would do as well in the conclusion of his own. They are works of Vergilian propaganda, aimed to raise the poet's reputation. Their texts are introductions to Vergil and his work, which, as Theodore Ziolkowski notes, were correctives to German criticism that exalted Greece over Rome, Homer over Vergil.[90]

Both Brasillach's and Bellesort's texts are infected by a nationalist streak opposed to Germany, curiously enough. Bellesort was a member of the older Germanophobic French right, and this emerged explicitly in his attack on German critics of Vergil. But Brasillach demonstrates an admixture of this too (despite its Italian fasciophilia). This element returns to which European nation was the inheritor of antiquity, and, for that matter, which antiquity. Published immediately after the First World War, Bellesort's study represents the triumph of French classicism, and is about a Latin poet not a Greek, erasing German Greek scholarship.

Brasillach and Bellesort emphasize France's Latinity, while the German's turn instead to Greece, demonstrating the dual roots of classicist reactionary fascism. Brasillach and Bellesort emphasize a French national identity rooted in its Latin inheritance and reject as preposterous Germany's role as a classical inheritor through a rejection of Ancient Greece. If Denis represents a forerunner who equates classicism with conservatism, Brasillach embodies the next transformation equating classicism with French nationalism and fascism. What might appear a petty squabble among fascists

about the ludicrous topic of what nation is the true inheritor, the rightful embodiment of the classical past, corresponds to a conflict within fascism based on the nationalism inherent within the political movement. Where to an outsider fascism's idolatry of the classical might seem a unifying factor for the right in France, Germany, and Italy, it in fact underscores a nationalist rivalry through a myth of classical inheritance.

3.4 Arresting Vergil in time

The biography's title presents the nature of his project. Not labeled as a life or a biography, it is about the presence of Vergil in the modern world. Vergil's name does not appear in the text until the final word of the second chapter. Likewise no dates are mentioned. Brasillach mentions geographical names and later the names of other individuals. The purpose of this is explicitly stated in the book's final section, a "Note pour le lecteur bienveillant." He states,

> [O]n n'a pas voulu faire de roman historique. On n'a pas voulu y prononcer de mots qui ne fussent pas d'aujourd'hui…On a voulu que le lecteur pût commencer ce livre comme s'il s'agissait de l'histoire d'un jeune Italien de 1930, et c'est pourquoi les premières pages ne contiennent ni dates, ni noms[.][91]

Brasillach makes his analogy completely clear. This note is the key to the entire text. Vergil corresponds to a young artist of the moment, developing his style, producing his work, and growing up. "Le dessein de faire lire cette vie…comme une vie

moderne…L'homme change peu, et ses préoccupations, meme littéraires, reparaissent semblables après quelques années. Et Virgile est un homme de temps *présent*."[92] Likewise to emphasize the contemporaneity of Vergil, Brasillach peppers the text with allusions and analogies to other writers and texts that both came before Vergil and afterwards.

3.4.1 Augustus and Mussolini elided in time

The life's mise-en-scène is that of contemporary Italy, with all its fascist baggage, Brasillach's enthusiasm for Mussolini, with Augustus turned signifier for the current Roman emperor. Brasillach engages in standard Biblical typology, where Old Testament figures and actions correspond to those in the New Testament as completion and perfection, as will be discussed in the next major section of this chapter. The typological association of Augustus and Mussolini is designed into the text; Brasillach consciously engages in Italian fascist symbolism or fascist typology, au courant in the Duce's regime.[93]

3.5 Brasillach's prose

In the note, Brasillach discusses his use of Vergil's text, which Ziolkowski has critiqued. "On aurait déclaré enfin que c'était dans les poèmes de Virgile qu'on avait été chercher la connaissance la plus profonde de son caractère et de sa vie. Et cela, sans essayer de l'embellir."[94] In practice this amounts to Brasillach paraphrasing passages from Vergil's poetry and using them for description. Brasillach himself foreswears[95] total

invention for antique sources and uses only competent modern conjectures for all of his descriptive flights and the thoughts and words of his hero. Recall that Brasillach was trained as a classicist; he sought factual accuracy and enlisted invention only for the embroidery of his political project to make Vergil seem a protofascist and of his aesthetic project to make Vergil immediate and relevant. Brasillach intelligently selected a method that was grounded in vergilian sources for his novelistic life, though he wanted readers to view it as a standard biography, obfuscating his political project.

3.6 A royalist intervention in history

One element of invention on the part of Brasillach is carefully deployed Action Française propaganda, moving political analogy from fascist Italy to royalist France. In the first chapter, he discusses Vergil's youth in the countryside among the children of shepherds. Vergil joins the children in singing, "Le meilleur sera roi, tra la la."[96] This is clearly a foreshadowing of the rise of Augustus, masked as a childish ditty. What Brasillach consciously ignores is early Roman history. The idea of a king was anathema to all Romans, due to the abuses of the early kings. This clear factual error, that such a song would have existed, becomes an expression of Brasillach's and the Action Française's royalism. This lapse in Brasillach's avowed dedication to historical accuracy exactly reveals the nature of his project. He foreshadows Vergil's embrace of imperial power and makes it an inevitable outcome. For all of his statements about the truth of his narrative, his fabricated history is based upon his political desires for the future of France.

3.7 Brasillach maps himself onto Vergil

The *Présence de Virgile* presented numerous themes, including that of classicism, devotion to a strong leader, and an anachronistic celebration of bohemian life which Brasillach had himself enjoyed when he moved to Paris from Perpignan. Likewise, one of the most interesting qualities of Brasillach's Vergil is that he resembles no one more so than its author: an aspiring writer who moved from provinces to capital, became acquainted with vibrant literary circles, lived la vie de bohème, and became infatuated with a strong leader, the emperor of Rome. Jubécourt's discussion of the text is limited almost exclusively to biographical criticism, mapping Brasillach's life onto that of Vergil.

Jubécourt's analysis of the text along with those of Ziolkowski, Marc Chouet,[97] Copley's brief review[98] of a German translation, and Bardèche's introduction to the text in Brasillach's collected works,[99] represent the only critical discussion of the *Présence de Virgile*. Jubécourt's discussion is limited almost exclusively to the biographical, that is Brasillach's biography, how Vergil is double for the writer himself and, in the critic's greatest flights of fantasy, how all of the supporting characters map onto Brasillach's circle of friends—Maulnier equals so-and-so, Horace equals so-and-so. In addition to the autobiographical dimension, Jubécourt emphasizes another major element of *Présence de Virgile*, that it is not so much a biography as a notebook of the "movements of the soul,"[100] Jubécourt borrows the term "vie ranimée" from Léon Daudet, a Maurassian critic, to describe a litero-biographical study that focuses not solely on analysis of works, but also "des mouvements de l'âme."[101] This explains all of the atmosphere and seizures of description present in both Brasillach and Jubécourt, who praises Brasillach's evocations of the classical world and in turn writes evocatively of Brasillach's own group of young bohemians who would quickly don their blackshirts. These movements of Vergil's soul are

nothing more than those of Brasillach, valorizing his political beliefs by placing them in the mind of Vergil, giving the Action Française and nascent European fascism an origin within the classical tradition, a legitimacy which fascist neoclassicism had built all over the face of Rome, as well we shall see below.[102]

3.8 Violence and dictatorship

Brasillach repeatedly describes Vergil as enamored of violence and force, though not as greatly as Augustus who managed to quell his thirst for the sake of governance.[103] Even in Vergil's youth, Brasillach says that he knew the importance of order for his country, "cet ordre était nécessaire aux choses humaines, et la politique…venait l'instruire et le former."[104] These were the politics of Julius Caesar, who retained an important place in the mythology of Italian fascism as the strong general who took power and Rome. Vergil was still a young man, and Brasillach makes clear that he knew the necessity of such a leader for his country. "Pour sauver ce pays et cet ordre, il savait que la force était nécessaire. Mais il ne craignait pas d'en appeler à la force, il l'aimait[.]"[105] Notably, Brasillach uses the same phrase, "était nécessaire," two sentences apart, but never gives a reason for why it was necessary. The Pax Augusta that Augustus would bring and that would be repeatedly celebrated by the poets, was after all peace from civil war waged by these same rulers against their former friends. The Roman Republic was successful for 450 years until it was overthrown by these "necessary forces." Vergil is described as loving this power. "[I]l aimait les grands vainqueurs qui violent toutes les lois jusqu'au moment où ils donnent aux autres."[106] These conquerors are lawless and celebrated for it. They are leaders above the law and who make their own. This passage is followed by a short diatribe against republicanism, where Brasillach clearly expresses his own feelings.

> Alors, en haine des renoncements et des démissions, des bavards peureux comme Cicéron, de tous ceux qui gâchaient et perdaient Rome par des discourses et des combinaisons prudentes, il appelait à l'aide l'exaltante force, le grand corps puissant qui referait son pays dans le sang et dans la chair, comme on fait un enfant charnel.[107]

On the previous page, Brasillach insists that Vergil learned of this need for order from his readings where he studied the craft of literature and philosophy. In short, Brasillach makes Vergil's literary work interdependent with his proto-fascist belief system, a natural outcome of Vergil's readings of Lucretius, Theocritus, Homer, and Catullus, although how Catullus' dirty satires of Julius Caesar inform Vergil's belief in empire are left to the reader's imagination. Vergil believes, and thus Brasillach too, that his land must be remade in blood and flesh after the excesses, discourses, and prudence of a Senate too long in power.

Later, Brasillach makes Vergil promise to support Augustus, whom he loves with a "terrifying love."[108] Up until Vergil's death, "Il avait admiré la force[.]"[109] Brasillach's thin discussion of the *Aeneid* revolves, as one might expect, around devotion to the nation and a leader, to sacrifice, and to obedience.[110] Aeneas is the "treasurer of the people's blood."[111] And Brasillach turns the poem into a "political sketch," which "gives, in a poetic form, the most striking lessons of obedience, modesty, and sacrifice."[112] Brasillach has transformed the Aeneid through his revisionist history into simple propaganda, erasing any of Vergil's subversive innuendo.[113]

3.9 Conclusion

Brasillach's analogies and comparisons of Vergil to later writers are typically illustrative and understandable in terms of his project to make the swan of Mantua immediate to a contemporary audience. He compares Vergil to two of the most politically charged writers of the day, Barrès and d'Annunzio. Brasillach describes Vergil's role as a national poet, dismissing the official magistrate position of the British poet laureate, and instead comparing him to the role of Barrès during the war of 1914, and the aura that d'Annunzio held for Italians.[114] Brasillach goes on to observe that Vergil possessed more tenderness and humanity. It is more telling about Brasillach than Vergil that to describe the role of public artist he used two immensely popular, notorious arch-conservatives. Brasillach turns Vergil into a signifier, representing not only Brasillach himself but also the conservative young artist coming of age in the 1920s enamored of force and violence and susceptible to a strong leader. Brasillach transforms Vergil into a recruit of the Action Française or of Italian Fascism. The most striking literary predecessors to Brasillach's text are not the vitae or studies that he used as sources, but rather the ideologically-soaked early Christian saints' lives, allegories, and morality texts. In the Middle Ages, Vergil became a sorcerer, a virtuous pagan, but also a Christian because of the medieval interpretation of *Eclogue IV* as a prophecy of the birth of Christ. Brasillach's twentieth-century morality tale is a political allegory for how the artist should engage in politics, celebrate the ruler, and produce art to the glory of the nation. Brasillach reduces the greatest poet of Rome to a mirror-image of himself and a tool to produce propaganda and honor the machines of fascism.

PART FOUR:

Fascist Neoclassicism in Mussolini's Imperial Project

If you listen carefully…you may still hear the terrible tread of the Roman legions… Caesar has come to life again in the Duce; he rides at the head of numberless cohorts, treading down all cowardice and all impurities to reestablish the culture and the new might of Rome. Step into the ranks of his army and be the best soldiers.
Il capo centuria, 1938, a training book for ten-year-old boys.[115]

4.1 Introduction

While the French typically turned to their own neoclassical period, and the Nazis to Greece in accordance with their own historical predilections, ancient Rome served as a site both literally and figuratively for Italian fascism to excavate its mythological legitimacy and its political symbolism. Where Mussolini began using Julius Caesar as his historical precedent who seized power but retained democracy and crossed the Rubicon (though in a train this time),[116] he later shifted to Augustus, the first emperor proper and the bringer of peace throughout Rome. Mussolini's fascist project was to build an empire modeled upon that of ancient Rome. After the conquest of Ethiopia, there was a new Roman empire, a "Third Rome," which Mussolini and his regime used to signify a return to glory after the first of ancient Rome, and the second of the Popes. In fact, after the new empire was built, the ancient was no longer a model, but, as already discussed, became a type that prefigured and promised the new. It was the Roman Empire, which served as the locus of inspiration for artists, propaganda, and Mussolini's regime.

The historical legitimacy which neoclassicism gave to Italian fascism was exploited in massive archaeological excavation, architectural projects, and artistic decoration. The rhetorical project was made most effectively in the Foro Mussolini, a project completely dominated by a neoclassical style rife with the analogic link of Mussolini as a Roman emperor complete with his own forum. The mosaics which adorn the large piazza greeting every visitor to the complex are the most explicit artistic representation of the equation of the new fascist empire with that of ancient Rome. Produced in the classical black-and-white figure mosaic style recently discovered by Mussolini's excavations in Ostia, the mosaics present contemporary subject matter in a classical style, conserved only through a fascist project. Beyond this, however, many of the mosaics present scenes from Italian fascist history—the conquest of Ethiopia, the triumph of fascists against communists, soldiers, tanks, and the Foro Mussolini itself. In a manner the exact opposite of that used by Denis and Brasillach, the Foro mosaics historicize the contemporary instead of contemporizing the historical or mythic but still arrest time.

4.1.1 Classical reception studies and Italian Fascism

The amount of critical discussion on the nexus of Italian fascism and classicism is immense, and the focus varies wildly. Classical reception studies, an off-shoot of the larger discipline of the classical tradition, but more related to reception theory, focuses on the morality of appropriating the classical past. Clearly, when related to fascism, and it is usually Italian fascism, the subject becomes charged.[117] In other words, did fascist

appropriation taint the use of antiquity irrevocably? Moreover such studies use the sets of terms use/abuse and appropriation/misappropriation. The problem is, thus, how to tell one from the other. It sets the discourse in the realm of morality

There cannot be anything morally unacceptable about excavating and exhibiting Augustan monuments like the Ara Pacis. But, if Mussolini did it, clearly in an analogic project of self-aggrandizement, what happens then? For artists of the post-war avant-garde, *any* use of the classical was immoral.[118]

4.1.2 *Romanità*, flexibility, and Italian fascism

The concept of *Romanità*, that is "Romanness," held great currency throughout Italian Fascism. In a speech on May 2, 1922 Mussolini said,

> We dream of a Roman Italy, that is to say wise, strong, disciplined, and imperial. Much of that which was the immortal spirit of Rome is reborn in Fascism: the Fasces are Roman; our organization of combat is Roman, our pride and our courage are Roman: *Civis romanus sum*. Now, it is necessary that the history of tomorrow, the history we fervently wish to create, not represent a contrast or a parody of the history of yesterday…Italy has been Roman for the first time in fifteen centuries in the War and in the Victory: now Italy must be Roman in peacetime: and this renewed and revived *romanità* bears these names: Discipline and Work.[119]

Romanità can be no more evident than here. It emerges both in its relation to the past (archaeology and the ruins of Rome) and to the present (the state-endorsed style of neoclassicism in contemporary art) as a hollow shell or form that can be used flexibly by a regime. Italian fascism appropriates Latin antiquity as its birth right, model, and antecedent, its glories to be transcended by a promised golden age under Mussolini; it comes with some of the baggage of the past—the mental picture of Rome at its height—but ultimately signifies much less of the past than it does of the present. *Romanità* in art is a form that can be filled with ideology, or at least signifiers of ideology. This is the key to understanding the dominance of neoclassicism in not just fascist state art, but in a great deal of state art in general. It points to a rich past, but in its present it is flexible, associating past with present, but then more importantly charged with messages for the present and future.

The Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista (1932-1934) has received the most focus of the two large scale exhibitions that the regime produced, as a celebration of fascism by means of Italian Futurism[120] and the antithesis of the German Entartete Kunst exhibit. The 1937-1938 Mostra Augustea della Romanità was slightly more subdued, consisting of casts and replicas of sculptures, reliefs and inscriptions from Augustan Rome. It was a celebration of the two thousandth year anniversary of the birth of Augustus and presented an encyclopedic celebration of ancient Rome from the 8th century BC to the 6th century AD. But the purpose of the exhibition was clear; it underscored the similarities of Augustus and Mussolini, and the mythic renewal of the former in the latter. It attempted to define "Romanness" and what it meant to be Roman. Needless to say, when the power

to define is located in the power of the regime, meaning becomes highly specific and charged with ideology. Quotes from Mussolini assaulted the viewer,[121] and the Latin "DUX" instead of the Italian "Duce" inscribed eight times across the top of the façade made the exhibition's meaning clear.[122]

The '37 exhibition, mounted the same year as the Entartete Kunst exhibit in Munich, rejected Modernism for the neoclassical, just as Mussolini had done in abandoning Futurism. The utility of the avant-garde was exhausted. In Italy, the Modernists would not be purged, after all they were still useful for recruiting the elite, but there contribution as propagandists as deliverers of an imperial style was exhausted. The Mostra Augustea della Romanità presented a new fascist style palatable and comprehensible to every Italian, announcing unmistakably that Mussolini was the new Augustus and that fascist Rome would continue the imperial destiny of Augustan Rome. This exhibition sported over 3,000 plaster reproductions of extant antiquities (many still on display at the Museo della Civilità Romana). The exhibit presented the triumphs of Augustus alongside the triumphs of Mussolini, linking the two inextricably. It provided the fascist interpretation of Rome, "providing eternal inspiration and purpose for the Italian people."[123] The entrance of the exhibition was flanked by monumental statues of both Augustus and Mussolini. Rhetorically the manner in which Augustus' triumphs were deployed associated them inextricably to the fresh "triumphs" of Mussolini. Italian fascism became the culmination, the end-point of history. Ancient Rome was exalted not for what it was, but for what it supposedly foreshadowed. Rome itself became another tool of the regime. Both exhibitions were designed as places of instruction for Italian

youths. Field trips from schools were encouraged and were given reduced fees for both the exhibitions and train fare.[124]

4.1.3 Mythic spectacle and historic legitimation

Concomitantly, there have been numerous studies that focus on other particularities of the intersection of Italian fascism and classicism. Much has been made of the notion of spectacle, and Italian Fascism was in a sense defined by it.[125] There were fascist parades of people in togas carrying fasces, which too were seen everywhere, from the facades of buildings to the grates of sewers. Mussolini presented himself as a spectacle, often shirtless, or wielding a pickaxe at excavations of Roman ruins, engaged in sports. He produced a myth of himself.[126] Italian Fascism was obsessed with the spectacle of its own history (exhibiting itself in the Mostra) and haunted by that of Roman History.[127]

Such celebrations of history forged a mythic reality for Italian fascism and its leader. The new Roman empire appropriated the old as its historical analogue and decorated itself with its trappings. Italian fascism's spectacle produced a psychological façade at the same time as those corporeal of its buildings and of ruins excavated for contemporary legitimacy. By reliving the past in a triumphal march, dressed in speculative modern-versions of Roman dress, the new Roman empire celebrated itself as if it were ancient Rome, parading in a mise-en-abyme of its own carefully deployed analogies.

4.2 Italian fascism embodying ancient Rome

The epigraph at the beginning of this section demonstrates the prevalence of fascist propaganda yoking both Romes in school texts. Fascism revolutionized school instruction. A 1938 report for a conference on school reform said, "All Italian educational life must have one focus: Mussolini."[128] Similarly education must be inspired by ancient Rome. The minister of national education, Cesare Maria De Vecchi, argued in 1935 that Italy had a "perennially imperial destiny. Rome is alive…with all its wisdom, with all its power, in the heart of the Italian school and culture."[129]

In *Believe, Obey, Fight*, a study on the fascitization of youth in Italy, Tracy Koon discusses the changes that the fascist government instilled in the school curricula. Though the disciplines remained the same in primary schools, fascist propaganda was inserted into everything. Greek history was "minimized or overlooked entirely"[130] to give centrality to Rome in ancient history, just as Brasillach had done for France. Italy was given a "divine civilizing mission"[131] throughout its history leading from the glories of the ancient empire to the new. The period of unification in Italy, or the *Risorgimento*, was cast as the initial phase of fascism.

What occurred as Koon points out is that every event in fascist Italy was historicized in the schools. The trajectory and evolution of past history led directly to the fascist present, past glory to contemporary glory. The contemporary was given the mythic status of ancient Rome. The Italian youth were seen as the inheritors of past heroes, and the collapsing of timelines into trajectories made them the heroes of the future.

Just as Italian fascist neoclassicism arrested time in a different manner from other classicizing projects, so it used the classical divergently. The classical was not an empty signifier for Italy, rather it was mapped onto the very city of Rome, a concrete visual reminder. It is not a simple signifier or signified, rather it holds a wealth of meanings and significations, not a dead metaphor, but a bundle of associations, monuments, and realities even hindering movement through the city. The significance of the classical was astutely deployed by fascism in all of its projects and lent to it its guiding myths and metaphors

A famous poster presents two stone busts—one of Julius Caesar and one of Mussolini in his typical expression with lower lip outthrust. The bust of Julius Caesar is placed behind him looking out to the viewer. Mussolini is clearly placed in the role of successor while Julius Caesar looks out both proud of his successor and struck by his accomplishments. For the reproduction of this image in *Kitsch*, Gillo Dorfles provides the following quote from Rosavita's *Reincarnzaione di Cesare—Il Predestinato* of 1936: "Go! Caesar!...Your task is over; Benito Mussolini emerges in Caesar, as strong and powerful as in history; his determination has a supernatural, divine, miraculous quality, something of Christ among men!...Caesar outlined, initiated, dreamed; Mussolini perfected, fortified, created, achieved."[132] The government cast fascism as the consummation of the Roman empire, replete with busts of Mussolini, sometimes clad even in togas, the contemporary equivalent of the widespread use of Roman portrait busts.

4.3 Archaeology and fascism's neoclassical project

Mussolini was not solely concerned with the production of monuments to glorify his regime. He engaged in numerous projects of excavation and restoration, more often than not linked to Augustus: the Ara Pacis, the finest extant example of Roman sculpture which celebrated the Pax Augusta, the forum, excavated to "a consistent late Republican level," the fora of Julius Caesar, Augusts, Nerva, and Trajan, and the Roman port of Ostia (1938-1942).[133] Similarly, the Mausoleum of Augustus was "free[d]…from parasitic construction that concealed its circular form."[134] Under Rome's new emperor it could not do that the sanctuary that held the remains of its first be anything other than sumptuous. A piazzale was constructed around it which showed off its importance. The fascist architecture that was built for it still stands. Yet for all Mussolini's love of ancient Rome and the imperial precedent it set, he was most concerned with modern Rome.

The first new holiday that was instituted under Mussolini was the 21st of April, the birthday of Rome. It would replace May Day, that unpalatable socialist holiday. Yet the birthday of Rome was also a celebration of labor—according to Mussolini, the Roman, and now fascist, virtues of "work" and "discipline."[135] Mussolini had announced in 1921 that this would be an official fascist holiday, and in 1923 after they had seized power it became the first celebration instituted by the new government.

In a speech on the 21st of April, 1924, Mussolini announced massive building and excavation plans for Rome. They would exalt the specific, ancient Roman past at the expense of their more recent pasts. Mussolini would save the ruins of "their" Rome from what he called "deturpazioni mediocri," or mediocre besmirchment.[136] In 1929 when he

moved his offices to the Palazzo Venezia at the Capitoline, he made it known what this besmirchment was. The medieval "Pantani" quarter was demolished along with five nearby churches.[137] In building the Via del'Impero (now renamed the Via dei Fori Imperiali), he wanted a grand boulevard like those of Haussmann in Paris. It was made to link the Colosseum and the Imperial Fora to the Pizza Venezia, serving to unite antiquity with the present. Cutting through the ancient fora it visually linked where the old empire was governed to where the new would govern in the Palazzo Venezia. This was part of a building plan that served to visually and ideologically link Italian fascism to its supposed Roman predecessor. Everything that was found that was not Roman was promptly destroyed. Ancient Rome must be imminent, not simply because it was a model for modern fascism, but because it prefigured and announced fascism's coming. Yet this boulevard covered up and destroyed large parts of those same Imperial Fora which gave Mussolini his heritage. The demolition equated building with destruction and gave the images of Mussolini with his pickaxe their true significance.

Mussolini's attempt to link himself to Augustus, even Aeneas, and the modern Italians to the ancient Romans took archaeological projects further than the city of Rome itself. He sent a mission led by Luigi Ugolini to Butrint, Albania in search of the second Troy that Aeneas visited in the *Aeneid*. No second Troy was found, but many important excavations were done.

4.4 The Foro Mussolini

Similarly Mussolini's building projects themselves engaged ancient Rome. The public works projects consciously echoed what ancient Romans had created—major roads, public buildings and facilities, and even draining the Pontine Marshes, which had been a project of Julius Caesar's. Buildings themselves, as is always the case, embody the ideology of a period; and the monumentality of the architecture that was produced reflected both fascism and the importance of the myth of Rome.

Mussolini's three major building projects, neither excavation, renovation, nor temporary exhibition, but building new monuments for Italy, for the glory of his regime, were EUR, Città Università, and the Foro Mussolini (tastefully redubbed the Foro Italico). The Foro Mussolini was made in dialogue with the past. Mussolini's forum was built to dwarf the ancient fora. It appropriated their name, but not their purpose, and was designed to completely engage ancient Rome, from its obelisk, to its stadium and theatre, to the mosaics that decorated its grandiloquent opening piazza.[138]

The Foro Mussolini was designed to be a large athletic center comprised of two stadiums, swimming pools, baths,[139] and educational facilities. It is located north of Rome between the Tiber and the hills of Monte Mario and Macchia Madama.[140] The structure was adorned with much visual art including an immense obelisk, sixty statues of male nudes around the Stadio Mussolini, and mosaics. A colossal statue of Mussolini was planned but never finished.

The Foro was designed by Enrico Del Debbio, but the project was later taken over by Luigi Moretti. Renato Ricci, president of the Opera Nazionale Balilla (the system for the training of youths) and undersecretary of national education enlarged the scheme to

its massive dimensions. Del Debbio's first plan dates from 1927, and his second of 1928 provided most of the plans that were later realized. In 1932 the Foro Mussolini was expanded from the recently constructed Ponte Milvio to the Piazza d'Armi, a residential quarter, and became 850,000 meters large.

Most of the literature on the Foro concerns its construction and architecture; more recently the statues circling the stadium have be considered. From the perspective of art history, however, the most interesting features of the Foro are its mosaics which display a clear engagement with their classical predecessors, particularly those found at Ostia. There has been little consideration of the effect that the excavations at Ostia had upon the art of the time. Peter Bondanella in *The Eternal City* argues that the simplicity of arches and some of the brickwork recently discovered there influenced contemporary fascist architecture, selecting particularly I. Jacobucci's 1941 Monument on the Janiculan Hill, dedicated to the martyrs who fought for Rome, and the Termini Station which wedded simplicity of design and construction with the common materials of brick and travertine stone.[141] In the Foro Mussolini the effect of Ostian building is negligible. The Academy is made of exposed brick, but the rest of the major buildings were made of Carrara marble.

The mosaics of the Foro Mussolini are perfect examples of the utilization of classical forms for fascist propaganda. In fact, the form used here, that of black-and-white figure mosaics, had not been used since antiquity.[142] The area was designed by Luigi Moretti, flanking the Piazzalle with an enormous fountain and obelisk. Between the two are the mosaics made in 1937 by Achille Capizzano, Giulio Rosso, Angelo

Canevari, and the most famous artist to work on them, Gino Severini, a major Modernist painter.[143]

4.4.1 Gino Severini and neoclassical fascism

In 1900, Severini met Umberto Boccioni and Giacomo Balla, and became influenced by Italian Divisionist painting before moving to Paris in 1906. He met most of the Parisian avant-garde, becoming what amounts to a Parisian liaison for Italian Futurism, whose *Manifesto of Futurist Painters* and *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting* (both 1910) he signed. But his work stood apart from most of theirs, eschewing the machine for dancers to convey the same interest in movement and action, and he gradually moved from style to style, embracing Cubism, neoclassicism, and abstraction after the Second World War. His work, while not of the first tier, embraces many of the characteristic images and figures of modernist paintings, including Harlequins, Pulcinellas, and Pierrots, Futurist depictions of light, musicians and instruments, clippings pasted into paintings, and, as the 1920s progressed, columns and classical masks. After the First World War and into the early 1920s he began reading and studying a variety of theoretical texts on mathematics, architecture, traditional painting, geometry, and philosophy which would direct his painting away from Cubism toward what would become his neoclassicism. These studies culminated in the 1922 publication of *Du Cubisme au classicisme,* a manifesto for his rappel à l'ordre which expounded perspective, traditional figurativism, and mathematical design. He had never been completely comfortable with the Futurist manifesti to which he had subscribed. Marinetti

had asked him in 1913 to write his own manifesto. He had attempted to for a year, but Marinetti consistently rejected Severini's drafts. *Du Cubisme au classicisme* was his public break with Futurism and Cubism, a manifesto of his ideas a decade later, and presented the new direction that his painting was beginning to take.

He moved back to Italy in the 1930s and returned to Paris after the war. Throughout Severini's life he continued writing criticism and theory, and distanced himself from Mussolini and the regime by criticizing Italian fascism in these writings and in his autobiography. Besides the mosaics for the Foro Mussolini, he had little involvement with fascism, though he continued producing and exhibiting his works. His later essays are concerned with distancing art from politics, as in "Non-Political Collaboration."[144] He argued that beauty was the ultimate goal of art in "Le Vrai sens du classicisme" (1923).[145] Severini argued that this beauty could only be constructed through a study of craft, quoting Baudelaire, "tout les arts sont nombres."[146] He denounces decadent art, which amounts to that which he disapproves, like Denis before him and Pierre Boulez afterwards. In an epigraph that he wrote himself to a later article, he says that being modern is not enough. "Ce qui compte c'est de revenir aux lois de l'art avec un esprit nouveau."[147] In short, Severini's classicism is that of Denis and its other practitioners. The laws of art, the rules of form are essential. Conversely, old form alone does not suffice to make relevant art, the modern must be present as well.

Severini's classicism which emerged during World War I, like that of Picasso, gradually became entwined with fascism in his sketches for the mosaics of the Foro. He produced, as Denis had dictated and whom he had cited and praised in *Du Cubisme au*

classicisme, a synthesis of the art of the past and the art of the present, but in its manifestation, it had accumulated fascist signification.

The same year he published *Du Cubisme au classicisme*, Severini was commissioned by Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell to make a series of frescoes, depicting Harlequin and Pierrot for Montegufoni, their villa outside Florence. These frescoes are what began Severini's devotion to large scale public frescoes and mosaics, which would eventually lead to his work on the Foro Mussolini.

4.4.2 The Mosaics of the Foro Mussolini

Since their completion on May 17, 1937, the Foro Mussolini mosaics have been greatly damaged by both Allied tanks and utter disregard. They look towards the Tiber and the Ponte Milvio from the large Stadio dei Cipressi. The project and lay-out of the mosaics is clearly modeled upon those discovered in the Forum of the Corporations at Ostia. The sequence of mosaics continue around the walkway, which was called the Piazzalle dell' Impero.[148] However in addition to their similarities in construction and form, they provide glimpses of what each locale, the Forum of the Corporations and the Foro Mussolini, offered. The mosaics from Ostia present what would have been sold and the wares of the businesses or corporations for whose offices they were designed, while those of the Foro Mussolini typically depict what would have gone on at the complex. As can be seen, the mosaics form a progression between the obelisk and the spherical fountain. The mosaics move from the pseudo-futurist repetition of the name "DUCE" spelled, using a "V" in a subtle evocation of Latin[149] to more traditional representations

of deities. An anthropomorphic representation of the Tiber falls into the ancient Roman representations of the river.[150] Immediately above this mosaic another depicts important monuments from ancient Rome including the theatre of Marcellus and the Porticus Municia. In this same mosaic, just east of the monuments is a representation of Romulus and Remus, north is a bull, and south is a lion to which we shall return. Immediately across the Piazzalle is a mosaic with a similar project. Here we find another anthropomorphic representation of the Tiber. The buildings presented here, however, represent the Foro Mussolini itself—a microcosm of the plan as a mosaic within the Foro. The ancient Roman fora, across from Mussolini's new forum, define the complex's historical dimension. The Fascist empire eclipses the ancient one. The *dioscuri* are represented as well. Bordering all of the mosaics in the Piazzalle are fascist eagles, the repeated "DUCE," *fasces*, and large "M"s for Mussolini.

Most of the mosaics in the Foro Mussolini represent gymnasts in various positions. This is a standard trope in fascist art. The frescos that adorn the pool at the Foro are similar, as are the sculptures by Josef Thorak and Arno Breker for the Third Reich, which emphasize physical fitness, strength, courage, and the exalted fascist characteristic of discipline. The gymnasts represent the young Italians, members of the Opera Nazionale Ballila, for whom the Foro was built. The project of physical education was clearly for military training, just as the indoctrination of the Italian youth placed them in the trajectory of ancient Rome, as inheritors that would surpass the glories of the past, so the physicality exalted in the Foro Mussolini enabled them to become the soldiers of the future to perpetuate and further glorify fascism. In addition to this sequence of

young fascists, there are also a few mosaics celebrating particular moments in Italian fascism.

The yoking here of fascism and the Roman empire is evident, as it would have been to the original viewers of the mosaics. Since Mussolini's march on Rome the convergence of empires was total and overbearing, seen in school texts, field trips to the major state exhibitions, the massive architectural projects in the city of Rome, and the speeches of Mussolini. The Roman empire had been locked into the minds of Italians by constant references to it as model, predecessor, and type for the new Roman empire.

The lion, mentioned above, could almost be classical. Its paw is placed over the globe sending a clear message of fascist dominance. The globe is tilted in such a way that Italy is paramount, but it also displays Ethiopia and Libya, all in black as opposed to the vacant white areas of the globe that were not part of the Italian empire.

The most important mosaics are those that clearly represent the modern in a classical style. One celebrates the early period of Italian fascism, the *squadrista*, before the march on Rome when the fascists were fighting socialists. The mosaic depicts a truck crowded with young fascists. There is a dying figure on the ground; below him are small black strips representing his blood. His companion has raised a pistol toward the enemy to revenge his death. The truck above them has a figure carrying a flag inscribed with the motto of the *squadrista*, "Me ne frego!," "I don't give a damn!" The truck is likewise inscribed with the words "Viva Mussolini." And above the ensemble is the battle cry of the fascists, "A Noi!" or "To Us!"

The classical form of the mosaic with its figurative tropes was deployed to enshrine early fascism in the mythological context of ancient Rome. The *squadrista* have been classicized. Mussolini's classicizing, imperial project is here crystallized. Fascism is the return of ancient Rome and has been cast in its old forms. This mosaic is not like the nude statues around the stadium, which are atemporal celebrations of youth that could represent virtually any period. This is a different neoclassicism, not one where fascism can slip into an ultimately empty form to be charged with ideology—the nonspecific imagery of much of the art of the Third Reich (particularly the nudes of Breker). The viewer is not forced to make a connection for this image associating the past with the present; rather the mosaic's argument is evident. The text that accompanies this picture identifies the period which it is representing, but that is not the key to its understanding. The representation itself is of a truck and numerous guns (there is one on the roof of the cab, and some held by the young fascists in the flatbed)—the clearly modern. The only connection for the viewer to make is the association with ancient Rome through form and the context of the mosaic project. The classicism of this image is further underlined by the image immediately above it—a more typical image in the Foro Mussolini, a youth riding bareback on a horse killing two large lizards. The physical exertion in this image of beast-slaying (common in the lives of saints) and the other exertions represented in the surrounding mosaics, valorize the physicality of fighting Bolshevism just beneath.

The mosaic to the immediate right of the *squadrista* and part of the same panel depicts young fascists giving the Roman salute and, again, the repetition of "DUCE" (both of which had originally been adopted by D'Annuzio in 1919 when he seized control

of Fiume, providing the immediate source of these for Italian fascism). One of the figures in the foreground has a large stick (a common motif in fascist art—it was used to beat socialists). These are clearly dressed in fascist clothing. There is also a rifle above the two largest figures.

One of the central mosaics celebrates the new Roman empire, and Mussolini's conquest of Ethiopia and is directly west of the panel discussed above. The inscription reads, "9 May XIVth Year of the Fascist Era—Italy Finally Has its Empire." This mosaic was in the center of the Piazzalle. In the foreground is the recurrence of the lion, and immediately above it is a group of three figures. These figures are workers with spades and a pickaxe, evoking Mussolini's celebration of the virtues of work and discipline. To their left are three more fighters. However, these are different from the ones that we examined before. They are not *squadrista*-era fascists, but they are cast as liberators, similar to the figures above them. They "freed" Ethiopia from slavery, and into imperialism. In the right corner is a tank, and, above, two airplanes demonstrating, yet again, fascist modernity cast in the form of its classical antecedents.[151]

V. Conclusion: Fascist neoclassicism as rhetorical landscape

What must be considered for the understanding of these mosaics is the rhetorical landscape constantly propounded by fascism. Viewers were primed to recognize the supposed connections between both empires. Their propagandistic import is obvious—this is a complex designed for the youth of Italy. And as the school books demonstrated the connection, so the mosaics where they exercised demonstrated it. Italian fascism

propounded politics as spectacle. Everything was subsumed by myth, and all spectacles announced the convergence of both myths of Rome. Everywhere one looked, one could find *romanità* persistently displayed. This is exactly what Walter Benjamin called the aesthetification of politics. "The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into politics…All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war."[152] In fascist Italy, the political was cast in togas and the neoclassical, its own history. Its own battles became Roman-style figure mosaics in the Foro Mussolini. The art of the regime made a "production of ritual values,"[153] values that were based on ancient Rome, but went beyond them, creating the new values of fascism. The Foro Mussolini exalted the body and exercise; the gymnasts would have found themselves there represented, both in their exercise and in their politics, exalted as paradigms of Italian youth. The body is transformed into a fascist weapon, one of beauty. This is what Benjamin feared, what Marinetti expounded. War is the ideological consummation of fascism and is presented as beautiful. "[Society's] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order."[154] The mosaics of the Foro Mussolini represent the rhetoric of fascism crystallized in an aesthetic form. They present contemporary history, the fascist revolution, colonization, and the martial "metalization of the human body"[155] as classical myth and as aesthetic pleasure.

As Adorno had argued that the reliance on the classical "coloniz[es] the libidinous space of a past age not yet fully individuated,"[156] neoclassicism is malleable and can be injected with any ideology (thus, the popularity of such artwork for governmental functions). The figurative mosaics or statues of fascism are essentially hollow men that

can serve politics. Yet concomitantly, form also transforms content. What the style of neoclassicism does to the fascist content of the art is validate and elevate. Present "glories" are presented as past glories; they become historicized and mythologized. This is clearly what occurs to the mosaics of the *squadrista*, the conquest of Ethiopia, and the lion, its paw upon the globe. The more typical mosaics of gymnasts are rendered allegorical. Similarly they are hollow men, but they operate in the realm of allegory. They signify, generally, the young fascists who would have exercised at the Foro, but they also point to what they can become—the beautiful, new soldiers of Italy. The classicizing of the contemporary found in the mosaics of the Piazzalle dell'Impero at the Foro Mussolini, like the contemporizing of the classical in Denis and Brasillach, transforms fascism into a myth equal to that of Rome.

On the occasion of the exhibition, *Scultura Lingua Morta*, in 2003 which presented a retrospective of fascist sculpture,[157] Jonathan Jones cautioned in the *Guardian* about some of the excesses of academic criticism of fascist art and art produced under fascism. Jones counsels against the contemporary "critical vice [of] identifying...and rejecting…'fascist art'"[158] because of the difficulty of defining something "as comforting as a fascist aesthetic.'"[159] Fascist art, as Jones observes, is far too diffuse. Marinetti is whom Benjamin turned to and was clearly a fascist. But his work and manifesti long predate fascism. Mussolini himself began in alliance with Futurism, never publicly denounced it, but clearly moved away from it in favor of the much more "packagable" style of the classical, which was easier for mass audiences to accept and understand, which created the symbolic content of his regime, and which was

easy to imbue with contemporary meaning. Fascism wanted the masses, but Futurism only provided an elite.

As Jones makes clear, if one uses Mussolini to denounce art through association, anything becomes fair game including "futurism, classicism, art deco, the international style, abstract art, figurative art, traditionalism, [and] modernism."[160] A fascist aesthetic is far too difficult to define beyond abstractions like strength, power, freshness. Italian fascism changed over time, just as most of its artists did from style to style, while others like Luigi Dallapiccola and Arturo Toscanini shifted political sides as well. Where Marinetti and de Chirico retained a style which they had already pioneered, the bulk of artists shifted and developed. As Jones argues, fascism "had no single voice, style or aesthetic…Janus-faced…it was legion."[161]

What Jones cautions should be paramount in any discussion of fascist art. Finding an artist's political allegiance and then identifying the traits of their politics in their art is not where the critical discourse should end, after all biography has long been forsaken. This is where the criticism should begin. The scholar or critic must move on to treat the work itself as he or she would any other. It is important to identify the work that was in the service of these regimes of destruction. This chapter has attempted to understand the use of classical art in fascism and proto-fascism, and examine the ways in which it was used, the import of the alliance between classicism and fascism. I have attempted to prove, through a few choice examples, Denis, Brasillach, and the mosaics of the Foro Mussolini, the political and historical dimension of the classical tradition in the 20th century.

In this chapter I have traced the political and historical background that should frame any discussion or analysis of Modernism's relation to the Classical Tradition. Briefly surveying the political dimension of pre-20th century classicisms, I chose Maurice Denis as forerunner and transitional figure for encapsulating the early unity between the classical and conservative or reactionary politics in both visual art and art theory. Robert Brasillach provides an example of the intertwining of a classical ideal and French fascism through a biography invested with a political agenda that transformed a major European poet of the past into a fascist artist. I have shown how the mosaics of the Foro Mussolini deliver the best visual example of Italian Fascism's obsession with the myth of Augustan Rome as model and predecessor. They are remarkable in the history of art because they present fascism literally in the guise of Ancient Rome. These mosaics, even now more accurately when they were first made because they have become ruins themselves, imitate the past in form and present modernity in content. We have seen the fundamental tropes and qualities of 20th century classicism: its malleability, how it arrests time, its status as an evacuated signifier, its connection to the Modernist fragment, the fabrication of a classical past, as an outgrowth of searching primitivism combined with the nationalist trope of classical inheritance, the Right's attempt to use classicism to stabilize, the elision of the classical and the modern as in Augustus-Mussolini, and using it as a method of national legitimation. It is now time to see how it lived, how it worked, how classicism could be formed and designed. In my next chapters I will examine the ways in which classical art could be deployed, how it could be constructed.

[1] Arnold Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985), 270-271.
[2] The speech was published in *Il Popolo d'Italia* 95, April 21, 1922. Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia* XVIII (Florence: La Fenice, 1956), 161.
[3] See for example. Raymond Williams, "The Politics of the Avant-Garde." *The Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1989), 57-59.
[4] Roger Shattuck, "The Present Place of Futurism," *Candor and Perversion: Literature, Education, and the Arts* (New York: Norton, 1999), 193.
[5] Adorno faulted Stravinsky for irony and insincerity. For Adorno, Schoenberg represented "honest" music. Clearly, the question of sincerity is one of intentionality. For Naïve, both naïve art or outsider art, and Schiller's conception of the naïve and sentimental in art, especially poetry. And finally Cf. Bergson's privileging of intuition and the pre-rational, of great influence in the early 20th century.
[6] Michael Bell, *Primitivism* (London: Methuen, 1972), 80.
[7] See also Jack Flam, "Introduction," *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History,* eds. Jack Flam and Miriam Deutsch, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 11, who argues that primitivism should not be simplistically considered a type of colonialist appropriation, but seen as an enlargement of influences and of cultural consciousness, particularly when primitivism is accurately defined according to Shattuck above
[8] Similar to primitivism and neoclassicism, the Egyptian Neo-Pharaonic style sought to return to the Ur heritage of Ancient Egypt and Négritude turned to Africa more generally. A wider definition of neoclassicism, which this study does not seek to make, would consider all of these as various phenomena of the same artistic and ideological pursuit. I thank Christopher Micklethwait for this insight.
[9] A 1920 survey conducted by *Action*, quoted in Flam, 12.
[10] See Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 139-145.
[11] For instance, on the birth of Vorticism and the significance of its reigning icon, see William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (Toronto: University of Toronto press, 1972), 13-16.
[12] Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 58.
[13] Eliot, for example, was inspired by both texts and cited them in his notes to *The Waste Land*.
[14] The term "period modernism," coined by Lynn Garfola, is used to describe the wedding of the avant-garde and traditional, pre-Romantic styles in terms of Diaghilev's frequent adaptation of earlier music including Pergolesi, Rossini, Cimarosa, Scarlatti, and Paisiello for which Diaghilev not only generated the expressive idea for the ballet but also edited, selected, and annotated the original score. See Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 90-97. Garafola suggests that the "plumbing of the Latin past" was a manner of exorcising Russia for the exiled Diaghilev (93). He accepted a different, European tradition "framed within the highly

structured parameters of classicism (ibid)," and he began to work within it. Importantly, however, the tradition is not only evident within Diaghilev's choice of texts, but in the manner of choosing them, accepting the ur of France and Europe generally rather than the specifics of a Russian ur-past as in *Le Sacre*. Diaghilev's classicizing work of the 1920s abandoned the exoticism with which he had announced his role as impresario and focused his position as a citizen of Europe trafficking in European history and tradition, however avant-garde, rather than as a nationally-confined Russian.

[15] In the case of Germany see the landmark study, E. M. Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany: A Study of the Influence Exercised by Greek Art and Poetry over the Great German Writers of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935). For a French, academic perspective, see Martha Hanna, The Mobilization of Intellect: French Scholars and Writers during the Great War (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996): 142-176.

[16] In particular for English neoclassicism, see the short discussion in W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (New York: Norton, 1970): 12-27.

[17] See Robert Reinhold Ergang, *Herder and the Foundations of German Nationalism* (New York: Octagon, 1966).

[18] Fascist Italy, on the other hand, found inspiration in the ancient Roman Empire, having continual access to antiquity without the need of Enlightenment philosophers who functioned in Germany as redirectors to place Germany in the tradition of ancient Greece. See Butler.

[19] Henri Peyre, on the other hand, argues that France, particularly in the 20th century with Claudel and Valéry, exhibited a "periodic need to resort to Greece in order to learn anew the supreme value of measure,…of an order which is…instinct with life." Henri Peyre, "What Greece Means to Modern France," *Yale French Studies* no. 6 (1950): 60. Antliff also observes that Thierry Maulnier argued that Racine's classicism, as a precursor to fascism, went directly back to the violence of Classical Greece and "rediscovered the violence and sublimity native to a creativity whose aesthetic corollary was Greek tragedy. Effectively, Racine and French neoclassicism are the direct ancestor of fascism, but Maulnier emphasizes the Greek influence unlike Brasillach, as we shall see. Mark Antliff, "Classical Violence: Thierry Maulnier, French Fascist Aesthetics and the 1937 Paris World's Fair," *Modernism / Modernity*, 15.1 (2008), 50-51.

[20] Again, see Hanna, 154-162.

[21] For excellent recent discussion see Cathy Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Gere examines the reception and, ultimately, the invention of Minoan civilization in the 20th century. Her first chapter begins with a discussion of Nietzsche and Heinrich Schliemann whose work was appropriated by German racial theorists and claimed Mycenaean civilization possessed a German origin, thus laying claim to the oldest European heritage.

[22] However after World War II if such a sculpture is removed from its environment, it still contains the connotative meaning with which it became associated; it is virtually impossible to rehabilitate such neoclassical art

[23] Michael Greenhalgh argues that *Marat* consciously imitates the antique relief *The Bed of Policletus* in the Palazzo Mattei in Rome, where the dead figure hangs his left arm out as he lies on the bed, as Marat's right arm hangs out of the tub in the painting. Michael Greenhalgh, *The Classical Tradition in Western Art* (London: Duckworth, 1978), 212. The ancient relief was known by Ghiberti and probably influenced Michelangelo's *Pietà*.
[24] For discussion of the relationship between David and Napoleon, see Albert Boime, *Art in an Age of Bonapartism, 1800-1815* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 39-47
[25] Marx recognized this as well, "[P]recisely in…periods of revolutionary crisis [the brains of the living] anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language. Thus,…the Revolution of 1789 to 1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman republic and the Roman empire…[T]he heroes as well as the parties and the masses of the old French Revolution, performed the task of their time in Roman costume and with Roman phrases…[I]n the classically austere traditions of the Roman republic its gladiators found the ideals and the art forms, the self-deceptions that they needed in order to conceal from themselves the bourgeois limitations of the content of their struggles and to keep their enthusiasm on the high plane of the great historical tragedy." According to Marx, revolutions of all sorts historicize and, ultimately, mythologize themselves by means of antiquity. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 15-17.
[26] The parallel trope of Biblical typology is also at work here, as will be seen below in the discussion of Mussolini's classicizing project.
[27] Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art: Rococo, Classicism, Romanticism*, v. 3 (New York: Vintage, 1958), 142.
[28] Ibid., 153.
[29] Ibid., 132.
[30] See Vern G. Swanson, *Alma-Tadema: The Painter of the Victorian Vision of the Ancient World* (London: Ash and Grant, 1977).
[31] The emphasis on the primitive was so widespread it can even be felt in such diverse pursuits as Bernard Berenson's championing of Duccio and Cimabue, Harry Partch's turn to primitive and non-western musical scales, and Rothko's mythological subjects based on Greek tragedy from the 1940s.
[32] See Silver, *Esprit de Corps*, 63-73.
[33] This manifesto, subtitled notes on music, is collected in *Le Rappel à l'ordre* (1926).
[34] Jane F. Fulcher, "The Preparation for Vichy: Anti-Semitism in French Musical Culture between the Two World Wars," *The Musical Quarterly* 79.3 (Autumn 1995): 466.
[35] Likewise, Denis opinions about the direction of art became more and more virulent. For example, "Nous avons placé l'art nègre au niveau de l'art grec, et nos amateurs ont couvert d'or les toiles du douanier Rousseau." Maurice Denis, *Charmes et leçons de l'Italie* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1933), 155. Denis frequently mentions Matisse and

occasionally Braque as well. However, he seems mostly confused by the two younger painters.

[36] Maurice Denis, "Le Présent et l'avenir de la peinture française," *Nouvelles Théories, 1914-1921: Sur l'art moderne, sur l'art sacré* (Paris: Rouart et Watelin, 1922), 58.

[37] Ibid., 57.

[38] 1903's *Our Lady of the Schools* depicts the Madonna in a contemporary school surrounded by children. Behind her, posted on the wall is a map of France with Alsace and Lorraine painted red. See Mark Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909-1939* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 88.

[39] Denis, "Du Gauguin et Van Gogh au classicisme," *Théories, 1890-1910: Du Symbolism et Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique* (Paris: Rouart et Watelin, 1920), 273.

[40] Ibid.

[41] There have been three critical treatments of Denis' politics which trace his anti-semitism and his association with the French nationalist right, Antliff, *Avant Garde Fascism*, 101-104 and *passim*, Jean-Paul Bouillon, "The Politics of Maurice Denis," *Maurice Denis: 1870-1943* (Ghent: Snoeck-Ducaju and Zoon, 1994): 95-109, and Michael Marlais, *Conservative Echoes in* Fin-de-Siècle *Parisian Art Criticism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 185-219.

[42] Denis, however, lamented the encroachment of fascism, opposed Vichy, and despised Hitler. He fell in with the Resistance and was recalled as "un très authentique résistant," by the painter Jean-René Bazaine. In 1941 Vichy set up an Ordre des Artistes which would give artists a modicum of financial security and a pension but limit the content of their art. A study committee was produced from members of the Académie des Beaux-Arts and other artists of a conservative aesthetic bent. Expatriate artists would be turned down for membership in the Ordre which would have power of censorship over art critics, who could have potentially joined, power over competitions and exhibitions, even prices. In short, as Bertrand Dorléac observes, the Ordre would essentially control artistic traditions and the history of art. Artists would have to take an oath to practice "in good conscience." Denis, who was a member of the study committee for the development of the Ordre, was elevated without his consent to president of an organizing committee. He had already leaked the preliminary-by-laws to actively dissident artists. Upon learning of his absent appointment Denis, wrote Louis Hautecoeur, who had been given the task of developing the Ordre, and angrily rejected his appointment. "Je m'étonne." His experiences of the discussions of the group "a confirmé mes préférences pour le régime de la liberté, pour la liberté des organisations artistiques." Before his death, Denis had planned to contribute to *Vaincre* (1944) an album of lithographs for the Resistance which violently denounced the Occupation and was sold clandestinely. For the Ordre des Artistes see Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, *L'art de la défaite, 1940-1944* (Paris: Seuil, 1993) 158 ff. And directly relating to Denis, 162-163. The quotation from Bazaine is taken from an interview conducted by Bertrand Dorléac in 1980 and published in

Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, *Histoire de l'art: Paris 1940-1944* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonee, 1986), 356. The 5 August, 1941 letter to Directeur Générale des Beaux-Arts (Louis Hautecœur) is reproduced in Maurice Denis, *Journal*, vol. 3, 1921-1943 (Paris: La Colombe, 1959), 227. For *Vaincre*, see Bouillon, 184, Bertrand Dorléac (1993), 282-283 and for Denis' involvement, 383 n.60 and Bertrand Dorléac (1986), 196. See also Sarah Wilson, "'La Béauté Révolutionnaire'? Réalisme Socialiste and French Painting, 1935-1954," *Oxford Art Journal* 3.2 (1980), 63.

[43] In an account of a 1921 trip to Rome, Denis considered the blackshirts and their habitual street fights with the communists. He deplored both but attempted to understand the fascists, even admiring their energy and discipline. He warned anyone traveling to Italy to prepare for hassle, clearly informed by personal experience: he had to show his passport in cafés, a student of his was interrogated, and his room, luggage, and papers searched. He bemoaned the militarization of Italy, and foresaw the coming xenophobia. "Il n'y a rien de plus douloureux pour un Français qui aime et admire l'Italie." Denis, *Charmes et leçons de l'Italie* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1933), 43-44.

[44] Maurice Denis, "Les besoins collectives et la peinture: A. Les problèmes d'aujourd'hui," *Encyclopédie française*, v. XVI (Paris: Larousse, 1935), 16.70-71.

[45] Ibid., 71.

[46] Denis, *Charmes et leçons de l'Italie*, 44.

[47] While numerous works, like the lithograph *Le Nymphe* (1901), *L'Éternel été* (1905), *Eurydice* (1906), the cycle *L'Histoire de Psyché* (1907), *L'Éternel printemps* (1908), *Les Bergers* (1909), *Galatée* (1917), *L'Histoire de la Musique* for the ceiling of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées (1912), *Ode* a lithograph for Vollard's edition of Francis Thompson's poems (1936 on the title page or 1942 on the colophon), and his Italian landscapes of Fiesole, Florence, and Rome are examples of Traditional neoclassicism, Denis' most successful works on classical themes are examples of Modern neoclassicism, such as *Homère*, *Nymphes ou La Seine à Port-Marly* (1890), *Les Muses* (1893), *Figures dans un paysage de printemps ou Le Bois sacré* (1897), *Virginal Printemps* (1899), and, though not as successful, *Epona protège les troupeux* (1901).

[48] Guy Davenport terms the same phenomenon "calculated anachronism" in an essay on Stanley Spencer and David Jones. "Spencer located the gospels in Cookham-upon-Thames, and symmetrically clothed Old Testament angels in Edwardian and twentieth-century clothes. Before thinking that we can appreciate (or be offended by) this calculated anachronism, let us notice that the mythologizing of the gospels began quite early and is by now undetected by most of us. No ox or ass stands in the stable at Christ's birth in the gospels; we put them there. The number of the Magi is not in Scripture; we made them three. And so on. Far from leaving tradition, Spencer is deep within many traditions of Christian iconography such as the Dutch tradition of localizing events of the Bible in finely detailed realism (the Annunciation in a Dutch room)." Guy Davenport, "Stanley Spencer and David Jones," *The Hunter Gracchus and Other Papers on Literature and Art* (Washington: Counterpoint, 1996), 117-118.

[49] See Chapter 3.

[50] In 1795's *Prolegomena ad Homerum*
[51] Bouillon has repeatedly argued that the three seated Muses correspond to a "Holy Trinity of Art, Love, and Religion." While he has not offered any explanation, it is feasible (Art, clearly the pencil sharpener; Religion, the opened book is, in fact, the Bible and the dark garb and covered head, monasticity; Love, low cut dress), but, those three not being Muses, there would need to be two more for mathematical accuracy, bringing the number of figures to twelve. Bouillon also suggests that the tenth figure is Denis' wife. This may be, but each figure possesses his wife's features. See, Jean-Paul Bouillon, *Maurice Denis* (Geneva: Skira, 1993), 47; "Puvis de Chavannes and the Nabis," *Toward Modern Art: From Puvis de Chavannes to Matisse and Picasso*, ed. Serge Lemoine (New York: Rizzoli, 2002), 102; and *Maurice Denis: Earthly Paradise (1870-1943)* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2003), 156.
[52] Denis, *Charmes et leçons de l'Italie*, 13.
[53] In addition to 1933's *Charmes et leçons de l'Italie* (a revision of 1925's *Carnets de Voyage en Italie*, a lavishly-produced limited edition), Denis's two most important publications were his selections of essays, *Théories: 1890-1910, Du Symbolism et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique* (1920) and *Nouvelles Theories: Sur l'art moderne, sur l'art sacré, 1914-1921* (1922). There have been two more recent selections from his writing which are more easily obtainable: *Du Symbolisme au classicisme: Théories*, ed. Olivier Revault d'Allones, in the series Miroirs de l'Art (Paris: Hermann, 1964) and *Le Ciel et l'Arcadie*, ed. Jean-Paul Bouillon, in the series Collections Savoir: Sur L'Art (Paris: Hermann, 1993). Denis also published an *Histoire de l'art religieux* (1939).
[54] Denis, "Enquète sur la séparation des beaux-arts et de l'état," *Théories*, 179.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Denis, "De la gaucherie des primitifs," *Théories*, 177.
[57] Ibid., 172.
[58] Denis, "La Réaction Nationaliste," *Théories*, 192.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Denis, "Le Présent et l'avenir de la peinture française," *Nouvelles Théories,* 56-57.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., 57-58.
[63] Denis, "Du Gauguin et Van Gogh au classicisme," *Théories*, 266-267.
[64] Denis more clearly explains the political aspect in the later essay quoted earlier, "Le Présent et l'avenir de la peinture française:" "Le mouvement d'Action française témoigne, en politique et en general dans le domaine des idées, d'une orientation nouvelle dans le sens de l'ordre et de la tradition." Although, drunk upon ideology, he does not recognize the danger of the Action Française. It took his trips to Italy in the 1920s, discussed above, to recognize the danger of fascism. Denis, "Le Présent et l'avenir de la peinture française," *Nouvelles Théories*, 48.
[65] Denis, "Du Gauguin et Van Gogh au classicisme," *Théories*,, 273.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid., 274.
[69] Ibid., emphasis his own.
[70] Ibid., 278.
[71] In *From Cubism to Classicism*, Gino Severini's polemico-theoretical tract which argued for a return to perspective and Renaissance craftsmanship, the Italian painter said "the very beautiful book, *Théories*, by Maurice Denis…is, from the aesthetic point of view, the most elevated of the works that have been written in our age." Severini's book is intended, in some ways, as an improvement upon Denis, which "remain[ed]…confined to the level of good intentions because [it is] not solidly based on technical and practical applications." Gino Severini, "From Cubism to Classicism," *Gino Severini:* From Cubism to Classicism*; Albert Gleizes:* Painting and its Laws, trans. Peter Brooke (London: Francis Boutle, 2001), 58.
[72] For other fascist uses of Vergil see, Richard F. Thomas, *Virgil and the Augustan Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 222-259 (i.e., chapter seven, "Virgil in a Cold Climate: Fascist Reception," concerning German uses), and "Goebbels' *Georgics*," *The Classical Bulletin* 76.2 (2000): 157-168, and Theodore Ziolkowski, *Virgil and the Moderns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 38-42 which concerns Paolo Fabbri's *Virgilio: Poeta sociale e politico* of 1929. After Fabbri, Ziolkowski discusses Brasillach's *Présence de Virgile*.
[73] See Martha Hanna, *The Mobilization of Intellect: French Scholars and Writers during the Great War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 143-144
[74] See Hanna, 146-147
[75] While Bergson's address to the Académie des Sciences morales was made in 1923, and to be discussed in the subsequent chapter, its argument is indistinguishable from, only stronger than, his fellow scholars in positioning France as a classical nation. Henri Bergson, "Les Études gréco-latines et l'enseignement secondaire," *La Revue de Paris* (Mai-Juin 1923), 5-10. For further discussion, see Françoise Waquet, *Latin or the Empire of a Sign: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 2001), 195-196 and Fritz Ringer, *Fields of Knowledge: French Academic Culture in Comparative Perspective, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 142-143.
[76] See Silver, 100-101
[77] Breker also produced numerous portrait busts. Alone a bust of Pound or of Alfred Cortot would not signify any particular ideological project. Yet, when taken together with busts of Hitler, Wagner, Vlaminck, Céline, Speer, Wilhelm Kempff, Abel Bonnard, and Junger, a pattern quickly becomes identifiable.
[78] René Wellek, "French 'Classical' Criticism in the Twentieth Century," *Yale French Studies*, 38, The Classical Line: Essay in Honor of Henri Peyre (1967), 67. He excepts here Goethe and later Hölderlin (71).
[79] See also "The Nation as Artwork: Charles Maurras and the Classical Origins of French Literary Fascism" in David Carroll, *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 71-96.

[80] The Action Française critics whom Wellek discusses are Maurras, Léon Daudet, Pierre Lasserre, Pierre Gilbert, Jean-Marc Bernard, Eugène Marsan, Henri Massis (who would help Brasillach publish *Présence de Virgile*), Brasillach, and Thierry Maulnier.
[81] Other classicists who were praised by various critics of the Action Française included Malherbe, Chenier, Stendahl, Lamartine, The writers they despised are easily identifiable, Hugo, Flaubert, Zola, Rousseau, etc. But above all, most admired Nietzsche.
[82] Yet classicism was not the sole property of Maurras and his followers. Julien Benda for example, a Jew and Dreyfusard, shared similar tastes. At odds with Sorel and Hulme, Benda despised Bergson whose "German irrationalism" he found incompatible with classicism, just as the critics of the Sorbonne had presented World War I as the clash between classical and Teutonic civilization. Wellek goes on to discuss other writers who intermittently represented classicism, Gide, Jacques Rivière, Valéry, Irving Babbitt, Eliot, and Hulme.
[83] Henri Bergson, "Les études gréco-latines et l'enseignement," *La Revue de Paris* (Mai-Juin 1923), 10, to be discussed at more length in the subsequent chapter.
[84] Antliff, 236-237.
[85] Frank O. Copley, Review of *Gegenwärtiger Virgil* by Robert Brasillach, translated by Fritz Jaffe, *The Classical World* 58.5 (1965): 144.
[86] NB. Aelius Donatus should not be confused with Tiberius Claudius Donatus, who wrote later that century. Both wrote commentaries on Vergil, Tiberius just of the *Aeneid*.
[87] It also shows the influence of Augustin Cartault, a French classicist who wrote a study of the *Eclogues* (1897) and another of the *Aeneid* (1926), Sainte-Beuve's *Étude sur Virgile* (1857), and the school text of Vergil by Frédéric Plessis and Paul Lejay, *Oeuvres de Virgile*, a 900 page text of Vergil's work with a biographical and critical introduction, lauded in Bellesort's own study. As Ziolkowski notes, Plessis and Lejay's text contained all of the factual information that Brasillach used, but he did not cite it. Ziolkowski, 43 The most important formal influence on the book was André Maurois' novelistic biography of Shelley, *Ariel, ou la vie de Shelley.*
[88] Cited in Marc Chouet, "Brasillach et Virgile," *Cahiers des Amis de Robert Brasillach* 17 (1972), 57. Chouet gives no citation for the Bardèche quote. It's Maurice Bardèche, "Notice," *Oeuvres complètes de Robert Brasillach*, vol. VII (Paris: Le Club de l'Honnête Homme, 1964): 6. Ziolkowski wrongly states that Brasillach's text was what was referred to as the épopée. See Ziolkowski, 43.
[89] Gérard Sthème de Jubécourt, *Robert Brasillach: Critique littéraire* (Lausanne, Les Amis de Robert Brasillach, 1972), 91-93. Jubécourt then gives a half-hearted defense of Brasillach with two examples of where they diverge in their assessment of texts. An earlier version of the chapter devoted to *Présence de Virgile* was published as an article. See, Jubécourt, "Une Lecture de « *Présence de Virgile*» de Robert Brasillach," *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, XXXVI.144 (Oct.-Dec. 1971), 591-606.
[90] Ziolkowski, 32-33.
[91] Robert Brasillach, *Présence de Virgile* (Paris: Plon, 1989), 242.
[92] Ibid., 243.

[93] This cyclical reading of text and history is common throughout Western culture and can be easily perceived in Yeats' mythological system of gyres and correspondences (in the full Baudelairien sense).
[94] Ibid., 241.
[95] Brasillach, 240.
[96] Ibid., 6.
[97] Chouet's text, of little interest, critiques Brasillach's ignorance of the *Aeneid*, as Jubécourt and Bardèche had done (59-60); he discusses the doubling of Brasillach's life for Vergil's (60); he remarks on how the *Présence de Virgile* is a modernized life for a modern reader (58); and he praises Brasillach's youthful, atmospheric style and its "immenses promesses" (60).
[98] Copley observes Brasillach's consistent denigration of Cicero as another emergence of Brasillach's royalist politics burning through the centuries to an emblem of republicanism.
[99] Maurice Bardèche, "Notice," *Oeuvres complètes de Robert Brasillach*, vol. VII (Paris: Le Club de l'Honnête Homme, 1964): 3-8.
[100] Jubécourt, 98.
[101] Ibid., 98.
[102] Jubécourt also emphasizes Brasillach's celebration of the youthful style of the *Eclogues* (Ibid, 97 and 100), by and far the Vergilian text of which he makes the most use. What Jubécourt identifies as the "don de la jeunesse," is a refraction of Brasillach upon Vergil. Jubécourt argues that the *Georgics* proved less important to Brasillach because they lacked youthful spontaneity. Yet this is one of the traits of Brasillach, who was frozen in time, forever youthful by his execution, whose literary style was marked by strength and freshness. Jubécourt sloppily attributes his taste in Vergil, to Brasillach's own posthumous aura. Jubécourt's critique falls into all of the same perils of impressionism and atmosphere and biographical criticism as does the *Présence de Virgile*. For discussion of Brasillach's posthumous reputation see Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 230-234.
[103] Brasillach, 147. Vergil already saw Augustus as his "maître" (147). Yet it was Augustus who had confiscated the lands of both Vergil and Horace to pay the soldiers who waged his civil war. It was only though his magnanimity that he would give them land again.
[104] Ibid., 61.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Brasillach, 147.
[109] Ibid., 234.
[110] Jubécourt does critique Brasillach, following upon Maurice Bardèche, for having a very cursory knowledge of the *Aeneid* (86), which Brasillach barely discusses. Bardèche

suggested that Brasillach might not have even read Vergil's most important poem in its entirety.
[111] Ibid., 197.
[112] Ibid., 198.
[113] Needless to say, Vergil did celebrate Augustus in the *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid* is a national poem celebrating the founding of Rome, but both poems are continually read in terms of subversion. Most modern approaches to the *Aeneid* concentrate on how the poet might have undermined the national project of his public poem. Aeneas goes through the Ivory gates of false dreams; he kills Turnus in rage, having always been reasonable; and he plants his sword in Turnus with the same word that Rome is planted. Nevermind poor Dido.
[114] Ibid., 181.
[115] Quoted and translated in Tracy H. Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy*, *1922-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 21. This is taken from the publication of the Partito Nazionale Fascista and the Gioventù Italiana Littorio (one of the many systems for the training of youths), *Il Capo Centuria*, (Rome: Pizzi and Pizio, 1938), 245.
[116] For discussion see, Maria Wyke, "Sawdust Caesar: Mussolini, Julius Caesar, and the Drama of Dictatorship," *The Uses and Abuses of Antiquity*, eds. Michael Biddis and Maria Wyke, (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999): 167-184.
[117] Did fascist appropriation taint the use of antiquity irrevocably? No. It still serves as a useful source of themes, images, plots, and style.
[118] For an introductory discussion see Katie Fleming, "The Use and Abuse of Antiquity: The Politics and Morality of Appropriation," *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, eds. Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray (Malden: Blackwell, 2008): 127-137 and the collection of essays, particularly the introduction (13-17), *The Uses and Abuses of Antiquity*, eds. Michael Biddis and Maria Wyke (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999).
[119] Mussolini, 161, trans. Bondanella, 176.
[120] The question of morality discussed above is problematic here as well, since the art there on display was extraordinary with rooms designed by Mario Sironi and a façade of fasces that far surpasses both the German and Soviet buildings at the 1937 Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne in Paris.
[121]e.g., "Italians, make certain that the glories of the past are surpassed by those of the future," a quotation from Mussolini inscribed on the wall of the entrance hall. Marla Susan Stone, "A Flexible Rome: Fascism and the Cult of *Romanità*," *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945*, ed. Catherine Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 215.
[122] See Stone, 205-220, Romke Visser, "Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of the *Romanità*," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27.1 (1992): 5-22, E. Strong, "'*Romanità*' throughout the Ages," *Journal of Roman Studies 29*.2 (1939): 35-166, and Romke Visser, "Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of the *Romanità*," *Journal of Contemporary History 27*.1 (1992): 5-22. For how *Romanità* is used in a particular case of one of Mussolini's building

projects see, Janet DeLaine, "The *Romanitas* of the Railway Station," *The Uses and Abuses of Antiquity*, eds. Michael Biddis and Maria Wyke (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999): 145-160. On the fascist exhibitions see, Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "Mostre," *Kunst und Propaganda im Streit der Nationen 1930-1945*, ed. Hans Ottomeyer (Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2007): 78-85.

[123] Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 247.

[124] Koon, 30.

[125] See Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[126] See "Mussolini's Self-Staging," *Kunst und Propaganda im Streit der Nationen 1930-1945*, ed. Hans Ottomeyer (Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2007): 88-95.

[127] See Claudio Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) and, in terms of the typological association of the two empires, among many others, Ann Thomas Wilkins, "Augustus, Mussolini, and the Parallel Imagery of Empire," *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, eds. Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005): 53-65.

[128] Koon, 71.

[129] Ministero dell'Educazionae Nazionale, *Annuario* 1935, 13, translated in Koon, 21.

[130] Koon, 72.

[131] Ibid. For more discussion see her third chapter, "The New Spirit in the Schools," 60-89.

[132] Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste* (New York: Universe Books, 1969),113 n.

[133] For a good survey of Mussolini's excavations see F. Christian Kopff, "Italian Fascism and the Roman Empire," *The Classical Bulletin* 76.2 (2000): 109-115. Also of note, Suna Güven, "Displaying the Res Gestae of Augustus: A Monument of Imperial Image for All," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 57*.1 (1998): 30-45 and Diane Ghirardo, "Architects, Exhibitions, and the Politics of Culture in Fascist Italy," *Journal of Architectural Education 45*.2 (1992): 67-75. See also Tim Benton, "Rome Reclaims its Empire." *Art and Power: Europe Under the Dictators, 1930-45*, eds. Dawn Ades, et. al. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995): 120-129, which discusses both Mussolini's excavation and building projects, and, focusing exclusively on the new buildings, Jobst Welge, "Fascism Triumphans: On the Architectural Translation of Rome," *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, eds. Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005): 83-94.

[134] Spiro Kostof, *The Third Rome, 1870-1950: Traffic and Glory* (Berkeley: University of Art Museum, 1973), 68.

[135] Mussolini, 161.

[136] See James Packer, "Politics, Urbanism, and Archaeology in 'Roma capitale': A Troubled Past and a Controversial Future," *American Journal of Archaeology 93*.1 (1989): 137-141.
[137] For a list of buildings demolished between 1870 and 1950 see Kostof (1973), 78-79. Dates of demolition are given so it is easy to see which were destroyed by the fascist regime. It is interesting to note that the regime did destroy two classical monuments—the Basilica of Junius Bassus (who was consul in 331 A.D.) of the Esquiline on Via Napoleone III and the Meta Sudans between the Arch of Constantine and the Colosseum. This reveals despite Mussolini's exaltation of Rome that fascism's interest in Rome was limited to *display*. If something ancient stood in the way of fascism's project, it could be demolished. Similarly we find Mussolini's interest solely in the early Imperial (the Basilica is c.350 A.D., but transformed in the Fifth Century by Pope Simplicius into the Church of S. Andrea). The Meta Sudans, an ancient fountain, hindered traffic around the Colosseum, hence its demolition.
[138] See Peter Aicher, "Mussolini's Forum and the Myth of Augustan Rome," *The Classical Bulletin* 76.2 (2000): 117-39 and Peter Bondanella, *The Eternal City: Roman Images in the Modern World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987): 192-199. The most comprehensive book on the Foro Mussolini was published by the Opera Ballilla, in year XV of the fascist regime. *Il Foro Mussolini* (Milan: Valentino Bompiani, 1937). Four illustrated books on the Foro have since appeared: Mimmo Caporilli and Franco Simeoni, eds*, Il Foro Italico e lo Stadio Olimpico: Immagini dalla storia* (Rome: Tomo Edizioni, 1991), Comitato dei Monumenti Moderni, *Il Foro Italico* (Rome: Clear Edizioni, 1990), Antonella Greco and Salvatore Santuccio, *Foro Italico* (Rome: Mulitgrafica, 1991), and George Mott, *Foro Italico* (New York: powerHouse Books, 2003). I have located two contemporary, international accounts of the Foro dating from its first appearance. Both of them are quite positive accounts of Italian fascism and do little but express awe at the complex. They are ultimately historical curiosities: Roland G. Andrew, *Through Fascist Italy: An English Hitchhiker's Pilgrimage* (London: George G. Harrap, 1935), 165-167 and Paule Herfort, *Chez les Romains fascistes* (Paris: Révue Mondiale, 1934), 62-63, 132. Another contemporary account can be found in, "Il Foro Mussolini in Roma," *Architettura 5* (1933): 65-105. For a complete bibliography until 1990 on the Foro, see Greco and Santuccio.
[139] Gino Severini's most accomplished mosaic for the Foro Mussolini is located at these baths, in the Palestra del Duce, entitled Fascist Italy, Icarus, and the Constellation of Leo. Fascist Italy is represented by a bare-breasted woman in flowing, Roman-like dress, a garland in her hair, bearing the fasces. Within the black figures of the woman, the lion, and a falling Icarus are white geometrical spaces in which the lines of the figures are continued.
[140] For detailed discussion of its planning and construction in English see Kostof, 72.
[141] Bondanella, 200-201.
[142] The few mosaics from EUR are in color and look more Byzantine. The only other black-and-white mosaics dating from the Fascist period are from the Ostiense Station in

Rome depicting the old Roman Empire. These are so similar to those located in the Foro Mussolini that they should be considered part of the same visuo-rhetorical project.
[143] See *Severini al Foro Italico* (Rome: Fratelli Palombi, 1998). This book accompanied a 1998 exhibition in Rome curated by Federica Pirani and Simonetta Tozzi.
[144] This is published in an English edition of essays written between 1943-1946. Gino Severini, "Non-Political Collaboration," *The Artist and Society* (London: Harvill Press, 1946): 66-73.
[145] This article, like most of his texts, was written in French. See Gino Severini, "Le Vrai sens du classicisme," *Ecrits sur l'art*, Collection Diagonales (Paris: Cercle d'Art, 1987): 139-142.
[146] Cited in ibid., 142.
[147] The article written between 1936 and 1942 is "Le modernisme et l'art," *Ecrits sur l'art*, Collection Diagonales (Paris: Cercle d'Art, 1987): 265.
[148] Originally this was to be called the Forum Imperii and is now known as the Piazzalle della Vittoria.
[149] This clearly is not because of the difficulty of depicting curves in the mosaics because of the curves of the "D" and "C."
[150] Another allusion that must be observed, though not classical, is to Bernini's Fontana dei Fiumi in the Piazza Navona, with its similar anthropomorphic representations of rivers (though not of the Tiber).
[151] This mosaic is briefly discussed in Tim Benton, "Epigraphy and Fascism," *The Afterlife of Inscriptions: Reusing, Rediscovering, Reinventing, and Revitalizing Ancient Inscriptions*, ed. Alison E. Cooley (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2000): 163-192. Benton also discusses the planning of the Foro in Benton, "Rome Reclaims its Empire," 125-127.
[152] Benjamin, 241.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Benjamin, 242.
[155] Benjamin, 241. He quotes Marinetti's manifeso on the Ethiopian War (which has not been translated into English).
[156] Theodor W. Adorno, "Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait," *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998), 155.
[157] The exhibition takes its title from a manifesto by the sculptor Arturo Martini written in 1945 against sculpture, which he had abandoned in 1939. His text was a reaction against state art, and it seems a variety of mea culpa. He taught Marino Marini, produced some fascist art, but died in 1947 before he was able to produce whatever his new art would be. The volume that accompanies the exhibition presents work by, among others, Martini, Marini, Libero Andreotti, and Lucio Fonatana, who after the war would make his reputation on slicing monochrome canvases. Penelope Curtis, *Scultura Lingua Morta: Sculpture from Fascist Italy*, (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2003).
[158] Jonathan Jones, "It's All too Easy to Call the Work of Artists in Mussolini's Italy Fascist," *The Guardian* 12 July 2003: 19.

[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.

Chapter Two:

Symbolic Classicism: Empty Tropes and Cultural Literacy

Classical knowledge, that is, Greek and Latin, is absolutely necessary for every body; because every body has agreed to think and to call it so.
Lord Chesterfield[1]

[Alama-Tadema's] art, therefore, demands nothing from the spectator beyond the almost unavoidable knowledge that there was such a thing as the Roman Empire, whose people were very rich, very luxurious, and, in retrospect, agreeably wicked
Roger Fry[2]

I. Introduction

1.1 Definition of symbolic classicism as signifier

Symbolic classicism is a mode of engaging the classical tradition which uses symbols of antiquity in a post-Greco-Roman artistic text. These symbols, like a lyre, an amphora, or a bust, are borrowed from the past and appropriated for the purpose of evocation. They seem to possess an aura which gestures backwards to their origins, but the great bulk of such symbols signify no finite meaning, no particular *signified*. Rather they evoke an atmosphere, an Attic breeze to waft through the text, or the solid foundation of tradition converted from an extant Roman building.

An archaic torso, before the sonnet's turn when Rilke gives meaning to a broken statue which in turn sends the reader in search of meaning, denotes a point in time, pregnant because of the tradition to which it gave rise. Rilke's archaic torso succeeds as symbolic classicism because the extant fragment of the past Rilke deployed in the poem produces meaning for the speaker and the reader. "We will not ever know his legendary head…Yet / His torso glows like a candelabra…If this were not so, this stone would

stand defaced, maimed…for there is no place here / That does not see you. You must change your life."[3] This signifier initially sends the reader back to antiquity, connoting Greek sculpture, Phidian craft, ideal form, beauty, in short Greek civilization. But more importantly, the torso forces the speaker to think constructively of what that tradition means to him. In it he finds a self-reflexive maxim for the role of art: you must change your life. The sublime provokes a search for the self, for the truth of the individual.

The fragment encapsulates the whole. Without the rest of the statue, it could have been as perfect as the speaker can imagine. Symbolic classicism at its most accomplished provokes just such an enquiry in a reader or viewer. The broken detritus of antiquity is still moored to the past, but the artists' purposes in using it should not simply be to proffer an object to the reader that does the work of the artist. Rather that signification is the initial step in a symbol's use. It should move from there to produce revelation, critique, amazement, recognition of a truth or a lie, or any number of the goals of a work of art.

1.2 The symbol as trope of western literacy

These classical symbols evoke (that first step in the "Archaic Torso of Apollo") thanks to two and a half millennia of an elite Western literacy. An educated viewer can recognize an object fairly easily as something Greco-Roman, or a work of art as within the classical tradition. A classical symbol corresponds to the shared knowledge of an elite group, which however specialized, is not a closed group. Fluency with the Greco-

Roman can come from a traditional European education of instruction in Latin and readings of Cicero, Vergil, and Terence.[4]

1.2.1 Not necessarily an elite literacy

That said, however, being literate of antiquity did not necessitate secondary education. Thorough study of the Latin language began after primary school (i.e., that is when the children of the lower classes had already left), but cultural fluency outside of the knowledge of the dead language still occurred. Consider, for example, Mussolini's imperial project and typological propaganda, discussed in the previous chapter. If his association with Augustus only held meaning for an elite, than there would have been no purpose in abandoning politicized Futurism, which those artists so eagerly produced. Modernism was a wholly elite movement, its difficulty insured its appreciation by a fraction of the elite. A secondary analogy following upon the previous is worthwhile. Modernist typography, most noticeably the lack of serifs in fonts, has become widespread. Contemporary viewers do not recognize it as "Modernist" but, rather, as familiar. Architecturally, rectangular apartment buildings are quotidian. Fast cutting and montage in film are to be expected of any action blockbuster. But such widespread techniques stem from earlier innovations. Similarly the use of the classical, a Latin phrase, a dome, a phrase of Mark Anthony via Shakespeare resounds with the Western tradition without any necessary specificity.

In an address to the Académie des Sciences morales in 1923, Henri Bergson argued for the primacy of Greco-Latin studies in education. He insisted that classical knowledge

formed the French intellect and made it a classical nation, an inheritor of antiquity, as we have seen before. However, Bergson did not limit classical knowledge and the importance of its study to an elite, but also to the lower classes. "Je veux bien que nos ouvriers n'aient pas appris le grec et le latin. Ils n'en travaillent pas moins dans une société qui a reçu l'empreinte gréco-latine et qui l'a conservée, nette et ferme, par un contact ininterrompu avec la pensée antique."[5] These workers bear the stamp of the classical tradition and what they produce, their goods, being made by Frenchmen, being French, whose contact with ancient though has "never" been interrupted, are likewise marked by classical antiquity.

While the myth of a modern nation being the inheritor of classical antiquity, an uninterrupted contact with classical thought, and Bergson's argument are all bogus, there is some truth to "l'empreinte gréco-latine," beyond its ideological construct and Bergson's nationalist argument. Bergson landed, despite his purposes, on a useful metaphor. A stamp or imprint is received simply through being part of the culture or society in which the classical tradition survives, in which contact with the classical is habitual.

1.2.2 The symbol resonating with the literate

A classical bust in a drawing of Cocteau or a painting by de Chrico means. A Western audience can understand it. Antiquity and the artistic tradition of Europe still induce reverence. It might be distant, apart, arch, or unpalatable, but an audience still recognizes it as classical and often as important. There might no longer be the familiarity

with the many myths, but then again the immediacy of religious art and fluency with it in the setting of a Cathedral has begun to slip as well. While classical learning has declined rapidly since mid-century, and steadily before that point, the audience for any classicizing Modernist works would have certainly been an elite, and therefore familiar with the classical tradition, imprinted by the Greco-Roman.

1.3 The symbol as modernist fragment

Beyond the production of a new past which can then be alluded to, invoked, or altered, symbolic classicism uses its signs as modernist fragments. As the fragments of Greek poetry helped construct the poetic High Modernist aesthetic,[6] symbolic classicism uses such Greco-Roman signs as shards to encapsulate the entirety of the classical tradition. They stand for the whole.

Classical learning, in steady decline, was fragmented and irretrievable in its entirety since the fall of Rome. Its fragmentation long predates that of European culture which the Modernists witnessed around them. To conserve tradition, the High Modernists shored the fragments against ruin, assembled the broken images into art to preserve the European tradition including the classical. Deploying the symbols of the classical past had this same conservative, ideological purpose. If culture is fragmented, the fragment can more accurately reflect the period than can a well-wrought text, it seemed. The fragment is a constant of Modernism, used in the formal construction of poems, in the scenic structure of Brechtian drama, as short prose fragment, in the rapid succession of disparate images in film, in consciously unfinished paintings, and Anton

Webern's musical compositions which, in addition to their short, fragment-like nature, fragment the melodic line across a variety of instruments.

1.4 The problems of symbolic classicism – *the specified gives way to the generalized*

Despite classical literacy, a European audience's more particularized knowledge of antiquity, familiarity with Greco-Roman artifacts, and classical literacy, symbolic classicism is still uniquely problematic within a work of art. What Rilke was able to accomplish in "Archaic Torso" is rare. Where the classical tradition depends on an audience's familiarity with classical antiquity, symbolic classicism in practice rarely depends on any specialized knowledge or ability to identify something specific, as can even be seen from Rilke's poem. Rather symbolic classicism deploys a symbol readily identifiable as classical. The recognizability of a trope as classical is the cause for its use. Symbolic classicism does not concern itself with complexities or the trail of contextual meanings linked to a sign. An artist's use of a classical symbol is for its associations, from which an audience can produce some recognition of the classical past. The classical symbol links back to no definite antecedent, rather it gestures pregnantly with abstractions of *an* antiquity, evoking the memory of a classical past and invoking the weight of classical tradition for legitimacy.

1.3.1 Production of a new antiquity (c.f. Adorno's "to colonize the…space of a past age"[7])

In turn, symbolic classicism recreates an inauthentic classical antiquity, as we have seen before, a past falsified and simplified that the text does not itself inhabit. Such classical detritus is often used simply to represent the passage of time. The text engenders such a past for and through the aide of the viewer. Eschewing any debt to archaeological or scholarly accuracy, symbolic classicism conjures images of lyres being strummed by garlanded poets and amphorae being emptied in libations to ancestors and dinner guests. Symbolic classicism relies upon an *idea* of the classical.

1.3.2 The Disruption and Fabrication of Meaning

Having produced an idea of the classical based on artificial reconstruction and having used the Modernist trope of the fragment to evoke both contemporaneity and the ruins of the past, the symbol disrupts its original historic meaning, as in the example of the amphora again, and fabricates a new meaning for it, namely a modern approximation of the classical past. The amphora becomes equated with the familiar theme of la source, an eternal spring. The spring itself has vanished but the renewed symbol has been posited in its place. The amphora now becomes a metaphor for the site of poetic and artistic inspiration and production. Yet the vehicle of the metaphor, the representation of the amphora, still has a train of meaning crystallized onto it, though malleable, as has been seen.

The amphora as inspirational site is united with its position in the classical tradition and produces a *sotto voce* argument that classical antiquity should be viewed as the source of the text, whether the case or not. If deployed delicately in the right stylistic

circumstance a text can be easily rendered neoclassical. In a more-or-less figurative painting, for instance, nude bathers can represent any period; with signifying baggage of the classical, the entire painting can be viewed completely differently, as part of an acceptable, laudable tradition, engaged with the past, renewing antique glories in a modern idiom.

While the symbol seems to lend the artistic work meaning through engagement with the classical tradition, exhibited through the artist's deployment of it, the symbol at the same time is stripped of its significations and rendered an abstraction such as "classical" or "Western tradition," or "pinnacle of artistic craft," or "birth of democracy," "birth of the west," etc. Where the archaic torso in Rilke's sonnet produces meaning, generally symbolic classicism effects only the mirage of an inauthentic past. Rilke constructs his torso for contemporary meaning for a viewer and does not rely completely upon its inherent classical associations.

1.4 The Classical "relic"

I wish to use the term "relic" to refer to classical forms, symbols, images, tropes, themes, and figures originating in antiquity. These have a train or more accurately a cloud of significations around them. Thus, our perennial example of an amphora, has a fixed material meaning, but beyond this it can more abstractly evoke the idea of a classical past. Combined with such relics' use in subsequent work from the modern period, its cloud grows more nebulous as its usage expands, incorporating more and more attendant meanings as the relic is more frequently deployed.

This in part begins to explain the twentieth century's versions of the classical, originating not simply in antiquity but both there and in the modern period, adding other subsequent classicisms from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Racine and Ingres are classical predecessors as important as Vergil or Phidias. Thus the cloud surrounding a relic grows larger as the idea of the classical expands to include subsequent art.[8] As relics are deployed in Modern art and literature these meanings can be used or invoked, sublimated, or used in part, becoming a tool of the artist in which meaning can be overtly controlled depending on how the relic is used and its context within a work of art.

1.5 Outline of texts treated

In *Le Sang d'un poète* (1930), Jean Cocteau uses symbolic-classicism with a degree of self-consciousness. Classical relics and fragments appear consistently throughout his first film, but are never moored to an explicit mythical narrative. Rather they appear, and reappear developing an aura of the classical. Cocteau stated that he attempted to film the poetic state, that is the conscious mind in the process of creating art. This helps a viewer to understand the role that the classical tradition plays in his film. For Cocteau, the classical past was a constant preoccupation. Thus, in the act of artistic creation, classical elements steadfastly appear in his consciousness. These classical engagements do not organize or structure the film; rather they simply inhabit the film as signposts or symbolic beacons for a classical patina. Furthermore, these classical relics persistently occur as living statues, namely metaphors for the film as a work of art, at once frozen in time and a "living," moving text.

Giorgio de Chirico, even more than Cocteau, made a career out of symbolic classicism. His paintings are suffused with classical relics jutting against modernity. Any inherent meaning is simply associative, allowing a viewer to construct an interpretation through the abstract symbolic content surrounding his relics. Furthermore, de Chirico is the classicizing modernist, besides those who produced specifically political and occasional art, the most invested in a national painting. All of his work is explicitly Italian, and he presented himself as the modern painter the most rooted in Italian soil. His use of symbolic classicism, which allows the classical relics that inhabit his paintings to blossom into a multiplicity of interpretations, reifies into a decidedly specific, national project.

W. B. Yeats uses Byzantine antiquity as symbolic classicism in "Sailing to Byzantium" by making Constantinople represent the ideal environment in which the artist or craftsman could work. Yeats transforms Byzantium into an imaginary place to which the contemporary artist could escape. For Yeats, it becomes a place where artistic creation is woven into daily life. After introducing the miraculous mechanical birds which symbolize an epitome of human artifice, he presents them essentially as trinkets to entertain the nobility. The speaker of the poem wishes to be transformed into immutable art, but this art is not sublime, rather it is quotidian.

And in the last text to be discussed in this chapter, Ezra Pound constructs the third section of his long poem *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* around certain classical allusions and relics, each stanza being moored by one, in comparison to a present that the poem's speaker finds vulgar and tawdry. Mauberley finds a gradual debasement of art, culture,

and ultimately all the trappings of society which he tries to encyclopedically denounce, from an idealized classical past to a present where Greek ideals can be transformed into mere advertisements. Although Pound, unlike the other texts under analysis, uses highly specific classical allusions (i.e., the silk Propertius favored on his mistress, the lost variety of lyre used by Sappho, a quotation from Pindar) the classical past in its entirety becomes a simplistic symbol for Mauberley to which he could compare his present. Antiquity is flattened into an ideal used solely for the purposes of measurement.

II. *Le Sang d'un poète* as symbolic classicism

2.1 Introduction to *Le Sang d'un poète*

Jean Cocteau's first film, *Le Sang d'un poète* (1930), was an attempt to represent the poetic state,[9] the mind at work during poetic creation. Despite his distance from the Surrealists and parodying automatic writing in both the play and film versions of *Orphée*, Cocteau's film shares many qualities with surreal techniques in its juxtaposition of images and in its attempt at conveying the unconscious mind. However, *Le Sang d'un poète* is far more grounded in classical imagery than any Surrealist text.[10] For Cocteau, the mind of the poet, constantly engaged in a poetic interpretation of the world and at times productive of art, is preoccupied with mythic narratives and concrete works of art. Cocteau's visual, filmed attempt to reproduce the state of mind during the creative act amounts in the finished aesthetic work to not a dream-narrative, the usual description of texts which flirt with surrealism, but a filmic representation of the Modernist fragment, particularly in his use of the classical elements. Demonstrating the artist's personal

creative state, the classical fragments emerge from both Cocteau's preoccupation with a classicizing style and likewise from his classical education. While these fragments sometimes correspond to a particular myth, when taken in toto they differ little from the classical fragments that we have already examined, signifying simply the classical as an undifferentiated mass of learning and tradition. In other words, here as elsewhere when the classical and the Modernist fragment intersect, the Modernist element overrides the classical and transforms it into an arbitrary signifier or hollow referent to the abstraction of "classical antiquity." Even if Cocteau's classical signs match-up to a particular myth, they still amount to vacant icons because in the film they are so many, mostly random, and amount to no higher purpose than evocation, an evocation of the artist, of sexuality, of the work of art.

In his attempt to give a visual representation of the creative state, Cocteau presents necessarily his own poetic imagination, a cinematic dramatization of his inchoate predilections and preoccupations. As such, it functions in a sense as a map of his artistic career. Yet the classical elements working in the film are not strictly of antiquity, rather they obliquely allude to the Greco-Roman inheritance, a more-or-less classical statue, missing limbs as if a broken statue, a hermaphrodite, a bull, a bust, a lyre, and laurels.

2.2 Mythic Fragments

Classical civilization is directly tied to Cocteau's poetic imagination. As a polymath, classical allusion occurred throughout his oeuvre in all of the mediums in

which he worked, usually amounting to either a very clear adaptation of a Greek myth or as detritus or the trappings of the classical littered about his works airiating a vague sense of antiquity or classicism. It is this that is at work in *Le Sang d'un poète.*

Traditionally, interpretations of this film, when they treat the classical elements at play within it, argue that such relics invoke a specific mythic narrative.[11] This is not strictly the case. Greek mythology is a constant for Cocteau, one of the most neoclassical of 20th century artists. Therefore elements, relics, one could even say fragments of mythological narratives appear consistently throughout his filmed "poetic state." Likewise, as a representation of a productive state, it demonstrates the supremacy of the classical tradition in Cocteau's mind. Fragments of the classical past consistently reoccur throughout the creative process. For Cocteau, then, he could choose, and would in different projects, to pursue a particular strain of the classical tradition and, in effect, complete the allusion by filling out the narrative. But in this film, these allusions are juxtaposed, all incomplete narratives or passing thoughts and symbols that inhabit this inchoate landscape.

Yet these fragments must have served some aesthetic goal for Cocteau beyond simple referral. So, beyond the stated objective of filming the poetic state, and beyond the finished text with its narrative on the poet, *Le Sang d'un poète* exhibits another Modernist trope within 20th century classicism, namely the conservational impulse. This desire to preserve the detritus of civilization animates Eliot and Pound's artistic projects, and to a more limited extent those of Yeats and de Chirico. It is a platitude of Modernism, however accurate, that civilization is fragmented, that to represent modernity

aesthetically is to present fragmentation in imitative form. For artists preoccupied with the classical tradition and a European heritage, whose oeuvre is consistently classicizing, the fragmentation of a Western tradition should be countered in their own artistic production by shoring these fragments together against ruin, to adapt Pound's phrase, which amounts in a finished text to a mass of allusions and images.

Cocteau's fragments, however, never coalesce into something larger, but instead remain jarring pieces or shards representative of an artistic state in the act of production, but not a finalized, smoothed work of art. Perhaps this is fitting for his stated goal, but it undermines the final product, namely *Le Sang d'un poète* as a film. The conservational goal is muted and unclear, while the classical fragments remain too abstract, too simplistic, representing bald significances: the artist, the work of art, mythological images too distant from their original narrative to possibly conserve it.

Practically then, the film's poet brings to life a statue, like Pygmalion, yet Cocteau does not follow this relic, choosing instead to proceed with other non-classical preoccupations, i.e., the mirror, which would appear in *Orphée* (play: 1926; film: 1950), and the snowball fight, occurring in *Les Enfants terribles* (1929). These elements, as central to the film as the classical elements, should similarly be understood, as elements that enter his creative state, but from older texts or his life—he witnessed such a snowball fight in his childhood. What gives the film an illusion of Surrealism is these fragments jutting against each other within the act of artistic creation but, importantly, leaving them as fragments.

Mythic resonances are consistently and always partially invoked in the film. Beyond the allusion to Pygmalion, the poet after he has finished peering into the keyholes of the Hotel des Folies-Dramatiques, appears as a Dionysus-like figure, garbed in an approximation of classical dress and garlanded with Laurels, and kills himself. Yet immediately thereafter, returns to life and throws off his laurels. Cocteau, yet again, takes up a classical fragment, a Dionysian artist, yet the poet actively rejects fulfilling such a narrative by resurrecting and rejecting his crown. However, he cannot accomplish this so easily; by doing so, he has ironically fulfilled the allusion to Dionysus who is also resurrected. Cocteau produces a cyclical trap which his poet cannot escape. The classical tradition can never be fully escaped. In fact, the poet dies twice more. He destroys the living statue and is then transformed into another, which is likewise dismantled by the school boys who tear it apart for snowballs. And finally at the end of the film, the poet, alive again for no stated reason shoots himself yet again after losing a game of cards with a woman who subsequently transforms back into the statue. Cocteau's classicism offers simply a glittering antiquity. However visually interesting, it is semantically inert and does not further the classical tradition in any meaningful way. *Le Sang d'un poète* cannot conserve antiquity because it devours it regurgitating fragments that are ultimately meaningless and nothing more than visual titillation.

2.3 Artistic Objects

Le Sang d'un poète is replete with artistic objects, all of which are distinctly marked with Cocteau's style and a vague neoclassicism. The first shot of the film is of a living

statue—a man dressed in contemporary clothing, wrapped in long fabric with a mask upon his face that evokes a marble bust. Behind him is the raw material used for the production of a film: large lights, a camera, and a backdrop. This image is not used anywhere else in the film, although a female statue, similar to this first, is seen throughout. This statue holds out his right arm as he moves slightly. This initial statue serves as an overture to the film, demonstrating both its materiality and its recurrent themes, a conflation of the present with a vague evocation of the past, a living work of art like film itself. The two consistencies throughout *Le Sang d'un poète*'s classical detritus is that its classical elements are always vague and general (statues, bulls, and busts that need to be recognized and then parsed or interpreted) and that most of the concrete art within the film is alive to one degree or another, made up of living actors, serving as a metaphor for the genre of film itself. The living art may thus be interpreted as a metaphor for the classical tradition, namely that it is alive, but this is not consistent within the film itself because by it conclusion the statues return to their inert state and Cocteau's metaphor disintegrates upon himself.

Despite the wire busts, some with hair directly borrowed from Greek kouros figures, the works of art in the film come alive, including the initial male statue, the statue who receives the mouth, the hermaphrodite in the hotel, and the final figure at the end of the film. The female statue is animated by a mouth which the poet draws onto a canvas and is transferred to his hand and then to the statue. She is the living work of art that appears the most throughout the film. She motivates the poet's journey through the mirror and is then destroyed by him only to revenge herself at the end. Before she leaves the film, she

summons a living bull, itself become a work of art, inscribed with a damaged map of the world ion which Europe is missing. The bull has led some scholars to ransack the film for analogies to the myth of Europa. Yet this is another example of Cocteau alluding and dramatizing fragments of myths. The continent of Europe missing from the bull gestures towards that myth through its absence, but should not necessarily lead the viewer to equate the bull with Zeus.

The hermaphrodite and the final distorted figure serve less important roles in the film. In fact, they have little to do with *Le Sang d'un poète*'s narrative but more simplistically stand as evocative symbols. The hermaphrodite, behind the 23rd door at the Hotel des Folies-Dramatiques comes alive, like the other works of art and represents a parallel microcosm to the similar statues within the film. It is pieced together upon a blackboard, a sketch, followed by actual limbs coming into being. Outside its room are two shoes, one of a man and one of a woman. The hermaphrodite's groin area is covered by a cloth, and then stripped away to show the words "Danger de Mort," for its dangerous sexuality. Besides the vague Cocteauian classicism, its only classical analogue are the common statues of hermaphrodites sleeping and at rest upon divans such as the *Hermaphrodite endormi* at the Louvre, a Roman copy of a Hellenistic sculpture, or the *Reclining Hermaphrodite* at the Museo Nazionale Romano. Similarly, the final living statue walks into the distance, after the last shot of the bull, with a profile made of wire, holding a lyre and a world. This figure possibly represents the same female statue as before. The torn map has been transformed into a complete globe, and the lyre simply remains evocatively. That fixed shot, through which the bull and statue parade, is

followed by another of a female statue prone on the floor, with the same objects. Its limbs are missing, as in the initial female statue upon its animation. The body is distorted, and lines have been drawn upon the actress' face.

The classical tradition once enervated returns to stillness. The collapsed remnants of classicism are not orchestrated into a governing order, but remain disordered and inchoate. The fragments began to coalesce, but by the film's end return to their status as shards and nothing more. The first living, male statue as visual metaphor has been eclipsed by the second female statue which returns to its corresponding fragmented, dead pieces at the end. *Le Sang d'un poète* finally becomes a poetic evocation of an empty realm, a past space not even fabricated.

2.4 *Le Sang d'un poète*'s symbolic classicism

In *Le Sang d'un poète*, Cocteau attempted to film his poetic imagination. Fittingly for a 20th century neoclassicist, classical elements play a large role in the imagery of his conscious mind within the act of creation. The classical tradition manifests within the film in two major ways: the fragmentation and dispersement of classical myths and ekphrastic representations of artistic work within the larger film.

Yet for all the metaphoric importance of these classicisms within the film, Cocteau's classical relics remain symbolic shorthand for classical antiquity. In fact, *Le Sang d'un poète* presents its classical symbolism shorn almost completely of any authentic meaning, becoming a highly useful example of classical symbolism. The classical relics at work in the film can be eventually traced to their classical origins, but with both great uncertainty,

and, ultimately, little utility. That the Hotel des Folies-Dramatique's hermaphrodite resembles a couple of Hellenistic sculptures provides only where Cocteau discovered what would eventually become one of several tableaux. The core of the hermaphrodite image is not its classicism but its sexuality. Cocteau strands its metaphorical significance from the image's classical site, and as an icon, the hermaphrodite remains arbitrary. Yet the living sculpture is nevertheless distinctly presented as classical. The bull has its analogues in the myth of Zeus and Europa, but knowledge of these offers the viewer little more grist for his interpretation. Rather, these relics simply hover, lending an aura of neoclassicism, a sense of tradition mixed with the avant-garde, a style that was Cocteau's trademark. *Le Sang d'un poète*'s classicism exists solely within the realm of vague symbolic classicism. These exist to provide an aura, namely the presence of antiquity within Cocteau's mind, and never transcend the role as evocative signposts. As a depiction of Cocteau's personal creative state, the film succeeds in this modest goal, but his larger attempt to conserve deteriorates because the classical elements remain fragmented and diluted.

III. De Chirico's symbolic antiquity

Pictor classicus sum.
Giorgio de Chirico[12]

The loss of classical unity [in de Chirico] is reflected in the disruption of the functioning sign, that is, by the loss of the immanence of symbols.
Emily Braun[13]

3.1 Introduction to de Chirico

De Chirco's paintings depict a stylized classical landscape unmoored from time. Their settings are Italianate and classicized, full of piazzas, loggia, and sculptures, presenting an unmistakably Italian landscape set in an undifferentiated time period. De Chrico, like most of the major artists of Modernism, lived in Paris and led an international life style. For all of his "statelessness," however, de Chirico's art was more closely tied to a national identity than the work of any other Modernist. De Chirco turned to a variety of cultures for his inspiration, Etruscan, ancient Roman, and Italian Renaissance, but all were confined to his *pays natal*.[14]

De Chirico's Metaphysical phase of the 1910's, which was championed by the Surrealists, shows, with the benefit of hindsight, what his later art, from 1920 until his death in 1978, would become. The strange objects like gloves and bananas would be evacuated from his landscapes, which would take on their own classical symbolism. De Chirco's abandonment of the metaphysical is central to understanding the symbolism he advances in his later work. It is the very multiplicity of possible meanings, the dreamscape of early de Chirco championed by Duchamp, Breton, and others, that became no longer tenable for his artistic project. He began to dominate his paintings with carefully structured buildings which represented Italianicity, tradition, and order.

3.2 Symbolic classicism and de Chirico's metaphysical period

De Chricio made his reputation with his early Metaphysical paintings, which endeared him to Picasso, Cocteau, the Surrealists, and subsequent Italian artistic movements like the group around the journal *Valori Plastici* and the Novecento. These

metaphysical works juxtaposed quotidian objects and detritus from the classical past to produce a "dreamscape" of objects without any logical connections. More often than not, these objects inhabited the same Italianate landscape which de Chirico used throughout his artistic career.

The symbolism of these early paintings is dominated by a carefully constructed opacity of meaning and deletion of temporality. Objects from different historical periods coexist stripped of temporal mooring. De Chirico arrests historical specificity and temporality and thus engages in one of the most widespread tropes of classicizing art. The classical and post-classical past live in the unspecified "present" of a given painting. Emily Braun, referring specifically to his classical symbols, suggests that de Chirco "emptied 'signs' of their ideological significance[, which] refuse[d] to bear the weight of any invested meaning."[15] However through his temporal displacement, de Chirico invests his work with a new meaning, different from that of any attendant meaning associated with his objects and relics. His paintings force the viewer to produce some personal meaning from the collected artifacts, as de Chico presumably did in their construction. Thus these paintings invest new life into the objects at the same time as the objects construct an abstraction of meaning based on their connotations. Thus, possible meanings jut against one another allowing for an open-ended multiplicity of divergent readings, producing a proto-de Manian tension between readings, arresting the understanding of a painting.

3.3 From the metaphysical to the classical

By 1920, however, de Chirico had abandoned his earlier style and would be rejected by the Surrealists.[16] Examining his later paintings begins to explain the reasons behind his artistic evolution. He abandoned the open-ended nature of his earlier paintings for a much more rigid symbolic structure, still suffused with an element of mystery in his cityscapes with Ariadne, for example, which would subsequently be completely diffused in the paintings of mannequins.

As he expunged metaphysical objects from his paintings, mythological figures gathered as in the Ariadne series in which the typical de Chirican locale is occupied by a reclining statue of Ariadne with occasional distant figures.[17] Likewise in his work from the 1960's and 1970's, de Chirico painted his own idiosyncratic versions of most of the major Greco-Roman myths, including Hippolytus, Oedipus, Odysseus, Hector and Andromache, Orestes, Orpheus, and Antigone. Emily Braun argues that any relation of these paintings to their actual mythological subject is simply rhetorical, that these are again empty signs vacated of their significance.[18]

De Chirico's strain of classicism, through subject, locale, and ekphrasis emphasized the role he championed for himself as an anti-avant-garde painter. In other words, de Chirico was the only major Modern artist who presented his classicism in the manner it is most often viewed, as reaction. The other artists, besides those who produced quantifiable state art, classicized in the context of avant-garde practices, using the past in a new way to produce a new kind of art. The classicizing work of the 20th century melded antiquity and the contemporary with the goal of progress. De Chirico, on the

other hand, used the same techniques of arresting time and juxtaposing the ancient and the modern to retain his position in the past, distancing himself from the avant-gardes.

3.4 The Archaeological mannequins

In the mid-1920's, de Chricio adopted a trope in his paintings that would re-occur throughout his career. He painted mannequins, stripped of faces with wildly disproportionate limbs, often sexless. The torsos of these mannequins were full of a conglomeration of symbols. The paintings of mythological figures, for example, are full of wooden building materials; their poses, the setting, and the objects around them identify them—Orpheus' lyre lies nearby on a rock, Oedipus wears armor and his torso displays the walled city of Thebes. The most successful of these paintings is 1927's *The Archaeologists*, which he would return to copy with minor differences, as de Chirico was wont to do, in other paintings from the late 1920s and 1960s and in sculptures.

In the original 1927 painting, the figures of the archaeologists are seated upon upholstered chairs in a room, with cloth covering their legs and draped across their right shoulders suggestive of a toga. Their torsos are comprised of the ruins and the detritus of classical antiquity—arches, fallen columns, broken aqueducts, and temples. This painting succeeds better than de Chirico's other paintings which use the mannequin trope, because the material of which his archaeologists are made is more identifiable and more pertinent to his subject. Through this painting, his mannequin project can be understood. Not only do his undifferentiated figures develop specificity through the material of their

construction, but also de Chirico offers an x-ray of these individuals so the viewer can see into them as selves.

De Chirico's visual metaphor is simple: the contemporary individual is outwardly unrecognizable. We do not know the interests or passions of anyone we meet; other people are outwardly unremarkable and unknowable. Through his mannequin paintings, de Chirico attempts to demonstrate the wealth of individuality within a person, what cannot be seen. De Chirco's project is thus to show the identities of faceless modern man and woman. In his alternate variations on *The Archaeologists*, he presents the figures embracing and holding hands; he attempts to humanize the victims of modern alienation. The figures' dwarfed legs, making them incapable of movement, do not deny them the possibility of action, but rather attempt to demonstrate the wealth of their being, the depth of their vocation as an integral element of their humanity. Their torsos which hold the material of their individuality tower and extend their bodies.

Yet this trope ultimately reified into a cliché of de Chirico's painting, and its latter fortunes and the pseudo-humanitarian nature of the trope reveal the hollowness at the heart of these paintings. For all his attempts to show what is within the archaeologists, the vitality of their vocation, de Chirico represents them simply through their occupation. The trope to show the nature of individuals dissolves through its very impossibility, turning individuals simply into careers, the archaeologists become embodiments of the empty symbols inside of them.

3.5 The National Question

De Chirico's nationality became a charged question in Italy of the 1920s and 1930s. Having been born in Greece though of an Italian family, studied in Germany, and spent the majority of his years producing art in Paris, he was viewed as an international, not firmly rooted to a native land. In fact, he cultivated this internationalism in his early avant-garde years. In fascist Italy, his rootless internationalism became a detriment to his career, preventing him from appearing in some state-sponsored exhibitions, and even allowing one critic to label his work as "Jewish."[19]

However after the First World War when the question of national identity became more charged than previously, de Chirico began to present himself as a quintessentially Italian painter, the validity of this position can be clearly gleaned from his paintings which consistently inhabit an Italianate city. De Chirico's relation to Italian fascism is problematic, although he denounced it in his *Memoirs* and went into hiding with his Jewish wife in the last year of World War II.[20] De Chirico had joined the Fascist party in 1930,[21] painted Mussolini's daughter, Eda Ciano,[22] appealed to Mussolini himself in 1935 for acceptance in state-sponsored exhibitions,[23] and participated in the 1926 Novecento Italiano,[24] an exhibit in Milan and later a school of Italian art underwritten by Mussolini and developed by his then-mistress Margherita Sarfatti, who attempted to produce a school or style of fascist art.

Whatever de Chirico's historical relation to Italian fascism, his paintings consistently lend themselves to nationalist interpretation.[25] In fact, responding to the accusations of internationalism and to Italian painters working in Italy, de Chirico argued

that he embodied Italy better than anyone else. He said that he "construct[ed] in my paintings a forceful Italianicity unrivaled by our homegrown artists (not just painters) to this day."[26] His work in each period of his career was grounded in an imaginary Italian landscape or city, while the work which gave him inspiration, which he copied, and the objects within his paintings were frequently of an Italian origin.

Pia Vivarelli argues that "the [classical] elements [in his paintings] are almost always filtered through the tradition of humanism and the Renaissance, which augments [their] nationalism."[27] By not confining himself to solely classical symbols and incorporating later Italian elements, de Chirico inserts himself more rigidly into the Italian tradition. The classical by itself is deeply tied to the questions of nationality and modern inheritance, but de Chirico, by presenting his paintings as wholly Italian goes beyond most other 20th century classicists' infatuation with the nation-state. He weds the classical tradition to the modern Italian. He even finds an analogue in Futurism, with which he had little to do. The exquisite stillness of his piazzas and loggias which become almost vacuums, emptied of all life, are dominated by a rigid order, just as Futurism for all its dynamism, light, and motion was likewise dominated by the ordered politics of reactionary conservatism before it accepted Italian fascism.

3.6 Conclusion to de Chirico

Giorgio de Chirico's paintings are quintessential examples of symbolic classicism because his method of painting focused on the use of resonant symbols often of a more or less classical source. He abandoned the dreamscape of his early metaphysical paintings

because of their very dream-like abstraction, offering up too many possibilities of interpretation so that meaning could be sustained, developing a surreal, illogical, non-meaning akin to a collection of ephemera. He moved on to a subject matter which still retained the mystery of the abstract, yet could be more easily understood within a national framework, that of an Italian artistic tradition stretching from the present back into ancient Rome. Besides the series of *Archaeologists*, in which de Chirico came his closest to producing a verifiable meaning, his work still swam in mysterious juxtapositions and oblique interpretations. Yet even his archaeologists relied on the abstraction of the classical relic as symbol, using for its currency the most clichéd images of classical ruins. Whatever the lost meaning of his paintings, the symbols he used all functioned as shorthand for the idea of antiquity and Italy.

IV. "Sailing to Byzantium," the classical symbol equated with modern significance

4.1 Yeats' symbolic classicism

In "Sailing to Byzantium," Yeats transforms the city of Constantinople itself into a trope of symbolic classicism however Christianized. Through his historical readings, Yeats developed an idea of the city as a perfect environment for the artist where "religious, aesthetic, and practical life were one,"[28] where all artists and artificers could speak to both the multitude and the elite.[29] Yeats transformed a historical place into a mythological ideal city for the artist to work.

Here, then, the cloud of significations which surrounds the classical relic is joined with Yeats' own idiosyncratic mythology. Yet for whatever assistance knowing that

Yeats saw Constantinople as a haven of artistic production might provide in the understanding of "Sailing to Byzantium," the poem is not as dependent on Yeats' mythological system as is "The Second Coming" for instance. Rather the idea of antiquity, the cloud around the relic of Constantinople, is what informs the reading. The reader barely need know that there was a thing called the Byzantine empire that existed; that it had an Emperor and that he commissioned clockwork birds comes from the poem itself. Yeats has stripped the poem of history. Early drafts mentioned a golden dome of Hagia Sophia, but Yeats removed it as well.[30] Despite the specificity of a place called Byzantium where the speaker will sing to lords and ladies, any mooring in time is also erased. Byzantium is presented as a place still in existence. In other words, Yeats has not only arrested time, as has been seen in other classicizing texts, but also space.

Yeats erases the historical specificity of Constantinople and transforms it into a simplified antiquity equated with the classical past, a Christianized classical space palatable because it possesses both a spirituality of which Yeats can approve and a classical aesthetics. Yeats flattens time and history moving spatially from modern Ireland to antiquity, transforming that specific time and place into a symbol to be used in his poetic project. He strips Byzantium of historical significance save for the single, pseudo-mythical mechanical birds which is the only element he retains for his symbolic place, and he in turn transforms these into a Blakean metaphor.

Yeats has transformed Byzantium into an imaginative cityscape for himself; he makes more explicit than other artists a central element of the reuse of classical relics. The impossibility of his journey to Byzantium, or Baudelaire's to Cytherea,[31] presents

antiquity, yet again, as a fictive site, to be recaptured only through artistic invention. The historical Byzantium ultimately becomes incidental to Yeats' work of art.

Yeats represents his highly particularized notion of Byzantium through the poem with the aide of his supplementary prose in *A Vision* and as well as the poem's final stanza. The speaker wants to take "such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make…To keep a drowsy emperor awake; / Or…sing/ To lords and ladies of Byzantium / Of what is past, or passing, or to come." The mechanical birds do not amount, as at first they seem to do, to the Romantic role of the poet-prophet in Blake or Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" which clearly provided Yeats with the poem's final line. Rather Yeats transforms the seemingly miraculous birds, which strike the reader as both alien and as a great monument of artistic craft, into domestic, almost quotidian artifacts of the classical past like the delicate household objects of Pompeii. However irrecoverable antiquity is, Yeats recreates a facet of the daily life of a royal palace in a period and place of antiquity which represented for him an ideal environment for the artist where craftsmanship was accomplished and exalted.

The central classical symbol in this poem is not the bird, but rather the life of Byzantium which Yeats uses to represent how artistic craft should be respected. Yeats gives Byzantium life through a historical footnote—reading "somewhere"[32] that Justinian commissioned mechanical birds for his entertainment. Yeats uses symbolic classicism here by making Byzantium stand for an idealized environment for the artist to work, given specificity through a single historical rumor and outfitted with imagery borrowed from a Ravenna mosaic in which holy martyrs are transformed into "singing-masters."

Yeats transforms a historical antiquity, though the setting for the poem, into a quarry to demonstrate how craft and artifice should be intermingled with daily life.

4.2 Introduction to "Sailing to Byzantium"

"Sailing to Byzantium," Yeats' 1926 poem, the first poem of his greatest volume, *The Tower*, treats an idiosyncratic strain of classicism not simply based on his mythological system, but also a post-classical, Christianized antiquity suitable to his syncretic beliefs with the classical tradition exerting more emphasis on the poem than the strictly Christian. A trope central to late Yeats is a highly personal variant of the classical *carpe diem*, one divorced from its typical sexual purpose, but based on the same concern of inevitable death. Fully aware that he will eventually vanish, Yeats turns toward the accustomed solution, persistence through art, his own. "Sailing to Byzantium" is thus concerned with the preservation of the speaker through artifice. Beyond the obvious impossibility of the poem's solution, Yeats goes further in subsequent poems to dismantle even the metaphorical truth of the poem's conceit. Yeats rapidly refutes the immortality of art in the first stanza of "Nineteen-Hundred and Nineteen," the fourth poem in *The Tower*, as he would repeatedly through the rest of his career:

> Many ingenious lovely things are gone
> That seemed sheer miracle to the multitude,
> Protected from the circle of the moon
> That pitches common things about. There stood

Amid the ornamental bronze and stone

An ancient image made of olive wood –

And gone are Phidias' famous ivories

And all the golden grasshoppers and bees.

The solution proffered in "Sailing to Byzantium" is already recognized as futile.[33] The classical past becomes a source of nostalgia, a dreamt-for ideal, as in its appropriation by conservatives and fascists. But Yeats recognizes it as an impossibility, not as an overarching order to be fulfilled and to counteract contemporary decadence. Thus, Yeats' darkest volume commences with a recognizable failure of his own dreams to even imagine a possible preservation of the self.

4.3 The Classicism of "Sailing to Byzantium"

In this poem, Byzantium becomes a quasi-mythological city, perfect for the artist or craftsman. "Sailing to Byzantium" adopts the 19th-century neoclassical theme and image of the voyage to Cytherea, a trope unpalatable to fascist neoclassicism because it cannot be realized and must remain a revery. Yeats' vision of Byzantium, however dependent on his historical readings, is ultimately a civilization of his own imagination, serving a poetic purpose only tangential to historical accuracy. For example, l. 18's "gold mosaic of a wall" was found not through any examination of art from Byzantium, but rather the mosaics of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna. In other words, Yeats utilizes another neoclassical trope that we have seen before: the fabrication of antiquity,

but he transposes it to a past less remote in terms of time, but far more alien and exotic than ancient Greece or Rome to any Western European. Each major trope that Yeats puts into play in the poem he transforms from its typical usage: Cytherea becomes Constantinople, carpe diem is wrenched from the sexual to the mechanical, and he creates a fictive antiquity located not in an Arcadia but in the exotica of the Byzantine Empire. Yeats used his experience of these mosaics to produce the art that he would wish Byzantium had.

Byzantine antiquity represents a correlating antonym to contemporary Ireland, that country not for old men. Ireland, according to the speaker, is a place for youthful lovers and the natural world, i.e., "[t]hose dying generations" (l.3). The places in the first stanza, are defined by the animals there living, "salmon-falls," "mackerel-crowded seas." Defining Ireland as a place tied to the cycle of birth and death, the living world's song commends that cycle. For the speaker, the specter of death is unavoidable. And concomitantly artifice, monuments of unageing intellect, is neglected because of the sensual music of the life cycle. For the aged speaker, the immutable objects of art are his concern, as propounded in the second stanza showing why he must travel to classical antiquity which represents the opposite of it all. Therefore, before Byzantium is even treated in the poem, classical antiquity has become representative of a site beyond life and death, a place where time is arrested and still and replaces living things.

The second stanza turns from the natural world of Ireland to the aged speaker who observes that the natural world studies monuments of its own magnificence, that is itself, not human artifice's monuments of unageing intellect. Likewise, the signing school

which is not there, is given prominence in the poem's final stanza through the golden birds and the speaker transformed into a Blakean bard, which sing. The first stanza's birds thus are able to sing without study, without craft or artifice, something people cannot accomplish, much less aged men. The music or "art" of the natural world is counterbalanced against that of human creation.

The third stanza is the first to present anything particularly Byzantine, the sages in gold mosaic. Influenced by the holy martyrs in the Ravenna mosaics, Yeats' sages should not be interpreted as those that inspired the first four lines of the stanza. Rather the procession of the 26 martyrs from the mosaics of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo gave Yeats the initial image which he would utilize for his own purposes. In the manuscripts of this poem, the sages were initially, "Saints & apostles," becoming later "saints," "transfigured saints" "saints…& martyrs," and only in the last revisions transformed to "sages,"[34] distancing the Christian significance and in turn becoming more abstractly classical, representatives of a continuing classical tradition grounded in Greek aesthetics.

Yeats presents these sages, arrested in the artifice of antiquity, as living truths for the speaker. The sages are not within a mosaic, but "As in the gold mosaic of a wall." Yeats has transformed them into existing entities who stand in "holy fire" and perne or spin in Yeats' gyres. They correspond to Maurice Denis' muses, but Yeats does not update them because that would weaken the poem's argument. They are alive for all time, but still specific to antiquity. The poem is an understood journey into the past, into antiquity, in which the speaker by traveling to the past becomes part of eternity. He requests the sages to become his singing-masters, to be the teachers of the artistic craft

corresponding to the songs of nature, to posit an antique "singing school." And in the last line of this stanza the speaker calls upon the sages to gather him "[i]nto the artifice of eternity," thus making explicit both the purpose of his journey to antiquity and the means through which he will become immortal through ancient art in the final stanza.

The speaker says at the beginning of the final stanza that he will be beyond nature and will take as his form nothing natural but rather that of a clockwork bird.[35] A self-reproducing system of art is created in the man-made artifice of the birds which then create their own art, yet such a closed system is highly positive for the old speaker who places it in opposition to the self-contained system of the first stanza's life cycle. Byzantium then becomes an epitome of human artifice because it has produced its own self-contained artificial world, one superior to nature's in that it is both a monument of human artifice and eternal, unageing, but also able to eulogize the past, represent the present, and prophesize the future.

However, once the famous bird enters the poem, it is immediately downgraded to a delightful bauble, used to keep an emperor awake. And however much it has been given the position of a Blakean bard which sees all things, the past, passing,[36] and the future, the birds' prophetic songs amount simply to the news. The speaker-bird, it seems, will not produce epic art to change lives or prophecy to be put to use, but rather simply divertissement for the Byzantine royalty.

Yet this is exactly Yeats' point about Byzantium. The position he takes is not that of an exalted sage, but rather a median, robotic bird. In the passage from *A Vision* quoted earlier, Yeats expresses a desire to meet with a more humble artisan or mosaicist who

could answer all of his spiritual questions.[37] The speaker of "Sailing to Byzantium" desires to achieve a humble place in antiquity, not exceptional, or productive of sublime art, but rather one of accomplished skill and humble craftsmanship. Thus, in a way, Yeats' fantastical antiquity of prophetic machines is more casual than the classical landscapes of all other post-antique artists; Yeats seeks out the quotidian of the classical instead of the noteworthy narratives mythological or historical. Yeats transforms Byzantium into an Arcadian city of the imagination where the daily routine of artistic invention, while customary, is of supreme importance. For the Christian Yeats, pagan antiquity would have been unpalatable from a spiritual angle. Byzantium, as a syncretic paradise, combined the virtues of the classical past, notably a pinnacle of artistic craft, with a Christian belief system.

The poem becomes an imitation of the artificial bird song of Byzantium. Time is flattened, and the past, the passing, and that which is to come are unified in Yeats' poem. The poem begins in the present of Ireland, which sends the speaker into the past of Byzantium. The future is not only sung by the mechanical birds, but represented by the poem itself. A monument of intellect, eternal artifice, "Sailing to Byzantium" is projected into the future as an artistic text. The poem achieves, in the only way possible, the speaker's desire to be preserved within the amber of artifice. The symbolic classicism which engendered the poem, the idea of Byzantium and the historical footnote of its mechanical birds, is transcended by the poem's concern with the dichotomy of artifice and immortality. The poem's symbolic classicism rests upon the vaguely

orientalist exoticism of the Byzantine empire and the traditional conjunction of antiquity and supreme artistic craft, though it is marginalized by the poem's aesthetic project.

Yeats uses symbolic classicism throughout this poem and his oeuvre. "Sailing to Byzantium" empties antiquity of concrete meaning, and Yeats fills it with a fabricated symbolism based around an idea of Constantinople as an environment conducive to aesthetic creation, choosing at will elements from classical antiquity to transpose into his Cytherean city. He adapts tropes which we have seen again and again, but each time moving beyond their traditional usage and adapting, particularizing them for his poem. Yeats transforms antiquity, just as we shall see below in Pound's *Mauberley*, into a signifier for heightened aesthetic craft, although meted out with more historical particulars and details than in Cocteau or de Chirico where classicism is far more abstracted away from historical and mythological concretes into hollow symbols. Byzantium is reduced to a simple vehicle for his poem's metaphysical conceit, an entire civilization is diluted into a symbol for Yeats' poetic and theosophical project.

V. A Vortex of Classical Symbols in Pound's third section of *Mauberley*

5.1 Introduction

Ezra Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1919, second section 1920), along with the *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, are his two most successful poems. *Mauberley* takes as its theme the age and a bitter dramatization of the artist's relation to society. As fitting for a reflection of society, *Mauberley* is littered with allusions to the classical past. The third section of the poem is the most preoccupied with classical symbolism. The

speaker's aesthetic concerns regarding the contemporary society in which he found himself are all orchestrated in relation to the classical past. Classical relics are invoked as a means of understanding his current culture through analogy and metaphor. The comparison is universally unfavorable.[38]

Where *Propertius* offers the rekindling of a classical poet into a Modernist, *Mauberley* presents a traditional, fin de siècle poet imbued by the classical tradition though not a Modernist like Pound himself. *Mauberley*, *Propertius*, and much of Pound's mature, pre-*Cantos* work is written through the voices of different personae scattered throughout literary history. If *Propertius* is in effect Pound's most complete engagement with the classical tradition, *Mauberley* is the reproduction of a poet engaging that tradition, among other concerns. The character of Mauberley and how he conceptualizes and writes the classical past is representative of a generation or more of writers and artists who received a classical education. For Mauberley, and particularly this section of the poem, classical detritus functions as an Arnoldian touchstone through which the present can be interpreted and evaluated and as a system of symbols for referral shared by a community. The classical past is integral to Mauberley and his doppelgangers' imaginative, creative space. He can only understand the present through his classical education.

In the context of the poem as a whole, the third section was preceded by an introduction to the character of Mauberley from the initial section ("out of key with his time," striving to "resuscitate the dead art / Of poetry") and a disquisition on the state of art and its production in this period from the second section (i.e., "The age demanded an

image / Of its accelerated grimace"). The third section, then, follows upon the demands of the age with a perpetual evaluation of the present against the past, finding a consistent debasement of the choice classical relics' contemporary equivalents. The two subsequent sections concern the destruction of the First World War. The third section, along with its surrounding others, attempts to address the general state of culture and society of Mauberley's period: the question of how to produce art in such a period, its general debasement in comparison to an idealized classical past, the atrocity of the Great War, and, in the fifth section, the irony of dying for Europe presented as a "botched civilization," metonymically become only its cultural artifacts, "two gross of broken statues, / For a few thousand battered books."

In this context, Mauberley's esteem for the classical relics is at odds with Pound's off-handed encapsulation of Europe as, in a sense, the same relics. Thus, this third section of the poem must present a widespread, reactionary attitude towards classical learning but of an earlier generation, matured before the First World War. At the same time, however, Mauberley's rhetoric of a past golden age differs from the more progressive, albeit aesthetic rather than political, conceptualization of classicism that has been discussed previously from Denis's theoretical work onwards, that is the urge to synthesize modernity and the classical that emerges in the aftermath of the First World War and was widely disseminated in the neoclassical art, music and literature of the 1920s and 1930s.

Antiquity, represented by a handful of what is left over from it, becomes an unrealizable ideal, to which any present could never be justly compared. Mauberley

begins the section with two lines which compare the apogee, as one might guess, of fine fabric, to the nadir of contemporary fashion. Pound constructs the section with each itemized relic of the classical past being replaced by some inferior contemporary equivalent. Likewise at work is the construction of the gradual debasement of art from a golden age (ancient Greek) to the contemporary, which, in the section's final line, Mauberley wants to crown with a wreath of tin.

5.2 Reading of the third section

For all of the possible deficiencies of examining a single section of a long poem made of interrelated sections, an individual reading of this third section is warranted in this context, as a lengthier discussion of the "two gross of broken statues" that litter this poem would become redundant after a discussion of the section at hand. The third section, which clearly follows upon the first and second, sets up much of what will come throughout the poem. It provides the initial entrance of a number of the long poem's motifs (e.g., "ambrosial"), but the section can stand on its own merits, with minimal context. Where the first section of *Mauberley*, presents the titular poet's estimation of "E.P." a poundian persona closer to the original than Mauberley, the second section presents Mauberley wrestling with the demands that public taste places upon the artist.

In the second section, Mauberley announces that the age demanded a fitting image to encapsulate itself. And whatever that might be, it could possess no "Attic grace." Maublery then dismisses Pound's own *Homage to Sextus Propertius* as mendacious "classics in paraphrase." Pound would highlight this irony in his letters, suggesting that

Mauberley was more-or-less a "translation" for those who could no understand the *Homage*.[39] In the third Mauberley discusses that public taste and his contemporary society.

The third section, spoken by the persona of Mauberley, contrasts the past with the deficiencies of the present. In this section, the classical past serves as an idealized golden age to which any present can never be measured against. Antiquity is thus used to signal the decadence of the contemporary period. In other words, Mauberley indulges in a typical critique of his present which we have seen before. However, notably different from critical classicism in Auden's "Shield of Achilles," in Yeats, or in Pound in propria persona, Mauberley's juxtaposition of the contemporary with antiquity, sheds no light on the past itself; his reading of the present does not double back or in anyway complicate an inherited notion of artistic decline. Rather, Mauberley produces a narrative of artistic debasement, inhabiting a current age of "tin," a master narrative at odds with Pound's own aesthetic prejudices.

The section is a list of denunciations, and Mauberley begins by lamenting that fashionable Edwardian "tea-gowns" have supplanted "the mousseline of Cos." This muslin from the Greek island of Kos is coan silk which appears on Cynthia in Propertius' elegies. Thus, the *Homage* still lingers in this poem and provides this section's first classical allusion. It is noteworthy because this allusion is considerably different from the classical symbolism which we have so far examined. It provides specificity where the idea of Byzantium, a torso, or loggia presented simple abstraction. Here Pound indulges in the height of specificity. Beyond referring back to the poem's origins in the

Homage, where Coan silk is mentioned in the fifth section, Pound through historical accuracy attempts to produce *le mot juste*, as Mauberley said in the first section, "His true Penelope was Flaubert." Mauberley then on the same theme observes that the contemporary pianola has replaced Sappho's barbitos, a stringed instrument related to the kithara. Evidently, Mauberley denounces the replacement of authentic artistic creativity by its mechanical production on a player piano, allowing relatively little reflection of artistic ability or the nuances of a live performance. Mauberley rejects the pianola because it ostensibly removes the performer from his performance. He cannot even bring himself to say that the pianola replaces the barbitos without the addition of quotation marks around "replaces" to show its inability to fulfill the role of the individual artist. Mauberley, a late 19th century aesthete who survived into the 20th century, sees the pianola as a technology that might surpass the artist in society. Yet, this is not Pound's position. Not only is Mauberley the speaker of the poem, but Pound's enthusiasm for the music of George Antheil[40] who used the player piano in his *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), signifies Pound's distance from Mauberley's complaint, or at the least a receptivity to the idea of the machine that probably existed at the time of writing.

Immediately in the next stanza, Mauberley invokes the mythological parallels between Christ and Dionysus, both gods of the productive who were sacrificed. Pound possibly found his source in Yeats with whom he worked from 1913 to 1916 and who had long been uniting the two deities in his theosophy.[41] For Mauberley, both of these gods are "made way for macerations," another death, a spiritual one in the present climate,[42] just as "Caliban casts out" the ethereal in Ariel.

In the third stanza, Mauberley paraphrases Heraclitus, "All things are a flowing, / Sage Heracleitus says;" but immediately, Mauberley makes clear his use of the Greek philosopher with "But a tawdry cheapness / Shall outlast our days." These two lines are key to understanding the section. While everything is a flowing, Mauberley sees that tawdry cheapness is flowing into the culture of his time, where it shall outlast both him and Pound. The tawdriness of the tea-gown and the pianola function as metaphors for the degradation of artistic craft in opposition to their classical equivalents. Antiquity for Mauberley even in material objects like silk and musical instruments, objects only referenced in scraps of ancient texts, can be imagined to be far superior to the contemporary objects which supplant them. Mauberley sees culture being cheapened around him. Like Maurice Denis, Mauberley sees a constant decline from the glories of the past to the present, though it is not contemporary art, per se, that he finds decadent. The culture as a whole, the London society to which this poem was Pound's farewell, is the cause of Mauberley's gloomy moodings.

In the subsequent stanza, Mauberley announces that even Christian beauty is defecting, vanished just like the cult of Samothrace. Mauberley's loudest denunciation, however, comes directly after this reference to Christianity. "We see *tò kalón* / Decreed in the market place."[43] Following upon his two conjunctions of classical and Christian themes, Mauberley again weds the two traditions, by alluding to Christ throwing the money lenders out of the temple and up-dating the sacrilege for contemporary culture. Instead of the "tawdry cheapness" setting up in the place of worship, the marketeers have appropriated a Greek ideal, and there is no savior who can enter the place of

commodification to purify the sacred.[44] Where Christ could enter His appropriate space and cleanse it, even where the characters like Brennbaum, Mr. Nixon, and "the stylist" who appear later in *Mauberley* could create their own positions in their own milieu of the art world, everyone is impotent to enter into the market place and mete out justice. Christianity, itself ancient and emerging from antiquity, is collapsed into the classical tradition, as in the subsequent stanza as well. For Mauberley as for Yeats, Christianity is part of the larger classical tradition. This is the first section of the poem in which the scope of Mauberley's critique moves beyond his milieu of culturally-literate stratum of society to a loud denunciation of 20th century society as a whole.[45]

Likewise, in the fifth stanza, Mauberley states that both "Faun's flesh" and "saint's vision" are "not for us." Mauberley again pursues the steady dichotomy between the Christian and the classical in which the classical emphasis on the body and physicality is represented by the flesh of the faun and the religious privilege to the spiritual by the vision of the saint. For Mauberley, both the spirit and the body are essential, and he sees both being dissipated by the commodification of art and culture. The wafer of the Eucharist, Christ's body through the sacred mystery of the transubstantiation, is replaced by the prosaic daily events and criticism of the press. Daily communion with the divine has been supplanted by the daily pre-digested vulgarity of the newspaper. Likewise franchise has become the contemporary equivalent of circumcision. Both are ways of inscribing a body with membership, but circumcision demonstrates membership in God's chosen people, while franchise that in a larger conglomerate.

Having critiqued the market, the spiritual life, art, and fashion before the final stanza, Mauberley turns his eye to contemporary politics. This stanza, the section's weakest revolves around its own penultimate line. In keeping with each stanza's use of a classical allusion, Mauberely evokes Pisistratus, or Peisistratos, who was a 6th century tyrant of Athens, famous for his good governance and codifying the Homeric canon. As Mauberley says, "Free of Pisistratus / We choose a knave or an eunuch / To rule over us." He probably refers to Woodrow Wilson as the knave and Lloyd George as eunuch, but his intent is clear. Elected officials rely upon the masses for their power, and the masses have not chosen well.

Finally in the last stanza, Mauberley ends the poem with a loud rhetorical gesture, an exclamation point, and a deflating pun.

O bright Apollo,
Tín' ándra, tin' eroa, tína theón
What god, man, or hero
Shall I place a tin wreath upon!

Mauberely invokes Apollo to answer his question and quotes Pindar's Second Olympian, *tín' ándra, tin' eroa, tína theón keladesomen* "what man, hero, or god shall we praise." Pound disliked Pindar all of his life, preferring Sappho immensely. He found Pindar "the prize wind-bag of all ages,"[46] beating a "big rhetorical drum,"[47] a "pompier,"[48] and a rhetorician[49] who wrote as no one could ever have spoken.[50] In addition to the verse, it

was Pindar's very public presence as an occasional poet that Pound disliked. The entire stanza is a mockery of Pindaric style, an invocation to Apollo in high flown rhetoric before its utter deflation. But this is indeed Mauberley speaking and not Pound. The real poet abandons his dislike for Pindar and retains him in that pantheon of superior art opposed to contemporary. The poem offers no evidence that Mauberlery dislikes Pindar, and in fact the Theban eagle offers the speaker more ammunition for attacking the degenerate culture around him. Mauberley adapts Pindar's line just after quoting it, a move characteristic of Pound, and then wishes to place a wreath made of tin upon someone. The "tin" is a pun on the indefinite articles from Pindar's line. Likewise, the wreath is fitting for the age of tin in which Mauberley found himself.

5.3 Conclusion to Pound

Consistently, Pound uses replacement as a trope. The antique is replaced in the present by some inferior analogue which supposedly fills a similar need. Contemporary fashion replaces the exceptional fabric of the past, a mechanical pianola replaces the lyre, Caliban Ariel, the press for the wafer, franchise for circumcision, and finally Pindar for Sappho. Though both are classical, Pindar fits into Mauberley's dichotomy because the ancient poet reflects the contemporary artist who accommodates to public taste (i.e., Mr. Nixon). Likewise, Pindar's status as a virtual state-poet is reflected in the fourth section which uses Horace's notorious "dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" (Odes III.2.13)" in his evocation of the Great War.

Pound uses classical allusions and relics in this section of *Mauberley* to counterbalance a past, itself fabricated and idealized, to the present which both Pound and Mauberley find a vulgarity. Such a past never existed, but the idea of a golden age is useful to Pound's project since no present could ever measure against the best of an old civilization. The classical past, here evoked through the more specific than we have previously seen, becomes a resonant symbol *in toto*. Antiquity becomes a symbol of the achievement of artistry and cultivation. Its specifics are interchangeable, because this section of the poem is a litany or a jeremiad with the classical past signifying only the ideal. Built up in each subsequent stanza from the very specific, coan silk and Sappho's barbitos, to Christ and Dionysos, to a Greek ideal of beauty, to Mauberley's interpretation of the classical, faun's flesh as physicality. Mauberley transforms the classical past into a weighted scale.

As stated above, each stanza is constructed around a classical parallel to the modern age, and in each case the present is found lacking in comparison. Antiquity's achievements are replaced by the "tawdry cheapness" of the present, while its very ideals become advertisements for crass commercialism. Greece is transformed into a symbolic ideal to counterbalance Mauberley's larger project of railing against the society which never took notice of him, in which his artistic craft was wasted.

VI. Conclusion to symbolic classicism

Symbolic classicism is, thus, a master trope of the classical tradition. By this, I mean that symbolic classicism is a widespread manner of engaging the classical tradition

and organizing post-classical texts which utilize relics from antiquity, beyond the lower-level tropes that we have seen at work within texts such as arresting time, the search for an originary ur-art within the European tradition, and the dichotomy of fragmentation of the classical and its reconstruction in a modern text for conservation. Where these tropes emerge in how an artist treats a particular classical relic, symbolic classicism becomes a way for an audience to recognize how an artist treats antiquity in general throughout a given text or oeuvre. For example, in the section of *Mauberley* under discussion, "mousseline of Cos" is a specific piece of classical learning from Propertius functioning in relation with the contemporary "tea-gowns." However, moving beyond the initial two lines of the section, it becomes evident that something different is occurring. The specificity deteriorates into pedantry on the part of Mauberley. The two lines initially demonstrate the cheapness of the contemporary opposed to the quality of the antique. Yet the Coan silk's value itself decreases when the reader becomes aware that it is simply an element in a list of complaints about the contemporary world. The silk itself no longer holds any importance as silk or as the garment Propertius most liked his lover, Cynthia, to wear. The silk is cheapened and could be replaced by any variety of similar parallels. While symbolic classicism is usually at work in vague generalities of the classical, ideas of what the classical was, when it is at work with a highly specific example, it remains a signifier to a lost meaning. The silk is highly indicative of this. The signified, here, is some idea of the perfections of a past golden age that never was—how Mauberley views and presents antiquity. Yet this antiquity is not even his concern; the tawdry cheapness of the present is. The so-vaunted classical past becomes simply a counter-balance in his

measurement. Furthermore, the silk itself is two-thousand years lost; all that remains is the knowledge that at one point it existed and was nice. There is, quite literally, no signified.

Symbolic classicism should be recognized as an artistic response to antiquity as distinctive as a modern play based on a Greco-Roman myth, yet it is a more rudimentary manner of incorporating the classical. Classical relics, images, and allusions can be inserted into a text, or a text can even be built around them, as in the third section of *Mauberley*. However, these relics in large part function solely as referrants to classical antiquity, gestures seemingly classical, or windows onto a classical landscape informed by a reader's conception intertwined with what an artist might provide. Often, the artist provides nothing else, as in Cocteau, or their own idiosyncratic understanding, as in Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium."

In *Le Sang d'un poète*, Jean Cocteau uses symbolic classicism self-consciously. The classical elements in his film are minor and fragmented. Most importantly, they are classical in appearance. Providing not a glimpse of the classical, but an atmosphere of the neoclassical, Cocteau's classical detritus is completely symbolic and vague. When the origins of his symbols are pursued, they roughly match up and can be perceived, but in so doing, a viewer does not understand the film any better than if they had not linked his bull to Zeus.

Giorgio de Chirico exists completely in the world of the classical as atmosphere. In fact, the bulk of his artistic career is classical symbolism. The characteristic de Chirico painting is of a clearly Italianate city, often with a more-or-less classical statue.

His entire artistic craft relies on the vaguely classical. When he does engage a specific mythic narrative, as in his later paintings on Greek heroes, the figures are interchangeable. His series of the *Archaeologists* are his most inherently logical paintings, the most readable. Yet they are constructed from the most tired clichés of "the classical:" columns, arches, and temples. Their success rests solely upon their very generality, their simplistic reconstruction of a lost space.

In "Sailing to Byzantium," W. B. Yeats, on the other hand, takes a classical relic with a particular train of significations, the city of Constantinople, and produces a poem which uses Byzantium as a point of departure for the speaker's reveries on the role of artistic creation. The poem is motivated entirely upon a historical footnote, one the reader need not know before reading the poem, a position significantly different from that of Pound where some of his references become meaningless without prior knowledge. For Yeats, Constantinople became a lost paradise, an ideal city in which the artist could work. Yet it remains as a signifier a cousin to the trope of a voyage to Cytherea. Yeats made the Baudelaireian trope new by changing the destination of the voyage and transferring the dream to an aging artist who wishes for immorality through art. Byzantium, for all its splendors, becomes simply a tool to set the dream in motion in which historical accuracy is turned tangential

Finally, Ezra Pound in the third section of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* produces a work that uses symbolic classicism much more consciously than the other artists discussed through the simple technique of distancing. It is not Pound expressing himself, but Mauberley who engages the master trope. Mauberley turns the whole of classical

antiquity into a false golden age so that he might heap his disgust and dissatisfaction upon his contemporary time. Mauberley's blindness is the section's strength.

Symbolic classicism is the very bedrock of the classical tradition. Classical symbols, allusions, and relics adorn the bulk of art and literature produced after antiquity. It is a consistently reoccurring master trope of Western literacy that engages a shared knowledge but without strenuous demands on readers or viewers. Symbolic classicism is a mode of referral that can grant a work an atmosphere borrowed from Greco-Roman culture. Yet it is uncomplicated. Lyres litter poetry. Broken columns abound in paintings. Symbolic classicism is the most simplistic use of the classical tradition, but it is also the most common and can be deployed to great effect. It is necessary to examine this method of engaging the Greco-Roman past before discussing the more recognizably neoclassical in the adaptation of mythic narratives. Symbolic classicism remains a pregnant gesture towards the past, one which an artist can manage quickly for a desired effect, with which a reader or viewer can grasp and do with what they will.

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[1] The letter to his son of May 27, 1748. Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, *Letters Written by the Earl of Chesterfield to His So*n (London, 1827), 283.
[2] Roger Fry, "The Case of the Late Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, O.M.," *The Nation*, 18 January 1913, 666-667.
[3] I use the Snodgrass translation. W. D. Snodgrass, *Selected Translations* (Rochester: Boa Editions, 1998).
[4] These three Latin authors formed the bulk of Latin readings from the sixteenth century to the mid-twentieth. Horace, Julius Caesar, and Ovid were also common, but readings of the latter two grew through time as their texts were easier (along with Terence). Caesar, Terence, and Ovid still serve as the first major authentic texts to be read today. See Françoise Waquet, *Latin or the Empire of a Sign: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 2001), 33.
[5] Henri Bergson, "Les études gréco-latines et l'enseignement," *La Revue de Paris* (Mai-Juin 1923), 10. Bergson continues arguing that classicism always trickles into the less

cultivated portion of society: "Ce contact n'a été assuré, sans doute, que par un petit nombre. Mais de proche en proche, de haut en bas, se sont toujours transmises à la partie moins cultivée de la nation les qualités, habitudes, exigences intellectuelles qui se manifestent par l'ordre, la proportion, la mesure, et qui se résument dans l'esprit de precision ou esprit classique." Ibid.

[6] For brief discussion of the modernist fragment in conjunction with the classical, see Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 51 ff.

[7] Thedor W. Adorno, "Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait," *Quasi una Fantasia: Essay on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998), 155.

[8] For example, in Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un Poète*, to be discussed below, the poet-artist is first seen wearing an 18th century wig which, along with his own art, presents him as a classical artist.

[9] January 1932 lecture by Cocteau at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier accompanying a viewing of the film. Jean Cocteau "Postface," *Romans, poésies, œuvres diverses* (Paris: Pocothèque, 1995), 1310.

[10] Cocteau's film is animated by its consistent use of juxtaposition. A summary, however necessary, can only vaguely approximate the film. Its tableaux and dreamlike progression produce a far smoother, more artificial, more concerned with artifice, and ultimately more "classical" atmosphere than Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou* of the previous year, a film demonstrably *surréaliste*. *Le Sang d'un poète* begins with an artist drawing the face of a woman, whose mouth begins to speak. He wipes it off only to find that it has transferred onto his hand, and in turn the artist wipes it onto a statue which instructs him to walk through a mirror. The mirror leads to a hotel in which the artists looks through the keyholes of different rooms, each containing a different tableau. The artist is handed a gun and shoots himself in the head, but he does not die. He returns through the mirror and destroys the statue. In turn the artist transforms into a statue in a small square where a snowball fight among schoolboys takes place. One child throws a snowball at another who is killed. Over the body of the boy a card game begins between a woman and the artist of the first part of the film. The artist pulls an ace of hearts from dead boy's jacket. Subsequently time is frozen as the boy's guardian angel enters and makes both the body and the ace disappear. The artist, realizing he has lost the game, kills himself, and the woman transforms into the earlier female statue. She leaves the scene, and in the film's final moments is shown with a lyre and an ox, only to transform back into a dismembered statue.

[11] See for instance, Arthur B. Evans, *Jean Cocteau and his films of Orphic Identity* (Philadelphia, The Art Alliance Press, 1977), 100 and James S. Williams, *Jean Cocteau* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 2006), 53 where both assume that the bull accompanying the statue at the end of the film, represents Zeus transformed as in the myth of Europa. Elements suggest this parallel, but the film is far too vague for such a definitive reading. Williams acknowledges the limitations of a particular reading (that the rape of Europa is to happen when the film finishes), but assumes that the bull is still Zeus.

[12] Giorgio de Chirico, "Il ritorno al mestiere," *Valori Plastici*, 1.11-12 (Nov.-Dec. 1919) 19.
[13] Emily Braun, "Kitsch and the Avant-Garde: The Case of de Chirico," *Rethinking Art Between the Wars: New Perspectives in Art History*, eds. Øystein Hjort, Niels Marup Jensen, and Hans Dam Christensen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press and University of Copenhagen, 2001), 76-77.
[14] It is worthwhile to note that de Chirico was born and spent most of his childhood in Greece. He studied art at the Athens Polytechnic as well as in Munich, yet despite his firm instruction in classical Greece, it was Italy as a native land which would inspire his work, going so far as to insist that his work was more Italian, though living in Paris, than Italian artists working on Italian soil. See Keala Jewell, *The Art of Enigma: The de Chirico Brothers and the Politics of Modernism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 9.
[15] Braun argues that this element of de Chirico's classicism set him apart from the majority of artists in fascist Italy. By using established tropes like Gladiators, loggia, and Ariadne, his work seemed palatable to the regime (though for all purposes, art of any kind could flourish under Mussolini, irregardless of subject), but through this evacuation of ideological significance, even a symbolic subversion, it critiqued the regime, or at least proved useless to Italian fascism. Emily Braun, "Political Rhetoric and Poetic Irony: The Uses of Classicism in the Art of Fascist Italy," *On Classic Ground: Picasso, Léger, de Chirico and the New Classicism 1910-1930*, eds. Elizabeth Cowling and Jennifer Mundy (London: Tate Gallery, 1990), 347.
[16] In a review of a de Chirico exhibition at the Galerie de l'Effort Moderne in June 1926, Breton violently attacked de Chirico's latest paintings which in Breton's view had reified and showed no signs of any artistic progress. Breton was prescient enough to identify a fascist element lurking within de Chirico's classicizings. The Surrealist condemnation was solidified by de Chirico's practice of copying earlier paintings and frequently dating them to his earlier period, which was valued at a considerably higher buying price than his work of the 1920s. See, Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1989), 395-396 and Lisa Florman, *Myth and Metamorphosis: Picasso's Classical Prints of the 1930's* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 12.
[17] For discussion of the Ariadne paintings see Michael R. Taylor, *Giorgio de Chirico and the Myth of Ariadne* (London: Merrell, 2002) and Cathy Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), 98-104. For a discussion of de Chirico's mythological subjects see, Christopher Green, "Classicisms of Transcendence and of Transience: Maillol, Picasso and de Chirico," *On Classic Ground*, 275-280.
[18] Braun says, "In any event, the mythological allusions that pervade the classical series—their titles mention the Dioscuri, Adonis, Jason and the Argonauts---are mere rhetorical devices used to elevate the otherwise soft pornographic material." Braun, "Kitsch and the Avant-Garde: The Case of de Chirico," 86.

[19] A critic in 1938, Telesio Interlandi, called a "foreign, Bolshevik, and Jewish." See Jewell, *The Art of Enigma*, 7.
[20] Giorgio de *Chirico*, *The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, trans. Margaret Crosland (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971), 144-145, 151-159.
[21] Jewell, 13.
[22] Robert Pincus-Witten, "Capriccio de Chirico," *Giorgio de Chirico: Post-Metaphysical and Baroque Paintings, 1920-1970*, ed. Claudio Bruni Sakraischik (New York: Robert Miller, 1984), unpaginated.
[23] Jewell, 7.
[24] Florman, 12.
[25] He began to produce before Mussolini's infatuation with Augustan Rome (c. 1930) a series of paintings of gladiators. These lend themselves the easiest of all his paintings to a fascist interpretation. However, due to the distortion of their bodies making them alien to the fascist cult of beauty, both Emily Braun and Keala Jewell have argued that they might more readily serve to undermine fascist imagery. See Jewell, 13, 98 and Braun, 347.
[26] Jewell, 9.
[27] Pia Vivarelli, "Classicisme et arts plastique en Italie entre les deux guerres," trad. Claude Lauriol, *Les Réalismes, 1919-1939*, ed. Pontus Hulten, et. al., (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1988) 68.
[28] W. B. Yeats, *A Vision* 2nd. Ed, (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 279.
[29] Ibid, 279-280.
[30] Jon Stallworthy, *Between the Lines: Yeats's Poetry in the Making* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 95 ff.
[31] It is worth noting in the case of Baudelaire, that Cytherea is not even a physical place (Cytherea not the Greek island Cythera or Kythira), but it has become an imaginative site, the destiny of a mental journey towards a land of content. Where Baudelaire uses the "Cythère" the appropriate French version of the island, his translators and the English tradition which encircles such journeys inevitably turn his destination into a fictive site.
[32] See Yeats' note on the poem, W. B. Yeats, *Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 1996) 459.
[33] Yeats own dissatisfaction with this poem quickly drove him to write a second poem, "Byzantium," which he felt treated the idea of Byzantium more appropriately.
[34] Stallworthy, 98, 100, 104, 109. This transformation is clearly due to more than simple prosodic necessity—martyrs and sages both scan with an initial stress followed by a lighter syllable, and the line is fitted with an initial "O" which, despite whatever invocation it accomplishes, seems more accurately to fill out the initial unstressed position in the line. Yeats at one point excised the "O" for "Transfigured saints" and still retained the grammatic structure with an initial imperative verb in the third line. Stallworthy, 104.
[35] Much scholarship has concerned Yeats' readings, especially the source of his reading "somewhere" about the artificial birds. His sources are likely Gibbon and the fourth

volume of the Cambridge Medieval History. The source from antiquity is Liutprand's *Antapodosis*, 6.5. See Brian Arkins, *Builders of my Soul: Greek and Roman Themes in Yeats* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1990), 185-186.

[36] It is worthwhile, in continuing to examine the design of the poem with its recurring emphasis on song, that the present is called here "passing," a pun on the natural world's death-locked cycle. For Yeats, the present is "dying."

[37] Yeats, *A Vision*, 279.

[38] Pound himself presented *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* as a repetition and clarification of his concerns in the *Homage to Sextus Propertius*—writing *Mauberley* essentially for those who didn't get the earlier poem, a "popularization." See J. P Sullivan, *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius: A Study in Creative Translation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 32

[39] 18 February, 1932 letter to John Drummond. Ezra Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (London: Faber, 1951), 321.

[40] See for example, Ezra Pound, *George Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony*, *Ezra Pound and Music: The Complete Criticism*, ed. R. Murray Schafer (New York: New Directions, 1977), 253-265, 393-306 (this edition presents Pound's book chronologically, instead of how Pound ordered the volume).

[41] Another probable source in addition to Yeats is Gauthier. K. K Ruthven quotes "Mais l'Olympe cede au Calvaire / Jupiter au Nazaréen…" from "Bûchers et Tombeaux." See K. K. Ruthven, *A Guide to Ezra Pound's* Personae *(1926)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 131.

[42] John J. Epsey posits another interpretation of these lines, suggesting that "the phallic and ambrosial rites of Dionysus have given way to the macerations of Christianity." John J. Epsey, *Ezra Pound's* Mauberley*: A Study in Composition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 86.

[43] Nb. I have transliterated the original Greek as I cannot find a tolerable Greek font in MS Word, none allowing diacritics.

[44] Ruthven observes that Pound was alluding to a line of cosmetics christened "*Tò Kalón*." Ruthven, 131.

[45] It is worthwhile to note Espey's argument that for Pound "*tò kalón"* gradually changed in meaning from beauty to "order." In *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, Pound makes this clear. Order is a word that can be thoroughly mapped onto the twentieth century for it rapidly takes on a fascist meaning. Its use is widespread throughout Denis and Severini as well as Pound. Recall it was even used in the early name for the growing traditionalism in the 1920s *Rappel à l'ordre*. See Espey, 86-87 and John J. Espey, "The Inheritance of *Tò Kalón*," *New Approaches to Ezra Pound: A Co-ordinated Investigation of Pound's Poetry and Ideas*, ed. Eva Hesse (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 319-330.

[46] 20th(?) July, 1916 letter to Iris Barry. Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound,* 138.

[47] August 1916 letter to Iris Barry. Ibid, 143.

[48] March-April 1919 review in *The Egoist*. Cited in Espey, 88.

[49] March(?), 1915 letter to Harriet Monroe. Ibid, 98.
[50] May, 1937 letter to W. H. D. Rouse. Ibid, 387.

Chapter Three

Traditional Classicism and Narrative Adaptation

…Greek mythology has become a constant centre or pivot of reference
for all subsequent poetic invention and philosophic allegory.
The Greek myths are a shorthand whose economy
generates unlimited variations but which does not, in itself,
need to be reinvented.
George Steiner, *Antigones*[1]

1.1 Introduction

The most obvious and most plentiful example of the intersection of Modernism and the classical past is the adaptation, translation, or reinvention of a classical myth as a modern play. In these adaptations, the term I will use to group the disparate texts, a classical narrative either from an original Greek or Roman play or another source is borrowed and redeployed by a modern artist. While not all of these adaptations are in the dramatic form of play or opera, the 20th century saw a monumental number of these adaptations written by the majority of the major Modernists. An inexhaustive list would include: Carl Spitteler,[2] Georg Kaiser,[3] W. B. Yeats,[4] Andre Gide,[5] Hugo von Hofmannsthal,[6] Guillaume Apollinaire,[7] Jean Giraudoux,[8] Ezra Pound,[9] Oskar Kokoschka,[10] H.D.,[11] Robinson Jeffers,[12] T. S. Eliot,[13] Eugene O'Neill,[14] Jean Cocteau,[15] Walter Hasenclever,[16] Franz Werfel,[17] Alberto Savinio,[18] Richard Aldington,[19] Hans Henny Jahnn,[20] Jean Giono,[21] Bertolt Brecht,[22] Lauro de Bosis,[23] Jean-Paul Sartre,[24] A. D. Hope,[25] Louis MacNeice,[26] Eugene Ionesco,[27] Jean Anouilh,[28] Tennessee Williams,[29]

and Albert Camus.[30] Even authors one would doubt had any interest in the classical engaged in this practice. Alfred Jarry and Antonin Artaud both wrote novels on Messalina (1900)[31] and Heliogabalus (1934), respectively. Hugo Ball even wrote a play on Nero (c. 1914).[32]

There are two major ways of adapting a Greco-Roman narrative. An author could either set the play in its original time and place or in a contemporary setting, both of which I term Traditional Classicism. It serves as my next type of 20th century classicism after Symbolic Classicism. In other words, the author must decide whether he or she will recreate the past in the past or in his or her own contemporary.

1.2 Utilities of adaptation

One critic has argued that Modernism's "principal contribution to play writing is the extensive revival of Greek themes."[33] While Modern drama has certainly embraced classical narratives, we are less likely to see this today as its greatest contribution. Furthermore, with the canonization of certain texts over others at least in our cultural and critical memory, a great panoply of older texts are forgotten, including both a great deal of the twentieth century's treatments of Greco-Roman material and those of earlier periods. Michael Grant once noted that in France alone between 1840 and 1900, "582… imitations, translations, and adaptations of classical originals sprang from *le rêve hellénique*."[34] This, then, should mitigate the novelty of a Modernist taking for his subject a classical narrative.

Yet there must be an explanation for why such a bulk of Modernists turned to dramatic versions of classical myths. In *Antigones*, George Steiner pursued this same question and his solution serves as the epigraph above. Gilbert Highet in *The Classical Tradition*, the work which in larger part gave birth to this kind of analysis, argued that Greco-Roman mythology appears and reappears again consistently throughout the Western tradition because of the types of relationships between people, the world and the divine.

> [M]yths are permanent. They deal with the greatest of all problems…They deal with love; with war; with sin; with tyranny; with courage; with fate: and all in some way or other deal with the relation of man to those divine powers which are sometimes felt to be irrational, sometimes to be cruel, and sometimes, alas, to be just.[35]

For Highet, the Greco-Roman myths treated the human condition and the problems which arise from living and interpreting the world. What Highet argues for is a mythic criticism beyond the Freudian or archetypal constructions of the unconscious. The Greco-Roman myths articulated relationships of all different kinds, relationships suited to a dramatic performance with conflict between individuals each with a variety of comprehensible motivations. For the Modernist dramatist, the mystery of the divine is not as much in play as the interactions between men and women in a backdrop of fate or violence, the responsibility of an individual to choose for himself, as in Sartre, the mystery of poetic

inspiration, as in Cocteau, or in the relation of an individual to the state and an unjust law as in the variations on Antigone.

Most importantly for the dramatist, a myth offers a fully-constructed narrative in which the dramatic action, the very material of the play is already fully conceived. Materially, there is less work in an adaptation than in the construction of an original dramatic narrative. The drama is already inherent within the narrative, and the existence of predecessors in earlier adaptations provide working models.

Furthermore, the Modernist adaptation works similarly to a classical original in the safe assumption that an audience is already familiar with a given play's narrative. Thus, the dramatist can strip excess, could avoid, for the most part, a lengthy construction of novel characters. Pound's typical Modernist emphasis for condensation in poetry is at play within the classical adaptation.[36] These plays through their very origination as adaptations of familiar, classical narratives and their method of composition, constantly condense the original plot, remove the extraneous, and provide room for adaptation, re-emphasis, and exploration of the new. Through such a distillation of the borrowed and adapted elements, the Modernist playwright heightens and emphasize the elements which he or she invents. As in Symbolic Classicism, 20th century plays based on classical mythology function as an inherent shortcut, though in this case to a concrete object.

Likewise the use of a familiar narrative allows the audience to search for a dramatist's innovations and emphases, as in a Classical drama. The viewer is attuned less to the dramatic construction, being predictable, than to what a given playwright changes or highlights. Thus in Robinson Jeffers' version of *Medea*, which varies little from the

Euripidean original, an atmosphere of dread, violence, and brutality becomes that play's most striking feature. Similarly the interest in Freudian psychology, with its clear roots in Classical drama, inspired Eliot and O'Neill among others to emphasize the psychological aspects of the characters in their adaptations.

1.3 The seeming contradiction of Modernist classical drama

There seems to be an immediately apprehensible contradiction at the heart of Modernist adaptations of Greco-Roman myths. Namely, why would a cultural movement concerned with creating new ways of seeing the world, articulating the human condition, and representing modernity through an idiom appropriate to itself so consistently turn to the oldest European culture for raw material to be used in a new work of art. The reason is quite simply the Classical models of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides who themselves made the old myths and legends new. Through a dramatist's choice of emphasis, an adaptation could focus on the most contemporary of concerns. For example, Antigone which revolves around an archaic burial practice transcends the specifics of an ancient law to emerge as a drama about how an individual should respond to an unjust law. For Jean Anouilh, Antigone's narrative became a way to encode criticism of the Vichy regime through a classical play beyond criticism. By using a pre-approved tradition, a classical inheritance that France, Germany, and Italy all claimed as their right and went to great lengths to prove, as we have seen, a modern adaptation could hardly be banned, much less one so subtle and outwardly concerned with an archaic law

that its audience could then extrapolate and apply. Likewise for Cocteau, Orphée, the Western artist *par excellence*, grapples with poetic experimentation and automatic writing in both the play and the film. The artist, always a sympathetic character for a writer, struggles with a mode of expression fitting for the modern period. He attempts to translate the stomping of a horse or the sounds of the radio, prefiguring John Cage's experiments with using a radio in a concert setting,[37] into art. Similarly in *The Family Reunion*, Harry unlike Orestes, did not kill anyone, but felt guilty because of having wished her dead. Eliot is able to transform the Aeschylan original's emphasis on the opposition between the chthonic and the civilizing task of democracy into a psychological drama and the birth of an individual's spiritual life. Thus Eliot transforms the *Oresteia* into a contemporary drama, equipped with both Chorus and modern Furies, grounded in generalized Freudian concerns and Eliot's own spirituality. All of these dramatists find an inherent malleability in their chosen Greco-Roman precedents which enables them to engage a Western trope constantly in use for millennia.

1.4 The major difficulty of adaptation

Despite the consistent appearances of Modernist adaptations of classical material, there is a major material pitfall to for any such work. Namely, the original. Any given Oedipus will be measured by a viewer, whether consciously or no, against Sophocles' version. Few dramatists can hope to better an original which demonstrates one of the reasons that the most memorable of the twentieth-century adaptations are those that diverge the most from a Classical original. Nevertheless, the great bulk of these plays

have fallen from the repertory; the translations have been superceded by more recent attempts. Twentieth century drama is now best remembered not for its adaptation of past narratives, but for the innovations and experiments of Brecht and Beckett and their followers.[38]

In *The Guernica Bull*, Harry C. Rutledge defines the central difficulty of a classical adaptation. "The modern author who wants to use classical motifs has an easier time, and has the potential of more impressive work, when the ancient legend is less detailed in the original source."[39] Rutledge compares two plays by Cocteau, *La Machine infernale* and *Orphée*. *La Machine infernale*, often considered Cocteau's best play, is an adaptation of Oedipus which concentrates Sophocles' play into the last act and expands what occurred before the Classical play. Compacting the tragedy into so short a space, Cocteau's drama does not near the strength of the Sophoclaen original. According to Rutledge, Cocteau had a better chance of success at adapting the myth of Orpheus, though ignoring its copious post-Classical tradition in opera, because there was more room for invention. In *Orphée*, Cocteau borrows Heurtebise an angelic figure he had invented earlier in 1925 in his poem "L'Ange Heurtebise,"[40] made Eurydice a former Bacchante, and created the characters of La Mort and Aglaonice. The central movements of the myth—the death of Eurydice, her rescue, subsequent loss, and Orphée's death—are retained although the play presents them in a radically different manner than in previous adaptations.

The existence of a dramatic precedent, however, does not necessitate a close modeling, as can be seen in *La Machine infernale*. Yet what does occur is that in a close adaptation that does not vary far from a Classical play, the success or failure of the

modern adaptation relies upon the playwright's dramatic craft in producing a traditional *pièce bien-faite*.[41] While the action, characters, and plotting can all be retooled to a degree chosen by its author, the playwright is forced into producing a play based on the audience's expectations of a tight plot in which the various elements come together climaxing shortly before its conclusion. For an early twentieth century bourgeois audience, a play constructed along its precepts would have been the norm. Such a construction, while not even developed in antiquity or the Neoclassical period, would be necessary for a *succès d'estime* on a classical subject. While any dramatist wants a success, those who construct their plays in a more traditional manner must cater more carefully to a public's preconceptions of a play than more experimental dramaturges concerned with formal innovation. Hence, Modernist experimentation had no room to develop within a classicizing play; they were delimited in both form, the inherited 19th century construction, and content, the inherited classical narrative. The classicizing Modernist theatre had no room to develop any radical change beyond emphasis, setting, or a radical departure in plot.

1.5 Sources

Bearing in mind Rutledge's estimation, the question of source material becomes paramount. Looking at the material, there are a great number of adaptations and translations from Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, while there are relatively few from Aristophanes or Latin drama. Greek tragedy above all has traditionally been the source for later adaptations, providing both a variety of human relations suited to

dramatic performance and a source material in continual high esteem. However, beyond these clear predecessors, the most common source lies in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which has traditionally been the major source-text in Western literature for Greco-Roman mythology, from Shakespeare to the birth of the opera to Cocteau. Ovid, as Rutledge implies, provides a simple, often idiosyncratic narrative, like the Classical Greek playwrights, but as a source, his episodes are uniformly short and skeletal loaning all of the benefits of a Classical play, besides a pre-digested model for the action, without the possible risks of an audience measuring the failures of the modern play against the old.

It is useful also to consider the dramatization of events in Greco-Roman history as part of the same phenomenon, as I have been including them. By the twentieth century, Socrates or another historical figure has become so distant and shrouded in anecdotes, legends, and other texts, that he is almost indistinguishable from a mythical character.

1.6 Traditional or modern

In choosing where to set the action, whether in its original classical locale or in a contemporary setting, there seems to be no universal reason as to one over the other. A more Modernist adaptation that varies significantly from the original does not necessitate a contemporary setting. *La Machine infernale* is a text composed mostly of Cocteau's own invention, but it is set in ancient Thebes. On the other hand, Anouilh's traditional *Antigone* is set in the present day with a neutral décor, the characters use a contemporary speech, and Créon remembers Polynice and Étéocle smoking their first cigarettes, going to night clubs, and driving their cars fast.[42]

One element that is produced when setting a play in antiquity is that of distancing. In *Orphée*, Cocteau gave careful directions that the costumes should reflect the contemporary period and milieu of wherever the play was performed. This is effective because *Orphée* concerns a contemporary couple with their own marital problems and gives the play an immediacy because it and his later film rely upon an audience identifying with the characters. For the play to succeed the audience must be able to believe Orphée's final prayer as sincere not as a sentimental denoument, in which the poet thanks God that their paradise is their own house, that Eurydice and Orphée are happy together in heaven, and that God is poetry. Likewise the fantastic elements are supposed to come across as miraculous. This is only possible if the play has been to this point performed realistically. The first appearance of the otherworldly occurs when Eurydice and the audience witness Orphée pull a chair out from Heurtebise who then stays in the air floating. It would be only too easy for this to fall flat. The classical, along with the mythological elements, must be subsumed into what at first seems a mundane and quotidian domestic setting. The performance must use the classical structures within *Orphée* as understood and necessary, but not overwhelming until the journey into Underworld begins.

On the other hand, *La Machine Infernale* full of exotic monsters operates around the notion that the gods and fate are destructive, inescapable machines that have designed a terrible fate for all of the characters. In the third act, Jocaste and Œdipe celebrate their wedding night in a scene that at once captures for the characters the happiness of the day and for the audience the very perversity of mother and son married about to sleep with

each other. In fact, the two come so remarkably close to making the fateful revelation, that the audience realizes they are prevented from this knowledge only by the will of the gods. The distance provided by *La Machine infernale*'s classical setting is in keeping with Cocteau's focus on the inhumanity of fate. Where traditionally Oedipus works on an audience's ability to sympathize with the unremitting monstrosity of his accidental fortune, *La Machine infernale* carefully constructs his fate and propels it to the center of the drama beyond the characters who, as seems to be the goal, are displaced into more or less cogs and wheels in the machineries of fate and the play itself.

Likewise, while the fantastic exists in both Cocteau's plays, it serves different functions according to each play's setting. Where the intrusion of the magical Heurtebise and the salvation of Eurydice serves *Orphée* as miraculous events intruding upon contemporary life, the monsters of *La Machine Infernale*'s second act inhabit antiquity as exotic elaborations upon inherited mythology.

Thus the question for the Modernist playwright of where to set his play comes with a certain amount of preconditioning in terms of what he or she might wish to emphasize. If it is indeed, as in *La Machine infernale*, a desire to emphasize the fantastic and the alien, a classical setting is more conducive to such aims. Yet, in general, Modernists have avoided such settings becomes they are further from an audience's familiar environment, and thus more prone to seem alienating which will benefit that project. Distancing emerged only later in the century as a widespread dramatic technique. The great majority of texts understandably turn to a contemporary setting for greater affect in the audience. It is far easier to sympathize with a character if he or she is a

contemporary, despite the basic similarities of conflict and interaction, the human experience which Steiner and Highet emphasize as traits of Classical and neoclassical drama.

1.7 Oskar Kokoschka's *Orpheus und Eurydike*

Oskar Kokoschka, the Expressionist painter, was also a playwright and a poet. His play, *Murderer, Hope of Women* (1907), is the most well-known not only because it represents perhaps the first Expressionist drama but also because it was set to music in an opera by Paul Hindemith. Kokoschka's 1918 drama of the myth of Orpheus, *Orpheus und Eurydike*, deviates considerably from the Ovidian version and most other versions of the play familiar in operas from Monteverdi to Gluck to Glass. Kokoschka's play emerges quite clearly from autobiographical sources in addition the Greco-Roman ur-myth. He wrote the play recovering from both a bayonet wound received on the Eastern front during the First World War and from a tumultuous relationship with Alma Mahler. Conceiving the play in a field hospital at Wladimir-Wolynski and written mostly from memory during his convalescence away from the front in Dresden in 1915, Kokoschka finished the play in 1918, and it was premiered in 1921.

According to Judith E. Bernstock, one of the few scholars that has written on this play, *Orpheus und Eurydike* demonstrates "the fundamental irreconcilability of man and woman—the decay of their physical desire into hate and the impossibility of happiness in love between them."[43] Kokoschka's adaptation chaotically blends war and love, the twin inspirations of his play, into a single, unifying theme. Orpheus and Eurydice begin in

love with each other and by its end have each murdered the other. The play, furthermore, is constructed around such synthesizing chaoses. Myths blur pell-mell, Orpheus and Eurydice, Cupid and Psyche, Hades and Persephone. The Modernist and the Classical coexist destructively with a Dantesque depiction of Hades, *Woyzeck*-like murders and psychological torment, Aeschylan furies and the Fates. Love transforms into hate, while Orpheus' law not to look at Eurydice is coupled with a new pronouncement that he should not ask her about what she did in Hades during their separation.

Divided into three acts and an epilogue, the play commences with a dramatization of Orpheus and Eurydice's happiness together before her death. They have adopted an adolescent girl, Psyche, who is the same Greco-Roman character however altered. When she first enters the stage she holds a small snake which will bite Eurydice's ankle at the end of the first act. In the second scene, three Furies, conflated with the three fates to some extent, enter Orpheus' house in search of Eurydice. Psyche sleeps by the door to Eurydice's room while the Furies try to convince her, still in sleep, to look upon Cupid who visits her at night as in the Apuleian version. Half asleep, she opens the door for the furies who shine a torch upon Cupid. He turns around, and the Furies move on to Eurydice. Kokoschka does not explain why, but they wish unhappiness to fall upon Orpheus. They prepare Eurydice for her death, garb her in a shroud, and allow her to have a last meal with her husband. After her snakebite, the Furies carry her body away.

The second act occurs three years later. Psyche finds Eurydice's shade in the Underworld, but she has forgotten her earlier life. Orpheus quickly follows Psyche into Hades. Kokoschka's stage directions are dantesque. There are beggars on crutches

throwing trash about the stage which other shades fight to eat. Lovers with claws and animal faces swarm towards him. Murderers try to stab Orpheus's shadow. Psyche rushes to him and gives the accustomed rule not to look upon Eurydice, and the lovers ascend to a seashore. With the exception of Psyche's introduction into the narrative, Kokoschka's play has not yet strongly deviated from the norm of Orpheus adaptations. It is in the subsequent scenes and act where Kokoschka's adaptation radically changes the meaning of the play from the artist's vain search for his beloved to a nightmarish depiction of love as war.

The lovers board a dark boat which Eurydice recognizes as Hades' ship. On board, the Furies weave a net like the Fates' thread clearly symbolizing Eurydice's fate. Orpheus demands that Eurydice tell him what she did in the Underworld during the years of their separation. Eurydice tells him that Hades had seduced her, and Orpheus murders her off stage.

In the third act, a haggard Orpheus returns to his old home which has become dilapidated, and a large group of people discover him. Enraptured by his songs of love, they had abandoned their work and now wish to kill him. The group set about destroying his house before turning on each other. Kokoschka has transformed the Maenads' bacchanal into a battle commenced by their distrust of the artist and his art. Psyche accepts responsibility for the unhappiness of Eurydice and Orpheus claiming that she had thought selfishly of only Cupid. By this point the stage is littered with corpses. Orpheus is overcome by his despair and begins speaking to a disembodied female voice emerging from a cloud of smoke about his wish for death. It gradually becomes clear to the

audience that the voice is that of Eurydice who eventually materializes. They have a lengthy dialogue at odds with each other, Eurydice saying that, "Wherever you touch me, I turn moldy."[44] Orpheus rejects marital love, stating that a couple's only bond is "Our own imagination! / Which makes fools of us!"[45] Eurydice exposes her naked body on stage, and the pit which Orpheus has been steadily digging throughout this act bursts into flames. Psyche emerges from the flames, saving the lyre which plays without human fingers. Orpheus and Eurydice perform a *danse macabre* which is imitated by other dead bodies which have emerged from the Underworld. Orpheus confesses his hatred of Eurydice and damns Hades, his rival. In his madness Orpheus begins laughing, and Eurydice smothers him to death.

In the epilogue, Psyche emerges with bundles of flowers, ears of grain and the lyre, offering a final redemptive vision after the last act's nightmares. She strews flowers about the stage and sets sail on a boat towards Cupid as choruses of young women and men sing to the earth, to love, and to hope. A chorus of old peasant women attempt to warn the young lovers of the dualities of hope and fear, conception and death, but their warning is ignored. The young women and men merrily exchange flowers and conclude the play kneeling to the worship of the sun.

Kokoschka's play surprisingly hues closely to the major episodes of the traditional Orpheus narrative—death of Eurydice, descent to the Underworld, Orpheus' conditional statement not to look back, second loss of Eurydice, and death of Orpheus. Kokoschka's deviations from the traditional narrative reside in the atmosphere of the play

and the interactions between its principles, and the grafting of disparate elements from other sources like Psyche and Cupid.

Kokoschka's modernization transforms a quasi-pastoral love story into an Expressionist psychodrama on the insanity of love. Orpheus is tortured by Eurydice's betrayal of him with Hades, even though she had forgotten all of her former life. His love is a deranging, destructive force. In other words, Kokoschka has dramatized the widespread Weimar Expressionist theme of the sex murder. Ultimately, however, this is not too far distant to the causes of Orpheus' more typical failure of looking back—namely, self-control. Orpheus looks back because he cannot stop himself; here, Orpheus cannot control his jealous love.

Kokoschka adopts the traditional mask of Orpheus, which had been represented consistently on the stage for centuries. He breaks more strongly with the inherited narrative than anyone save Jacques Offenbach in his operetta *Orphée aux enfers*. The Orpheus narrative has long been redirected and saturated by artists in ways that highlight their interpretation, meaning their preoccupations and more often than not those of their period.[46] Kokoschka's version is no different. He appropriated the, essentially, empty mask of the Orpheus myth and filled it, redirecting the narrative, with a Viennese Expressionist perspective. Kokoschka transformed the classical myth of Orpheus through a supplementation of particularly 20th century concerns, like alienation, the dehumanization of war, and a deranging psychological portrayal of love, into a Modernist narrative where Orpheus has been driven mad by jealousy and alienated from all human interaction as a chaotic battle rages around him.

1.8 Alberto Savinio's "Psyche"

Such a replenishment of a traditional vessel does not occur solely in the performing arts. *Ulysses* is a familiar example of the type of text which falls into Traditional Classicism. Alberto Savinio, a painter, writer of short stories, composer, and brother to Giorgio de Chirico, consistently adapts classical narratives and relics throughout his work. His short stories collected in *The Lives of the Gods* almost exclusively treat classical relics with a Surrealist hand. In the novella "Psyche," published in Italian in 1944 as "La Nostra Anima," Savinio radically transforms the myth of Cupid and Psyche to virtually the point of unrecognizability, while still consistently referring to the standard version of the myth in Apuleius' *Golden Ass*. Formally, his narrative even parodies how the Psyche episode appears buried within Apuleius' prose fiction.

Three characters, Nivasio Dolcemare, his lover Perdita, and a Dr. Sayas, who have already been developed, as much as one can expect in a Surrealist text, visit a fleshworks museum in Salonika. There they find a young girl with a monstrous pelican's beak treated like an animal in a zoo or an exhibit in a freak show sitting in a small room in her own feces and urine with a bowl of food and another of stagnant water. Her body is covered in what looks at first to be hieroglyphics but reveal themselves to be inscriptions from other visitors excised into her flesh. Jean Cocteau has even inscribed her with a short poetic fragment signed with his characteristic star. Dr. Sayas reveals that this is girl is in fact Psyche from classical myth, her immortal body transformed into a

kind of ancient wall or statue with centuries of epigraphi. She tells the visitors her story, shorn of Apuleius' romanticizing, in an attempt to explain why Cupid did not allow her to look upon him.

Born to an impoverished couple, her father held an important but low-paying position as the First Pornographer of the Ministry of Mercy and Justice, Psyche had two sisters, likewise with beaks, and the three, known as the Furbelow sisters were great beauties and had many suitors. Her sisters eventually found suitable husbands, an oboist and an ambassador, but Psyche had no luck until an unsigned note arrived stating that an anonymous but powerful individual intended to marry her if no one would look upon him. Pysche was shepherded to his flying car and brought to an opulent, though garish palace in the sky. In her wedding chamber, an "immense crystallized vulva,"[47] she was attended by invisible servants who prepared her for the arrival of her husband. Night after night her husband would arrive, although the room was darkened so she could never see him, and she began to enjoy their lovemaking. She gradually became curious about his appearance and switched on the electric light. Perdita interrupts Pysche's narrative, guessing that she saw the beautiful Cupid, but Psyche mocks her. Cupid was, in fact, a "slimy slug, a hairless worm," with a "purple…domed" head with "jaws in imitation of the helmets of German soldiers, bare of eyes and nose, having nothing but a…vertical mouth…[and] a tubular body, around which twisted big, blue, palpitating veins…bereft of arms and as well as legs" sitting upon two swollen testicles.[48] Cupid, an enormous, disembodied phallus, became flaccid and flew out the window.

Her audience is horrified by the story, and Psyche discourses on the nature of love, explaining that this is why "Love doesn't want anyone to see his face."[49] She continues, "From love, life is born, but at the same time so is antilife. All the evil in the world comes from love impelling people to unite in order to procreate…I am Psyche, which is to say the soul liberated from love."[50] And Psyche slowly vanishes.

Savinio's clearly Surrealist take on the myth of Cupid and Psyche works in the same manner as that of Kokoschka. Both narratives hew to the same skeletal progression of plot but shift the outcome and metaphorical meaning from love stories to a perversion of love as deranging or grotesque. Savinio perverts Cupid-as-love into a bestial, animal urge; the god of love is literally an enormous, revolting phallus. Instead of a romantic fairy tale about two lovers overcoming the human failings of curiosity or impatience, both narratives suggest that the cause of each condition, namely not to look upon the beloved, has a demonstrable rationale of avoiding a horrible revelation, that love is bestial or that a lover's betrayal can drive someone to madness.

Savinio's Psyche is a victim. Stripped of agency, her parents agree to her marriage with an anonymous bridegroom. The only time Psyche is capable of self-determination is when she chooses to look upon her lover by which she gains knowledge. She began her story regretting her action, but concluded it by stating that Cupid's departure was a favor to her, suggesting again that she had no agency to leave after her revelation. Psyche's new knowledge in a sense freed her from a grotesque union, but in turn condemned her to an eternal existence as a museum attraction. By gaining knowledge, she is frozen in time.

Apuleius' account, which she derides consistently, fixes an inaccurate, romanticized narrative as tradition and is known by her audience. The myth of love is made palatable, is saved through the fiction of an inherited classical tradition, which Savinio in turn corrects. Where adaptations in plays and operas typically rewrite an inherited narrative, Savinio attempts to rewrite the tradition.

Savinio suggests that the myth is not simply an empty mask to be imbued with Modernity, but that the classical tradition as a whole is an empty fiction to be corrected and imbued with a Modernist truth about the human condition. Savinio deranges the inherited myth-as-text into a Surrealist fable, offering a Modernist account as the "true" metaphorical meaning.

1.8 Conclusion

The overabundance of plays adapting classical narratives is the most vivid example of the classical tradition working in the 20th century, yet its products are consistently the least remarkable. It must be recognized not as an innovation, but rather a continuation and link to a larger, Western dramatic tradition. Such adaptations, which formed the bulk of Gilbert Highet's discussion of the 20th century classical tradition along with *Ulysses* and Eliot, provide the clearest proof of the continued vitality of Greco-Roman influence in the Modern period, but in general the plays themselves have suffered and become mere elements of literary history. Their preponderance alone asserts that classical myths and dramas are still a valuable source for literary reinvention, a quarry of

old stories that has not been exhausted despite some two thousand years of almost continual use.

Artistic and academic narratives prize innovation, that momentum from one form to another that represents an epistemic shift and neatly provides the commencement of a new school or period. While these classical adaptations pursued on an individual basis their own innovations, from a classical perspective they offer little new or remarkable, however accomplished a given text can be. A large mapping of 20th century classical adaptations transforms quickly into a mundanity that charts the ways in which a myth can be shifted, a perspective emphasized, or cataloguing the various permutations of a given play like *Antigone*. They afford Modernist perspectives on ancient material, but they supply the 20th century's version of the 582 19th century French adaptations, a brief historical mention remarkable only for the plenitude and similarity in kind to other centuries' dramatic productions.

Oskar Kokoschka's and Alberto Savinio's adaptations of the Orpheus and Psyche narratives work neatly together. Both texts from authors primarily known for their visual work have not only the presence of Psyche, but also a Modernist interpretation of love writ large. The rules which Psyche and Orpheus break, instead of being almost random dicta, fatalistic because of human weakness, their conditions are set in order to prevent them from threatening revelations about the nature of love. Savinio perverts the universal human emotion into a grotesque metaphor for male lust, while Kokoschka couples love and madness together as two stages in the evolution of the same emotion. Both authors

radicalize an inherited, empty mask and engorge it with a Modernist angle on the same generalized human condition.

At the beginning of a new century, the 20th century's adaptations of classical narratives fall neatly into sections of a bibliographer's dry pursuits. For the Modern playwright in adapting a classical narrative, whether to set his play in antiquity or in the present was a loaded choice, lending itself to certain treatments and emphases. Adaptations that vary little from an original classical play tend to gravitate towards the structure of a *pièce bien-faite*, borrowing a successful dramatic structure for a successful dramatic tradition. There are those that vary greatly for the sake of a more new work, from Cocteau's *Machine* which is wholly reconstructed to O'Neill and Eliot which use their classical elements for an innovative perspective on antiquity, accomplishing Modernity as each period before found their own contemporaneity in the "how" of how they dramatized and configured their own versions of a tradition. What a dramatist does to make new these oldest European dramas highlights their understanding of their own period. Freudian psychology offered a manner of understanding human actions, so Eliot interpreted *Alcestis* or the *Oresteia* psychologically. Cocteau, entranced by the fantastic, transfixed the miraculous in the quotidian lives of Orphée and Eurydice. Anouilh confronted by the realities of living under the Occupation of a foreign, totalitarian state dramatized the plight of an individual faced with an inhumane, unjust law but also that of an official whose duty was the well being of the people he represented. Antiquity offered to each of these artists a dramatic model that could be adapted to reflect their interpretation of the role of art in the 20th century. But finally, however Modernist their

approaches were, that century's great innovators of dramatic form lay elsewhere. The advances of Brecht, Beckett, and others left such adaptations antiquated.

The classicizing plays of the 20th century attempted to rework the inherited narratives but made the faulty assumption that the classical narrative would provide enough emotional and substantive weight. The neoclassical tradition of the 17th and 18th century modernized the antique narratives by generally removing the chorus and transforming gradually into the 19th century pièce bien-faite. These classical plays continued into the 20th century and mostly offered a new perspective, psychological, surreal, or politically au courant, and were indeed successes with their respective audience. However, the true innovations of Modernist theatre were in the formally avant-garde, episodic theatre of Brecht which rejected structured linearity[51] and that of the theatre of absurd which proffered no resolution but a circular repetition. Modernist theatre's great success was in the rejection of narrative, the entanglements of characters, and the development of those characters themselves. Classicizing drama essentially failed because it expected that the adapted narrative would offer enough to sustain the play and the new.

In "A Thousand Lost Golf Balls," Hugh Kenner discusses what Eliot called the mythical method[52] of literary construction in relation to his plays.

> Eliot takes it for granted that what a myth may do, besides help you invent a plot, is give access to an old story's power… [T]he myth beneath an Eliot play seems credited with an efficacy that does not depend on our identifying it…It is clear

> that Eliot expected a great deal of the plot he'd taken from Euripides: nothing less than the ballast of seriousness, subliminally acknowledged.[53]

For Eliot, a classical narrative, whether identifiable or not by an audience, was in and of itself enough of a testament on which to build virtually his entire dramatic oeuvre. Yet, according to Kenner, he leaned far too much upon his sources expecting the original dramas to provide enough strength to float his own plays despite their transformation. This too-sure reliance upon source material has defeated the bulk of 20th century classical adaptations. For Kenner, *Ulysses* provides the only true success of the mythical method.

> Eliot's theatre, we may say, died without having been born. It has certainly inaugurated no tradition… Eliot wrote out of an acceptance of anarchy and futility, the myth present by virtue of the poet's will, to give a poem shape where human actions were shapeless. We are now apt to attribute the power of Eliot's poems to their oracular language, and find him least persuasive precisely where, as in the late plays, he depends on myth and not eloquence.[54]

In short, Eliot relied too strongly on the myth to give his plays their power; simply setting a classical myth in the present does not Modernize it. However much classical literature over the millennia has become a quarry for the artist of any genre, a successful work must not simply rely upon it but do something more. This is the great trap of classicism; however much it provides raw material, an artist must move beyond these characters,

names loaded with the heft of tradition with constellations of referral. *La Machine infernale* disintegrates into a pastiche of its sources with a mundane message, that fate is inhuman. Robinson Jeffers' three classical verse dramas are subsumed by his own work and preoccupation with violence.[55] Anouilh, on the other hand, refashioned *Antigone*, making it of his time instead of some mythical timelessness. Classical literature and mythology provides a virtually bottomless source of human interactions, emotions, and conflict with the inscrutability of the divine, yet an assumption based on some otherworldly power being invoked by simple use of the material is foolhardy. An artist cannot expect his or her work to stand on a foundation built only of belief in a myth's power. However a formal construction using Eliot's mythical method as a skeleton upon which artistic craft fills out the artistic text's body provides a valid method of using the classical tradition, as shall be discussed in the following chapter's examination of formal classicism.

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[1] George Steiner, *Antigones* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 301.
[2] His prose poem *Prometheus and Epimetheus* (1881) later revised as *Prometheus the Sufferer* (1924), and the allegoric epic *Olympian Spring* (1900-1906, rev. 1910).
[3] *Alkibiades Saved* (1920) dramatizes Socrates, while his last three plays form a trilogy (*Griechische Dramen*) on classical subjects, *Zweimal Amphitryon* (1943), *Pygmalion*, and *Bellerophon* (both 1944).
[4] *King Oedipus* (1926) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (1927).
[5] *Philoctète* (1899), *Œdipe* (1931), *Perséphone* (1933), and *Thésée* (1946).
[6] *Elektra* (1904), *Ödipus und die Sphinx* (1906), and the libretti for Richard Strauss' operas, *Elektra* (1909), *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912), and *Die ägyptische Helena* (1927).
[7] His widly inventive play that served as an inspiration to later experimental theatres and for which he coined the term surréalisme, *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (1917) was engendered by the classical myth.
[8] *Amphitryon 38* (1929), *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* (1935), and *Électre* (1937).
[9] *Elektra* (1949) and *The Women of Trachis* (1956). Pound had tried for many years to produce a version of the Agamemnon, but he eventually gave it up as futile, saying "I

twisted, turned, tried every ellipsis and elimination." Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 93. Finally Pound decided that "A search for Aeschylus in English is deadly, accursed, mind-rending." Ezra Pound, "Translators of Greek," *Make It New* (London: Faber, 1934), 146.

[10] *Orpheus und Eurydike* (1918).

[11] *Hippolytus Temporizes* (1927) and *Ion* (1937).

[12] *Medea* (1946), *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* (1950, from *the Oresteia*), *The Cretan Woman* (1951, after Hippolytus)

[13] *The Family Reunion* (1939, *Oresteia*), *The Cocktail Party* (1949, *Alcestis*), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953, *Ion*), and *The Elder Statesman* (1958, *Oedipus at Colonus*).

[14] *Desire Under the Elms* (1925) and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931).

[15] *Antigone* (1922), *Orphée* (1926), *Oedipus Rex* (1927, a libretto for Stravinsky's opera), *Œdipe-Roi* (1928, a loose adaptation of Sophocles'), and *La Machine Infernale* (1934, generally considered Cocteau's most accomplished play, also on Oedipus).

[16] *Antigone* (1917)

[17] *Trojan Women* (1914).

[18] Wrote a number of surrealist stories on classical myths throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

[19] *Alcestis* (1930).

[20] *Medea* (1926).

[21] *Birth of the Odyssey* (1938).

[22] Brecht wrote an adaptation of Hölderlin's translation of *Antigone* in 1947.

[23] *Icarus* (1927).

[24] *Les Mouches* (1943, after Electra).

[25] *Ladies from the Sea* (1987) imagines the fortunes of Odysseus after his return to Ithaca.

[26] A translation of *Agamemnon* (1936).

[27] *Victims of Duty* (1953) adapts *Oedipus Rex*.

[28] *Eurydice* (1941), *Antigone* (1942), *Medée* (1946), and *Œdipe ou le roi boiteux* (written in 1978 and published in 1986—never performed).

[29] *Orpheus Descending* (1957).

[30] *Caligula* (c. 1939, pub. 1944), not to mention his philosophical essay *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942).

[31] Jarry also wrote a play on Leda which he finished in 1909.

[32] Likewise the genres of film and opera in the twentieth century are replete with classical adaptations and appropriations. Cocteau's *Orphic Trilogy* comprises *Le Sang d'un poète* (1930), discussed in the previous chapter, *Orphée* (1950), a reworking of his play, and *Le Testament d'Orphée* (1960). Marcel Camus' *Orfeu Negro* (1959) is a famous adaptation of the myth set in Brazil, based on the play *Orfeu da Conceição* by Vinicius de Moraes (another film was made of the same play, *Orfeu*, in 1999). In opera, where the number of adaptations is even greater than in the theatre, it is more useful to look at the use of a single myth or the work of a single composer.

[33] Melvin J. Friedman, "*Amphitryon 38*: Some Notes on Jean Giraudoux and Myth," *Hereditas: Seven Essay on the Modern Experience of the Classical*, ed. Frederic Will (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 136.
[34] Michael Grant, *Myths of the Greeks and Romans* (Cleveland: World, 1962), 232.
[35] Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 540.
[36] Cf. Dicthen=Condensare, Pound's axiom that poetry should be concentrated. Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1960), 92.
[37] Cage's first major piece to use a radio, *Imaginary Landscape No. 4 (March No. 2)* of 1951, was written the year after *Orphée*'s premiere.
[38] Nevertheless adaptations and translations of classical plays have consistently appeared, at a much slower rate, in the second half of the century, including translations by many major poets including Anthony Hecht (*Seven Against Thebes*, 1973), Ted Hughes (Seneca's *Oedipus*, 1969, a version of the *Metamorphose*s, *Tales from Ovid*, 1997, and *The Oresteia*, and *Alcestis* both published posthumously in 1999), Seamus Heaney (*The Cure at Troy*, after *Philoctetes*, 1990, and *The Burial at Thebes*, after *Antigone*, 2005), Anne Carson, who has translated Sappho, an *Oresteia* comprised of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Sophocles' *Electra* (originally published individually in 2001), and Euripides' *Orestes*, 2009, *Grief Lessons*, a volume comprised of Euripides' *Herakles*, *Hekabe*, *Hippolytus*, and *Alkestis*, 2006, Tony Harrison (*Aikin Mata*, an African version of the *Lysistrata*, 1966, *Oresteia*, 1981, *The Trackers of Oxyrhyncus*, 1988 which uses as a starting point Sophocles' fragmentary satyr play *Ichneutae*, *The Common Chorus*, an adaptation of *Lysistrata* and *The Trojan Women*, 1991, *Hecuba*, 2005, and numerous plays based on classical material including, *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* about the Emperor Commodus, and the *Labours of Herakles*, adapting the earliest fragments of Greek tragedy by Phrynikos, both 1995). For further discussion of Harrison's relation to Greek drama see Steve Padley, "'Hijacking Culture:' Tony Harrison and the Greeks," *Cycnos* 18.1 (2001), unpaginated**.**
[39] Harry C. Rutledge, *The Guernica Bull: Studies in the Classical Tradition in the Twentieth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989) 48-49. Racine is the great exception that makes the rule. He is post-Antiquity's classicist par excellence, a dramatist equal to if not better than his predecessors. Shakespeare also surpassed the Greek playwrights. However, in his plays that concern the classical, he usually chose historical events which had not been dramatized in Greek theatre. Likewise, in his early works when he borrows a narrative, like that of *A Comedy of Errors* from Plautus' *Menaechmi*, or when he indulges in the excessive violence of *Titus Andronicus*, he consistently outdoes Plautus or Seneca, as the case may be. If Plautus' farce is based on the confusion engendered by a set of twins, Shakespeare will use two. If Seneca has Medea chop up her children and toss them off a wall, or summons the corpse of Laius, Shakespeare will borrow freely from the myths of Philomela and Tantalus (surpassing their grisliness as well) and cut off Lavinia's hands and tongue, and feed two children to their own father.

[40] On a trip to visit Picasso, Cocteau imagined a voice speaking to him and appropriated the name of an elevator that he was on. The poem was writing in May 1925 while the play was finished on September 25, 1925. Jean Cocteau, *Théâtre Complet* (Paris: Pléiade, 2003), 1663-1665.
[41] The 19th century concept of the *pièce bien-faite*, while emerged through the study of older plays, was developed by Eugène Scribe and subsequently Victorien Sardou and rapidly gained favor for the effectiveness of its plotting. It is the characteristic construction of the 19th century play and is still considered the basic form of traditional, non-experimental drama.
[42] Jean Anouilh, *Antigone*, *Théâtre*, v. 1 (Paris: Plèiade 2007) 660-661.
[43] Judith E. Bernstock, *Under the Spell of Orpheus: The Persistence of a Myth in Twentieth-Century Art* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 65.
[44] Oskar Kokoschka, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, *Plays and Poems*, trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside: Aridane Press, 2001), 156.
[45] Ibid, 157.
[46] See Dafydd Wood, "Adaptation of the Orpheus Myth in Five Operas," *McNeese Review* (46), 2008.
[47] Alberto Savinio, "Psyche," trans. James Brook, *The Lives of the Gods*, (London, Atlas Press, 1991), 34.
[48] Ibid,, 38.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 39.
[51] It should be noted that Brecht himself wrote an *Antigone* which premiered shortly after the war in 1948. The play seems largely a trial-run for *Mother Courage* with the same actress Helene Weigel and that was remarkably topical at the time. As it stands however, Brecht's *Antigone* is a version of Hölderlin's 1804 translation of the Sophocles' play with the addition of a prologue where Antigone and Ismene step out of a bombshell during the late war of succession between their brothers, and the development of Kreon's son and Antigone's betrothed as a vehicle for a descriptive monologue about war, and the ultimate destruction of Thebes.
[52] T. S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth," *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode, (New York; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich and Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1975), 177-178.
[53] Hugh Kenner, "A Thousand Lost Golf Balls," *Historical Fictions* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 91-92.
[54] Ibid., 92.
[55] Jeffers' *Medea* has received both damnation, dismissal, and praise. According to its accompanying criticism, it seems to have worked only in the performance by Judith Anderson. See for instance Donald A. Stauffer's criticism of the published text and Brooks Atkinson and Kappo Phelan's celebration of the performance in James Karman, *Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Boston, G. K. Hall, 1990), 151-155.

Chapter Four

The Ode and Formal Classicism

> In using the myth in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him…Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method.
>
> T. S. Eliot[1]

1. Introduction

When Eliot reviewed *Ulysses*, he found that Joyce offered a new way to organize a literary text, in other words a new way to construct the world through literary means, a mythogical method that surpassed the traditional narrative method. Eliot had attempted it concurrently with Joyce, originally planning to structure *The Waste Land* after the *Aeneid*.[2] *Ulysses*, while not the first, is the clearest example of what I term Formal Classicism—a text indisputably Modernist and obviously structured on a classical text. Formal Classicism manifests itself as the conscious modeling of form (and the form and content dichotomy) in a contemporary work upon an ancient one. The Joyce industry has meticulously examined every element of the novel, its classical allusions, structure, and Modernist traits.[3] For the sake of not taxing a reader's patience I will use it solely as a familiar example of this type of classicism.

Eliot continue, "Mr. Joyce's parallel use of the *Odyssey* has a great importance…It is…a way of controlling, or ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."[4] In other words, it is the same use of classicism that we have seen before; form and content exist symbiotically, each informing the other, enhancing aesthetic effect. Joyce provides

a classical structure into which he injects modernity. The other example of formal classicism that we have seen is the mosaics of the Foro Mussolini, which along with *Ulysses*, provide two clear examples, one concerned with aesthetic content, another in which aesthetic concerns are subjugated by political import. Fascist ideology in the mosaics, which presented episodes of Italian fascist history in a Roman style, bled even into the apolitical classical form: the style had been discovered through excavations fueled by Mussolini's regime. Where *Ulysses*' classical construction orders and gives significance to contemporary history, the mosaics' style is given significance by the same. It should thus be apparent that a discussion of an artwork's form, while often seen to be divorced from an examination of content, is integral to the analysis of a work of art in both the case of Joyce's mythic parallels and in that of the mosaic's, or Arno Breker's political significance.

Such a mythical method of construction, as Eliot knew, was not new. According to Eliot, *Ulysses* was the first novel to be built upon such a foundation. He argued that Yeats also used this method of ordering and controlling was the "first contemporary to be conscious"[5] of it. Eliot's caveat of "consciousness" is vital because the modeling of a contemporary work on a classical one has existed continually in the West as a means to order aesthetic texts, whereas the 20th century provided Eliot's "panorama of futility and anarchy." An evolutionary history of Formal Classicism would disintegrate into varying degrees of an author's modeling and eventually stretch back right into antiquity itself with the *Aeneid* or further.

Littered throughout the Western tradition examples of Formal Classicism abound, from the Fourteenth-century *Ovide moralisé* which presented a Christianized *Metamorphoses* that coupled the classical tradition of the commentary and the Christian moral homily into the text itself, to Giacommetti's *Femme Qui Marche* (c. 1932-1934) and Brancusi's echoes of Cycladic sculpture to Woody Allen's use of the Greek chorus in *Mighty Aphrodite* (1996). However a choice example of Formal Classicism lies in the tradition of modern lyric poetry's adaptation of classical forms, particularly in the case of the ode. Is it useful to recall, in fact, that the majority of pre-twentieth century "experimental" poetry[6] experimented with rare classical meters. The history of twentieth century poetic innovation can be traced back to Victorian period. Poets like Swinburne, Browning, Meredith, and Bridges all worked at times in exotic meters searching for a new mode of poetic expression that would not be fulfilled until the twentieth century. They turned to the old and forgotten, to dipodic meter which can be argued to use Greek paeons,[7] quantitative verse, and hexameters, among others.[8] The Victorian poets pushed metrical verse as far as possible until the rupture that vers libre would provide. Their poetic experiments, grounded in the classical tradition, create a literary historical narrative that necessitates a plunging-back into the past before further innovation can occur. Pound emerged from this style of experimentation, as, in a way, did Yeats in the early twilit work that made his reputation before both turned again to engage the classical past having exhausted the 19th century inheritance.

One way to understand Formal Classicism is to select a poetic form borrowed from classical literature as an exemplum. Such a method usefully limits and focuses the

scope. The ode, for example, provides a linear narrative from its emergence in Pindar, its use in Latin literature with Horace, and its adaptation in the modern period where it can be easily traced from Jonson into the Enlightenment to Romanticism and into the 20th century. Unlike other forms its classical provenance has never been truly lost. While the ode has wholly transformed, often stripped of the specifics of what makes a poem an ode, its very stature as a large or grandiose, often public or occasional poem, relies wholly in its origins as a classical showpiece. A poem about the west wind or melancholy, about New York or the dead of the Civil War is open-ended, while an ode on one of those topics necessitates a certain tone and breadth. The form not only structures meaning, but in this case dictates a reader's expectations of how a poet will handle a given subject, and opens up a host of ways the poet can fulfill, surprise, exceed, and fail a reader's expectations. The classical past of the form gives it a history similar to that of the sonnet, blank verse, and couplet, providing a tradition the lyrical equivalent of the epic. The example of the ode affords a concentrated lens of Eliot's tradition as "obtain[ed]..by great labour," necessitating a "historical sense" of the past and the past's presence, and where "the whole of literature" is filtered through a specific lyrical form constructing its "simultaneous existence…[and] simultaneous order."[9] The ode more than any other literary genre besides the epic possesses the strongest link to the classical tradition. 20th-century odes thus become the clearest engagement with the classical tradition outside of the Homeric long-form poem.

2. The Tradition of the Ode

The importation into English of a classical meter or form cannot be given enough importance. While classicists tend to deride the use of a Greek meter in English, its interest does not lie in how similar it is to the Greek, given the difference between quantitative and accentual-syllabic verse, but in transforming length to stress something new is created where it wasn't before. While J. A. K. Thomson can dismiss the formal influence of classical poetry upon English as "suggestion and stimulus," recognizing that "the classical lyric cannot be truly reproduced in English…[where meters] are only classical in appearance,"[10] creative adaptation of poetic form from a language marked for quantity to one isochronous to stress, coupled with incorporating rhyme as a distinctive poetic marker in addition to stanzaic construction, and the metrical line provides a poetic form that at once has a history and novelty. Ben Jonson and Abraham Cowley who pioneered the English ode produced a poetic form that became natural to English through the combination of elements of the classical predecessors and a sensitivity to the characteristics of English poetry and what makes one successful.[11]

There are two models for the modern (post-Medieval) poet to use in writing an ode—the Pindaric and the Horatian. Pindar's odes have been regularly noted by poets and critics from Horace and Pausanias to the 20th century as a poetry of emotional, aesthetic and overflowing intensity. Horace repeatedly compared him to a rushing torrent full of power but incomprehensible and useless to analyze.[12] Highet compared him fittingly to Blake as an "inspired lunatic."[13] For all intents and purposes he is the father of lyric poetry and encapsulates one way of seeing the work of art. Let us consider very

briefly his formal qualities for they are essential to understanding the development of the ode.

There are no two poems of Pindar that use the same metrical form,[14] yet they generally use one of two stanzaic forms. There are poems built upon a single stanza-pattern, called monostrophic (these are of no real interest to us in regards to influence). The other form is both more familiar and far more influential—it is, in fact, what is referred to as the Pindaric ode. This form begins with two stanzas which are mostly equal (the strophe or turn and antistrophe or counter-turn, respectively) and are followed by a briefer stanza which is usually quieter (the epode or stand)[15] and arranged differently but using the same basic meter. This is called a triadic structure and is the same form as used in the chorus of Greek tragedy. It is important to remember that the Pindaric odes were accompanied by song and dance. The individual lines were divided by "breathing-spaces," corresponding from stanza to stanza almost exactly. Yet within the stanza there were rarely more than two lines of the same length. There would be a similar meter running through the lines of varying length; the stanza form would then be repeated as usual in poetry.[16]

However, beyond this formal element we see another level of structure and thematic. All the odes exalt, as Highet has argued, nobility—that of the family of the winner and the legends to which his family is linked: "Above all the exalt *nobility* of every kind, social, physical, aesthetic, spiritual."[17] This will be of primary importance while dealing with the modern ode, its transformations and preoccupations. Additionally the ode is colored by the contest in the Panhellenic festivals whose winner is being

commemorated. The metaphors and similes follow upon the contests, while each ode mentions the contest's of festival's celebrated god. The myths related to the hero's family or country are placed in the middle of the ode.[18] Furthermore in 38 of the extant 45 odes a significant word or words are repeated in his strophes, which will become of the utmost importance in our examination below of Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead." This thematic can be mapped (distorted usually) into our modern odes in some way or another. However any argument that there is a central symbol dominating the entirety of each of Pindar's odes has been vigorously proven incorrect. What matters is that we find in Pindar, whether he makes sense or not, a wedding of form and content that is fitting.

Robert Shafer has observed that Pindar's odes move in a series of associative leaps.[19] This is the most we can say about them in terms of thematic construction. However, this will become evident as an influence upon the followers of Pindar where associative leaps organize a poem as in Jonson's Cary-Morison ode.[20]

Pindar was not known throughout the Middle Ages. The first edition of his *Odes* was printed by Aldus in Venice in 1513. He had been known of (particularly for Horace's admiring references to him) and the Renaissance shortly began imitating him. His first great imitator was Ronsard but was followed in England by Milton's "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," Jonson's Cary-Morison Ode (which also shows a strong Horatian influence), Abraham Cowley's series of odes, Dryden in the "Song for St. Cecilia's Day" and "Alexander's Feast" and finally in Gray's "Progress of Poesy." The Pindaric ode having fallen away in the 18th century to both the more rational Horatian and

the excesses of Cowley, emerged again triumphant with Romanticism when Pindar's torrent became more appealing (his followers there include Goethe, Shelley, Hugo, Wordsworth, and Hölderlin). And the Pindaric moved less visibly on into the 20th century. And then, who better to see himself as a modern Pindar than Hart Crane, who said with all seriousness and confidence (as usual) that he would be the "Pindar for the dawn of the machine age."[21]

An ode can thus be considered Pindaric if it meets a number of criteria. A construction based upon a triadic structure supercedes the stanza as an individual unit; in other words, a single stanza no longer functions as the poetic unit above the level of the line or of lines fused together through rhyme. Rather, the turn, counterturn, and stand dictate a movement the poetic equivalent to the Hegelian dialectic offering a proposition, a consideration of it, and a synthesis. In terms of poetic structure, both Pindar and Jonson allow a poetic phrase to run over not simply a line break but also a stanzaic break and occasionally, in Pindar, to the subsequent triad.[22]

The complicated verse form which uses one stanza for the strophe and antistrophe and another stanzaic form for the epode avoids monotony, and combined with the material shifts in tone or content befitting the movement from one stanza to another produces a perpetual momentum as it shifts from the strophe to a mirror of the same form with a turn as in the sonnet before a second turn. In effect, the Pindaric ode operates like an extended sonnet with two turns in the base triad.

Finally in terms of voice, the Pindaric ode offers a compressed poetic style, with rapid shifts and a movement from topic to topic based on allusion and suggestion. The

form produces variety while the stanzas lend brevity to each forwarded proposition. The style is typically grand and encompassing like a proclamation, fitting for their occasional status. In other words, at least in Pindar, there is a national character to his odes, which the modern poet is at liberty to develop in his own work. This national characteristic emerges because the ode became under Pindar a public institution it celebrated an Olympic victor and his own city-state, but Pindar's odes transcended that particular to celebrate Greek culture as a whole and fulfill a religious element as well in both the gods who were praised and the syncretic nature of the Olympics and Greek poetry as a cultural, national and religious event. And, as we shall see in Tate and Lowell, this national element has by no means vanished.

The other major model for the modern ode-writers is Horace, who is in several ways the antithesis of Pindar in form, content, and way of seeing poetry. His cardinal virtues of calm, thought, repose, moderation, reflection, etc. found themselves mirrored in exactly what the Roman world needed. The great period of civil war and unrest, of chaos and exhaustion had finally ended, Horace barely escaping it with his life. His odes are virtually all in four-line stanzas (with a few couplets) with (compared to Pindar) fewer stanzaic and line forms. While the Pindaric poets allow for great formal variation, the Horatians utilize shorter, more carefully-weighed and consciously-constructed forms (not to suggest that the Pindarics run around hither-thither, Cowley excepted), more "classical" than Pindar. Although the 18th century found Horace the more sensible model, it is inappropriate to make much more of a statement regarding classicism and romanticism in Horace and Pindar beyond the utility of simile. We can consider the

Horatian ode as a economical and reflective poem intent upon balance and heterogeneous lines while the Pindaric is a more extravagant poem of widely varying line lengths (though regularized throughout stanzaic forms).

Horace provides no rigid model for a modern author, besides an impressionistic descriptor of Horatian urbanity as style. This decorum lent itself to his adoption as model ode-writer for the Enlightenment. Sophisticated and carefully measured, Horace in large part defines the idea of Neoclassical poetry. Indeed, the Pindaric verse form superceded the Horatian in the shift to Romanticism and its concomitant explosion of odes. Simply looking at the different odes printed on paper offers a simulacrum of the difference between Augustan poetry and Romantic. Horatian odes present a carefully weighed balance, and formal regularity, right down the page. Pope strove to be the greatest "correct" poet, each line mirroring the last and the next. The Pindaric ode as in Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, and Wordsworth erupts, jaggedly. Overflowing its bounds, the form is still strict; a reader's formal expectations are fulfilled with the succession of stanzas instead of immediately after a line or two. Horace's odes offer a variety of verse forms, but, differing from Pindar, are most often stanzas of four lines of the same meter making their way (shorter than Pindar) to the poem's end.

Ultimately, however, it is more difficult to follow Horace for he is the quintessential master of perfection, to craft a poem so carefully and then set it aside for seventeen years. Petrarch was Horace's first modern enthusiast, though he was known in the Middle Ages.[23] Ronsard, after giving up his earlier attempt to rival Pindar, modeled his later poems upon Horace. But in England it was Jonson who brought Horace into the

conceptual framework of British poetry. Needless to say the Cavaliers were essentially his followers. However in regards to the ode we find his influence (as mentioned before) in Jonson's Cary-Morison Ode, in Herrick's "Ode to Sir Clipsebie Crew," Marvell's "Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland" (which announces its heritage and is often considered the finest Horatian ode in the language), Milton (who translated him) Pope's "Ode on Solitude" (and many translations), Collins' "To Evening" and "To Simplicity," and Watts' "Day of Judgment."

Horace provided likewise a model for the ode that was not centered around public, national, or occasional concerns. His odes address numerous topics; there are those in praise of wine, "religious, patriotic, and national ones, moral and semi-philosophic ones, and some not falling into any of these classes, but addressed to great personages or to other personal friends."[24] The Horatian tradition then unlocked odes from their occasional status. In other words, the combination of the Pindaric and the Horatian ode allowed for a variety of subjects to be treated in either form, providing both Keats' highly personal 1819 odes and Robert Lowell's ode "For the Union Dead," to be written using a more Horatian stanza while being the century's greatest public poem.

3. Two 20th Century Odes

I have chosen these two odes by Tate and Lowell because they form an irresistible diptych. Their intertextuality is evident from the outset; Lowell's poem in large part responds to his former teacher's, presenting a different approach although the concerns of both poems differ widely. As American poems likewise, they offer a vantage on the

form's poetic tradition that is remarkably different from the European. The great majority of early 20th century European odes break more strongly with the tradition. The ode is a familiar public poem with scores of examples in each period and from each nation. Thus the ode, while still of important stature, had gradually reified, its historical characteristics flaking off until it became simply a big, often public poem often with high-flown diction. The models for ode-writers became more and more recent, as Pindar and Horace, Ronsard and Jonson become more remote and less significant to the tradition. For example, Cocteau's odes use virtually no inherited form. The ode that begins Pound's *Mauberley*, while adopting a Horatian stanzaic patterning and elevated language, confines itself to the description of an individual avoiding any kind of public pronouncement beyond being published and having an audience of some sort.[25]

Tate and Lowell, however, turn directly to the Greek and Roman models, with less attention to the more recent examples than vice versa. Yet, as we shall see, they do not strictly use a classical structure. Rather they appropriate choice elements of Pindar and Horace in their attempts to produce a public ode suitable to their subject and place. Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" is key to understanding the re-deployment of a classical form within the matrix of Modernism. Tate moves a striking distance away from a reader's expectations. His ode transforms into a poem about the disintegration of classical form and the waning utility of the classical tradition. Lowell's "For the Union Dead" written well after the triumph of free verse and the dilapidation of classical education perpetuates the classical tradition only piecemeal, finding fewer and fewer elements suitable for recycling.

The utility of Tate's and Lowell's poems transform from simply an exemplification of how classical form can be preserved into a case study for the decline of both form and the classical tradition within the 20th century. A careful appropriation of the form, modeling section on section, is already gone. Tate's ode has a generalized triadic motion. Tate approximates the strophe, antistrophe, and epode already well into the poem and interrupts these units with an irregular refrain; all divisions are stanzaic, often within lines broken by verse paragraphs. Any attempt at public pronouncement lies in the role of the title upon an audience. The poem is a meditation by the only figure in the poem, and he is surrounded only by the dead. Classical form, like the Confederate dead in the poem's graveyard, has started to rot away. Lowell's poem, on the other hand, abandons traditional form and keeps its classical material buried beneath the surface. A Latin epigraph is all that stands out on first reading, appropriately for such a monument for the dead. The epigraph's encomium to serving the state transforms into servility to commodification. Hades is transformed into an underground car garage. Yet the poem is unified by a quantifiably Pindaric logic underneath its stanzaic structure. Images and symbols appear, vanish, and recur with a Pindaric logic, moving with analogy as one symbol or subject triggers another. Furthermore, "For the Union Dead" is one of the most demonstrably public poems in the 20th century, written by one of its most public poets. Thus, these two poems, taken together, demonstrate the general decline of traditional form, but particularly the persistence of the classical tradition even in its formal type in an almost subterranean existence. It has begun falling apart in the Tate and only exists at all in the Lowell underneath the surface of the poem—a public

statement to an American audience but its classical provenance hidden from view. In short these two poems depict the gradual erasure of the classical and form from 20th century poetics.

3.1 Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead"

Allen Tate' 1928 poem "Ode to the Confederate Dead" transcends its unfortunate subject by becoming a dramatic monologue in the form of an ode. The poem is built around the speaker's conflict in eulogizing the "heroic" dead in the cemetery by which he stands, never fully being able to collapse them in the falling leaves of the poem's refrain, and the realization of their material decay, before a concluding synthesis of sorts. The poem as a mediation turns on the subject of rot and decay. The image of the blind crab, cut-off from visual sensation, shows the contemporary individual as a bottom-feeder that survives off the rotting remains of previous generations and the Civil War dead. The poem's iambic structure itself decays with a constant variety of line lengths, abnormal rhyme, and syllable count. The overwhelming sense of death, decay, and his own mortality conspire to prevent the man-by-the-gate from speaking beyond internal monologue (and even there, incapable of completing his own train of thought) in this ode, which one might say, would have been a "public remembering," if it were not torn apart by decay and the speaker's psychological state.

Even the Ode's classicism is incorporated into the theme of decay. If it is indeed an ode, it is one that is half-way rotten and falling apart. The classical past, the strictures of a classical form, are incorporated and consumed into the poem and exist only partially.

Where the poem transforms what it eulogizes, the confederate dead, into fertilizer for crab and plant, it transforms the classical tradition into a fertilizer for the poem's structure. The classical tradition in the modern period is dilapidated, and Tate's "Ode" shows this in its content and structure.

This poem lends itself to a pseudo-Pindaric structure. In an essay on the poem,[26] Tate grants that it can be perceived as such, while a little luke-warm, and suggests the following break-down into the Pindaric triad:

Strophe: ll. 27-57 (first hemistich)
Antistrophe: ll. 57 (second hemistich)-71
Epode: ll. 72-89.

Tate's suggestion which reads as, "I should see not objection to calling [this passage] the Epode,"[27] enforces the notion that his "Ode" need not be read too strictly as such. The first strophe begins a good third of the way into the poem. He admits that it was originally termed an "elegy" and that its entitlement as an "ode" was an "irony."[28] Further discussion of its difference from the traditional ode can be swiftly given to Tate himself:

> It is an ode only in the sense in which Cowley in the seventeenth century misunderstood the real structure of the Pindaric ode… [A] purely subjective

> meditation would not even in Cowley's age have been called an ode…[T]he scene of the poem is not a public celebration[;] it is a lone man by a gate.[29]

The poem uses a loose iambic line with varying numbers of stresses and syllable. Likewise Tate borrows from "Lycidas" no strict pattern of rhyme.[30] The poem is interrupted four times by an irregular two-line refrain on the leaves and wind. Its definition as an ode then relies on a triadic structure that emerges in the last two-thirds of the poem. While the poem is a "subjective meditation" by "a lone man" and Tate rightly recognizes where it differs from a traditional ode, by entitling it an ode instead of an elegy, the nature of the poem and how a reader approaches it changes dramatically. Tate is surprisingly naïve for a new critic regarding his ode's reception. His article which addresses what he attempted to write, discussing "merely my intention in writing it,"[31] perhaps is not the place for the close reading that Tate would have given to another text. But nevertheless his knowledge of the public status of an ode would have given him some idea of what occurs when a poem is called an ode. Thus his poem, while it is a private meditation by a speaker not the author, is transformed into a quasi-occasional statement for at least a Southern, Fugitive or Agrarian poetics.

If a reader chooses to follow Tate's structural suggestions for the poem, the first stanza of the poem (ll. 1-9), before the triadic structure emerges, addresses the theme of decay which is taken up in the antistrophe. The headstones in the cemetery "yield their names to the element (l. 2)," as leaves pile up in troughs, a "casual sacrament" to the "seasonal eternity of death;" they will begin to disintegrate like those names etched onto

stones. Tate thus seeds the poem's inevitable turn initially. Likewise, the theme of the strophe is foreshadowed in lines 7-8: "Then driven by the fierce scrutiny / Of heaven to their election in the vast breath[.]" The grammatical subject shifts to the dead Confederates eulogized upon the headstones. A divine judgment drives them to heavenly immortality. Heaven's "vast breath" counterpointing the third line's "the wind whirrs without recollection" of the dead as it gradually erases their names from the headstones. The buried soldiers or rather their names "sough the rumour of mortality (l. 9)" joining the two themes so far advanced, that of decay and the immortalization of the dead in heaven or public memory.

In his article, Tate mourns the word "barter" which he later changed to "yield" for clarity.[32] While "barter" is a better word and the line's meaning is still clear, there were prosodic reasons as well. The first two lines begin a metrical contract with the reader, providing mostly perfect iambic pentameter (the first foot of the poem provides an abnormally weighted first syllable though it is still an iamb; the penultimate foot of the second line is a perfectly acceptable anapestic substitution) which is then disrupted in the more messy subsequent lines. As Langdon Hammer has observed, the metrical regularity evokes the "dignity of martial discipline."[33] "Row after row" of graves, of soldiers, of Tate's lines. These lines, like the soldiers themselves, quickly disintegrate and lose their metrical regularity. The meter returns (mostly) to normalcy in the stanza's last line, although the third foot is quite light, stressing "of." The first line of the next stanza again provides a relatively regular line of iambic pentameter with an initial trochaic substitution. Thus, Tate sets up the basis of a pattern to which he can return and regularly

depart. The novel form of the poem is built upon a reflection of the poem's thematic content. The rot and decay that for all purposes defines the poem is mirrored in its metrical disintegration and irregular rhyme pattern.

The second stanza (ll. 10-24) begins with the same themes intertwined. "Autumn is desolation (l. 10)," evoking Eliot, quickly moves into the public recollection of the soldiers, "memories grow / From the inexhaustible bodies that are not / Dead, but feed the grass row after rich row. (ll. 11-13)" The bodies of the soldiers have become inexhaustible because they are remembered by the speaker and his contemporaries and because of their place in the cycle of life and death, giving nourishment to the plants growing above them. But concomitantly, the soldiers must be dead if they are to feed the cemetery's grass. While they are part of that cycle and give life, they give life through the very annihilation of their physical remains. This reading is confirmed throughout the stanza as their above-ground-markers are eroded. The fourteenth line, "Think of the autumns that have come and gone!—" emphasizes excessively the poem's flirtation with "ubi sunt," already clear enough, but also demonstrates that the speaker is addressing someone. Line 20's "Turns you, like them, to stone," solidifies the address, but it is not clear at this point whether it is to the reader, to the dead, or the man-by-the-gate speaking in second person, confirmed in l. 27. Tate achieves' one of the poem's most striking images in ll. 23-24: "You shift your sea-space blindly / Heaving, turning like the blind crab."

Tate argues that his blind crab is the "first intimation of the nature of the moral conflict upon which the drama of the poem develops: the cut-off-ness of the modern

‘intellectual man’ from the world,”[34] arguing that his poem is about solipsism, narcissism, “or any other *ism* that denotes the failure of the human personality to function objectively in nature and society.”[35] Tate’s crib of his poem has become standard and parroted by subsequent critics every time the poem is discussed. Yet his own interpretation does not find much support. Rather the “blind crab” is what the speaker recognizes that he has become when confronted with these stones. No indication of being an intellectual, as nowhere else in the poem. The speaker has said that the “angel’s stare” from the headstones has turned him into stone, transforming the air too; until plunging into a heavier world below, he becomes “like the blind crab,” finding this simile more accurate than the previous metaphor using stone. The speaker changes images for a reason. The stone, as he has shown, decays, but is incapable of movement, thus the metaphor is not exact. The crab, living in the heavier world, below the surface, represents according to Tate the “looked-in ego,” having “motion” but “no direction,” “energy,” but “no purposeful world to use it in.”[36] What strikes the reader is not the crab-as-ego or –self, but rather as a consumer of decay, closer to the grass than the stone angels because it feasts off the offal of the dead. In the heavier world below heaven and below the perspective of the man-by-the-gate, the crab has its allotted space in which it blindly moves and gathers rot, and, analogically, the Confederate dead. The crab too gains life and sustenance from the dead, exists because of them as the subsequent generations live off of the martial dead. Where the crab clearly does represent man and the specific man in the poem, and it is blind to the world, it thrives in its station not needing sight but as integral a part of life as the leaves and wind, the grass and the dead.

If the poem then is about the mess of decay, the crab is steeped in it, consumes it, and clears it away. The crab is given life by the dead, but, if Tate's earlier paradox holds true, that the bodies are not dead because of the grass, thus the crab gives life to those bodies. The crab transforms into the reigning metaphor of the poem because it concerns itself with the rot and waste around itself, consuming almost the flesh off the poem's classical skeleton.

At the end of this stanza comes the first entrance of Tate's refrain: "Dazed by the wind, only the wind / The leaves flying, plunge[.]" The refrain serves here as an abrupt pause and transition back to concentrate on the speaker after his "Baroque meditation on the ravages of time." Confronted with the realization that he and his contemporaries are like the blind crab that feeds off the decay of earlier generations, the man-by-the-gate must step out, away from his realization and turn back to the wind and the leaves, the material objects of the natural world that spin around him.

After this refrain the first strophe begins. The speaker begins soliloquizing the primal, animal qualities of man: "You know who have waited by the wall / The twilight certainty of an animal, / Those midnight restitutions of the blood / You know – (l. 27-30)." He moves to ponder the natural world around him—pines and the "smoky frieze / Of the sky," before moving into the philosophical meat of the strophe and referencing Zeno and Parmenides who represent both the rejection of sensory experience and the possibility of change. Here the speaker attempts to convince himself of "the unimportant shrift of death" and praise the fallen soldiers for their vision and their "arrogant circumstance." His encomium to the dead is again interrupted by the refrain of the

natural world: "Seeing, seeing only the leaves / Flying, plunge and expire." The association of the fallen soldiers and the fallen leaves is manifesting, but not explicit and will never be quite fulfilled by the speaker.

In the second stanza of the strophe, the confederate soldiers are engaged more explicitly than anywhere else in the poem. "Turn your eyes to the immoderate past, / Turn to the inscrutable infantry rising / Demons out of the earth–they will not last." As in the Pindaric ode these heroes are praised and eulogized but transformed into demons emerging from their graves as in a last judgment where the dead arise. However, just as these soldiers did not last, this vision itself is fugitive. The immoderate past also becomes the antiquity from which Tate's poem springs; his "Ode" emerges as a patchwork reconstruction of a classical form., a reanimation like infantry. The speaker then litanizes Stonewall Jackson and various sites of Civil War battles which have become merely "sunken fields of hemp" an exotic "orient" in which the speaker is lost. At the end of this stanza he curses "the setting sun," which highlights the mortality not only of the soldiers as it sets upon their graves and the battlegrounds, but also confronts the speaker with both the impending conclusion of his meditation and his own inevitable death.

An unmistakable trochaic rhythm is begun in each line; the first syllable of each receives stress before the meter is normalized by the ends of the lines. Importantly, such a rhythm is termed falling, appropriate for this stanza's fallen soldiers and the immense casualties of the battles: "Shiloh, Antietam, Malvern Hill, and Bull Run." As Pindar would associate and unite an Olympic victor with his province of origin, so Tate allows

the battles to metonymically represent the Confederate casualties. Yet this classicizing trope is combined with the earlier Christian theme of bodily resurrection at the Last Judgment. Thus Tate uses elements from prior traditions, cannibalizing into his odes the remnants of the pasts classical, Christian, and American, as we have seen in Yeats and Pound. This passage, and in effect the whole strophe up to this point, has sublimated, and worked hard at doing so, the theme of decay and rot, unfitting for a eulogy to fallen heroes. But nevertheless this theme is at the back of the speaker's mind ready to come in at any moment.

Yet just as the "fields of hemp" begin inevitably to give way to fields of bones and bodies, the refrain of the leaves returns. The speaker stops himself from the coming association and attempts yet again to equate the soldiers to the falling leaves, but now cursing them because this metaphor too is becoming unstable, giving way to the leaves' inevitable decomposition. "Cursing only the leaves crying / Like and old man in a storm." His curse at the setting sun becomes a curse upon those leaves, while the crying man in the storm ushers in the conclusion of the strophe (ll. 33-37):

> You hear the shout, the crazy hemlocks point
> With troubled fingers to the silence which
> Smothers you, a mummy in time.
>
> The hound bitch
>
> Toothless and dying, in a musty cellar
> Hears the wind only.

This section which amounts to a gradual shift into Tate's antistrophe, rather than an abrupt turn, represents the speaker's inability to articulate a heroic epitaph for the dead. After invoking them, he curses time, hears his own shout, and recognizes that the immense silence of the dead, of time, of the exterior world, as opposed to his interior life, prevents him from eulogy or elegy. Time which eats away the bodies of those heroic dead makes him impotent and freezes him, as does the poem, in this moment. He is a desiccated mummy, incapable of action.

Immediately thereafter the image of the hound bitch succeeds the blind crab and the mummy, and turns the living speaker into a pathetic, dying animal. Standing for the speaker, it too is incapable of action and emitting sound, dying alone, cut-off from the world. The hound bitch also stands for the "Ode" itself and its tradition as a "formal ritual." The connection between the classical form and its modern content is implicitly evoked; the hound bitch as ode shows the form to be dying and decrepit, incapable of anything but witness. The speaker is turned feminine for the sake of a more striking image and his agency is muted. In "Narcissus as Narcissus," Tate emphasizes that the dog is a hound because it is "a hunter, participant of a formal ritual."[37] Thus toothless, its defining characteristic as hunter is stripped away. The dog's teeth symbolize not only its strength, defining the animal as dog and hunter, but also its ability to respond in speech or sound to the world. All that remains is the sound of the wind, confronting the speaker with his own inarticulateness.

Tate argues that the speaker, thrown back upon himself at the failure of his vision sees himself in random visions as lower life forms. The humans who retain their true image are the dead,[38] but, as we have seen, they are only tatters of their original form.

As the speaker's vision disintegrates, so does the iambic rhythm. Lines 33 and 34 proceed to a more or less regular beat. Line 35, scans with an initial inversion followed by three weighty dactyls, while the rhythm of line 36 disintegrates upon itself:

´ ˘ ˘ ´˘ ˘ ˘ ´ ˘ ´ ˘
Toothless and dying, in a musty cellar

Tate constructs a falling, trochaic rhythm which is continued in the first half of the next line:

´ ˘ ´ ´ ˘
Hears the wind only.

As the antistrophe begins, rhythmic normalcy is gained as the second syllable of the third foot receives stress and the line finishes with two anapests: "Now that the salt of their blood[.]" And we return to the theme of decay explicitly, while metrical regularity is restored. The classical form asserts itself upon the poem at this critical juncture, returning to regularity however temporary. This antistrophe is essentially a lengthy mediation on decay. The salt of the the dead's blood is absorbed into "the saltier oblivion of the sea."[39] Yet also operating in this passage is Pindar's associative logic—

the sea is far distant from the Confederate cemetery. What emerges is the blind crab of earlier in the poem. And just as the association of the dead in the sea with the crab who scavenges dead material begins to rhyme in the reader's mind, Tate again leaps to "the malignant purity of the flood," connected only tangentially by water imagery. This flood must be the Biblical one which purified the world of its decadence and sin through malignant, mass death.

The speaker quickly shifts to the first person plural pronoun and revives the theme of transiency: "What shall we who count our days and bow / Our heads with a commemorial woe / In the ribboned coats of grim felicity (ll. 60-62)[.]" The speaker confronts his own mortality, and garbs himself in funerary clothes at the same time he tries to commemorate the dead. "What shall we say of the bones, unclean, / Whose verdurous anonymity will grow? / The ragged arms, the ragged heads and eyes / Lost in these acres of the insane green? (ll. 63-66)" Quite explicitly the dead soldiers are recognized as rotting remains and giving sustenance to the green plantlife which grows above them. The speaker returns to the world of the living with two striking images—gray lean spiders and the screech-owl's lyric. The spiders appear in the official colors of the Confederate army. The owl's lyric is tight, and invisible, coming through the dark willows as it "seeds the mind / With the furious murmur of their chivalry (70-71)." The song of this quintessential predator invests the speaker with the memory of the Confederate soldiers.

The antistrophe is separated from the epode by a final refrain reading, "We shall say only the leaves / Flying, plunge, and expire." This is the first instance of a personal

pronoun appearing in the refrain, and the second repeats line 43 exactly. The leaves only at the moment of their death experience the motion which has been attributed to them throughout the poem. They fall from the trees, fly, plunge, and then become dead when they rest upon the ground.

The beginning of the epode borrows strongly from the preceding refrain: "We shall say only the leaves whispering / In the improbable mist of nightfall / That flies on multiple wing; / Night is the beginning and the end[.]" Here, Tate again underlines the Pindaric train of association. The movement of the refrain is pulled into the stanza along with the owl obliquely reflected in the multiple wing of nightfall, and night, like death in Stevens' "Sunday Morning," becomes the mother of beauty, giving life and death. The poem subsequently makes a quick march to its end. Tate's final major image, the jaguar that dives into its own reflection in a pool only to drown, falls flatter than any of the other major images in the poem. Tate over-emphasizes in the poem the narcissus-theme which he advanced in his own reading. Where clearly this element is at work within the poem, it is not nearly as forceful as he might have wished it. The narcissus-jaguar which attempts a summation of the poem sounds off because the theme of decay is far stronger than that of solipsism within the actual poem. The jaguar works best as simply another reference of death and death-in-water, one which consumes itself rather than by time or other entities.

Following the jaguar, a death-drive takes over the rest of the poem:

What shall we say who have knowledge

Carried to the heart? Shall we take the act

To the grave? Shall we, more hopeful, set up the grave

In the house? The ravenous grave?

In other words Tate propounds a proto-existential conundrum. What shall the individual, aware in life of the poem's theme, do? Suicide, to take that act to the grave like the jaguar, only aware of it? Or, less despondently, take this death into the home, into one's essence and live with its realities? We have moved far beyond the dead Confederates into a individual's awareness of Death, generalized and specifically his own. Tate, needless to say, provides no answer. The final question quoted above amounts to: really? Live with it really?

The line breaks off before the final foot which begins the final, short stanza. The voice of the speaker, having confronted mortality and his questioning, departs. "Leave now / The shut gate and the decomposing wall:" Even the borders that society has set up to demarcate the living and the dead decay. An image of the serpent emerges, "The gentle serpent, green in the mulberry bush, / Riots with his tongue through the hush – / Sentinel of the grave who counts us all!" The serpent, as Tate suggests, represents time, while he hoped "to give it the credibility of the commonplace by placing it in a mulberry bush—with the faint hope that the silkworm would somehow be implicit."[40] Thus time-as-sentinel is ever present for the mortal, with the faint hope that art in an implication of an implication as the silkworm in the mulberries provides some manner of coping with death through artifice. The poem's last line seems a failure. Its observation is pedestrian

and shrill—how much better to have concluded on the penultimate line's fabulous initial substitution, on a verb almost as strong as Yeats' rough beast which "Slouches" and the final rasping rhyme.

I hope to have presented a new reading, however simplistic but more honest to the written text, of "Ode to the Confederate Dead" that is not written in servitude to Tate's own gloss on the poem. For the record, the approachable and humble tone of Tate's essay invites contrasting readings. Tate consciously, albeit ironically, called this meditation an Ode, knowing well that its structure had an ode hidden within it, and that it is far different from the occasional poetry of Pindar, being closer to the Horatian ode in terms of subject matter. The reader comes to the poem expecting a paean to Confederate soldiers, celebrating their heroism, inviting the poem to be read as a statement about the American South or a manifesto for Southern literature. But instead the Confederate dead are seen decaying. Whatever their heroism, the poem revolves around its speaker's thoughts. It is within an individual's mind, not at a podium to be declaimed to the public. Obsessed with decay, the poem consistently distances itself from its expected reading.

However, given Tate's highly self-conscious use of prosody to reflect the thematic he advanced in the poem, surely there was some stronger motivation than sly irony to entitle it an ode rather than a more fitting elegy or meditation. And sure enough there is. Using the decaying meter as an analogy, Tate presents what might be called a decayed or ruined ode, like the wall around the cemetery or the detritus of the classical past. The zombified triadic structure struggles to manifest itself and finally gathers its strength a third of the way into the poem. The Pindaric ode is literally buried in the

poem, and, as in the speaker's imagination of the infantry, rises like a demon from the earth, or out of the immoderate past (antiquity). Similarly, the speaker cannot shake the specter of an audience; he wrestles with the appropriate personal pronoun, first "you" then "we." Although consistently undercut he tries repeatedly to eulogize the dead, perhaps struggling to produce something like an ode for them, though he cannot. The epode does transform into a public pronouncement treating "grand" themes for "man." How can we as living, intelligent creatures cope with the certainty of our own inevitable death, much less the heroic dead of the past?

If, as I argue, the poem's thematic of decay is so dominating that it devours the ode-form and the reading Tate attempted to advance of his own poem, than the classical past must be recognized as tattered or rotted within the poem beyond simply the borrowed classical form. Zeno and Parmenides are referenced as "muted" and "in rage." The long stanzas make frequent use of words with a Latin root in his epithets.[41] Along with the strong images of the crab, the hound bitch, and the screech-owl, these epithets provide some of the best poetry in the poem—"casual sacrament," "commemorial woe," "malignant purity," etc. These epithets send the reader back to the root of the word, with its clear Latin provenance, but they can be quickly grasped without the need of an etymological dictionary. Their Miltonic ring is carefully orchestrated. Such epithets have long been a technique of English poetic style from Chaucer to Dylan Thomas, and according to D. S. Carne-Ross they emerge from that impetus to enlarge the English poetic language by raiding classical poetry and translating Homer and others.[42] The epithet compacts the clause which the reader can then unpack. Tate, however, does not

quite produce the compound epithet of Homer, Shakespeare, or Milton; rather his are halfway there, just like everything in his ode—partly decayed. It is the Latinate adjective alone that modifies his nouns. Homer is there, but half-buried.

But Homer is in the poem in another way as well. The refrain, which Tate added five years after he wrote the first draft, is evidently a careful association of the leaves to the dead men and time more explicitly. However, this more than any other element in the poem has the clearest provenance to an earlier literary text—the *Iliad*. In one of that poem's most famous passages VI.145-51, Glaucus compares the different generations of leaves to the generations of human beings.[43] In the "Ode," the leaves are the only physical motion in the poem as they fly, plunge, and expire; they echo throughout the stanzas of the poem reflecting the motion of what the man-by-the-gate imagines and the shifting motion of his own meditation.

If Tate's poem in large part subverts the function of the ode, than it does so with a strong purpose to dominate everything by his major theme of decay. If the speaker cannot fully honor the very subject of his poem, how can the poet do justice to a classical form far older than the Confederate dead? Tate thus offers a metaphor for how the classical tradition functions in the 20th century. It is clearly there, etched into the title of his poem, like the names of the soldiers onto the eroded tombstones. And it leaves its traces on the poem. It's present even in the poem's formal design, but a direct link between the past and the present is all but incapable of being traced. The past is irretrievable and can only be approximated. It is of the utmost importance and deserves

its place in literature and in the poem, but it is quite visibly decayed and must stiffen the saltier oblivion of the sea.

3.2 Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead"

Robert Lowell's last great poem is indubitably an ode. Even if it had not been presented publicly, occasionally, read by Lowell at the Saint-Gaudens memorial, its ode-ness must come from one of the most direct examples of intertextuality in 20th century poetry, a response of sorts to Tate's "Ode." Beyond even this, the poem's public nature is unquestionable. Lowell was the great, mid-century American poet, and the confessional style that he developed still holds sway over contemporary poets. This poem, positioned first as the last poem of *Life Studies* and then as the last poem in the volume to which it gave its name, his last solid book, addresses the specter of nuclear war, racism, the Civil War, civil rights. There is no more public poem in the century. No other 20th-century poem deserves the title of ode more than "For the Union Dead," which, of course, Lowell withheld. To call it an ode would make it seem antiquated, classical, archaic, which his poem is not.

In 1959, Lowell was asked to read a new poem the next year at the Boston Arts Festival, not far from the Augustus Saint-Gaudens' memorial to Colonel Robert Gould Shaw. He worked separately on two poems, one on Shaw, another on his memories of the Boston Aquarium. The drafts he transformed into his sole occasional poem which he read to much applause in 1960. He initially published the poem in *The Atlantic* and later

added it as the final poem of the paperback edition of his previous book, before using it as the title poem of his last great collection.

Robert Gould Shaw was offered the command of the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, the first all African-American regiment. He was from a Boston abolitionist family, and died in battle with more than 250 of his men during an unsuccessful siege on Fort Wagner, South Carolina on July 18, 1863. They became famous throughout the North, and Augustus Saint-Gaudens, one of the most respected sculptors in the United States, was commissioned to build them a monument in front of the Massachusetts State House, dedicated in 1897.[44]

According to Lowell, he worked personal memories into the poem to "avoid the fixed, brazen tone of the set-piece and official ode."[45] By doing so, Lowell created a new kind of ode, like Keats before him; a public, political poem framed by personal reminiscence.[46] Constructed in free verse quatrains and 68 lines long, the poem evokes the form of the Horatian ode. Lowell explicitly told Tate in a letter that he was working on "a Massachusetts Civil Ware poem, For the Union Dead,—not an ode though."[47] Lowell's reluctance to entitle a poem that fits the definition of an ode far better than, say, Keats' for example, shows Lowell's knowledge of form and tradition. He could not have called it an ode because such a title creates a set of formal expectations for the reader, which would ultimately create needless confusion. If Tate's poem, designed in an "imitative form"[48] that differs markedly from the traditional, can be entitled an ode, surely "For the Union Dead" can also be. And, from a purely intertextual approach, the

parallelism of Tate's and Lowell's poem is already obvious enough without a title which so prosaically links the two.

Lowell's imagery is constantly mirrored throughout the poem—the "Sahara of snow" anticipates the parking spaces like "civic sandpiles." His metaphors and similes reflect each other in their vehicles. The Aquarium returns at the end, its fish turned into the cars, mocking the "vegetating kingdom / of the fish and reptile" for which the speaker yearns. Virtually every symbol at work in the poem is reflected and paralleled later, down even to the Latin epigraph's *servare*, "to protect," to the servility of the contemporary American populace with their cars and parking lots.[49] Similarly Tate's "Ode" echoes all over Lowell's, which will contrive to answer the earlier poem's question: "What shall we say who have knowledge / Carried to the heart?" Finally Lowell also accomplishes what Tate's man-by-the-gate could not; he celebrates Shaw's heroism, an indisputable moral heroism easier to celebrate than those of the unindividuated Confederate dead. But at the same time, Lowell's speaker finds that heroism non-existent in the post-World War II environment to which there will be no memorials erected as those that appear throughout the small towns of New England commemorating the veterans and casualties of the Civil War. Finally, Tate's ravenous grave transforms in Lowell's poem to an unceremonious ditch where Shaw and his soldiers are tossed.

It opens with a Latin epigraph, "Relinquunt Omnia Servare Rem Publicam," or "They leave all behind to protect the republic." Lowell took this epigraph from Saint-Gaudens' memorial which was in the third person singular. By making it plural he

expands the subject to include the African-American soldiers of the regiment, not simply Shaw.

Lowell produces a topical poem, a public ode that is engaged to contemporary societal concerns whereas Tate's poem is adrift in the meditation of a lone man struggling with his inability to speak. Where Tate's speaker finds the modern world a landscape where not simply speech, but the continuation of a strain of thought, is an impossibility, Lowell, facing the same landscape, only worsened by another World War and the continued oppression of his country's most underprivileged, finds an absolute necessity of speech. At the point that Lowell was writing he had already become a far more public writer, and one with a much stronger, individual voice than Tate.[50] Lowell was compelled to produce a poem that spoke for his period; it provided a new phase in his poetic career after the sea-change of *Life Studies*. It encapsulated the private concerns of his poetic style, emerging from the self of confessionalism into a public space, and "For the Union Dead" solidified his position as the Great American Poet of his generation by addressing history, the self, and the contemporary.

Lowell begins the poem by reflecting on the closed South Boston Aquarium, standing but abandoned in a "Sahara of snow," while its "airy tanks are dry." This reflects Lowell's concerns regarding nuclear war that appear later in the poem. On top of the Aquarium stands a weathervane cod, the symbol of Boston, which has lost most of its scales, decayed, returning to Tate, but also highlighting one of the major themes of the poem. The first quatrain advances a lamenting, elegiac note, which will be coupled with the nostalgia of his second quatrain as the speaker remembers the time he spent there in

his youth. "Once my nose crawled like a snail on the glass; / my hand tingled / to burst the bubbles / drifting from the noses of the cowed, compliant fish." Fascinated as a child by these exotic fish, as an adult he recognizes them as completely servile, mirroring what he will see in his contemporaries, mimetically represented by the cars which in turn become like fish in the final stanza.

In the third quatrain, the speaker's hand draws back, in the present tense. We have moved from the childhood scene into the present. Nostalgia as an emotional state will be banished when the speaker realizes that the past was not better than his present. Instead of sighing for childhood which is a faulty edenic memory based on immature perceptions, the speaker turns elsewhere: "My hand draws back. I often sigh still / for the dark downward and vegetating kingdom / of the fish and reptile." As the stanza moves forward, the reader understands that the hand is drawing away from childhood and towards a consciously romanticized vision of the fecund, chthonic lower life forms. If his reminiscences allude to the self-as-subject in *Life Studies*, these lines return the reader to Lowell's even earlier, muscular and dense style of *Lord Weary's Castle* (cf., "upward angel, downward fish" from "The Quaker Graveyard"). This vegetating kingdom, furthermore, offers a place divorced from the realities of contemporary Boston. The speaker yearns for such an uncomplicated life as an escape. But, of course, it is impossible. The speaker sighs for it before he turns to his societal concerns, which fill out the stanza and spill into the next, where the previous had been end-stopped with both punctuation and shift of subject matter (ll. 11-21):

One morning last March,

I pressed against the new barbed and galvanized

fence on the Boston Common. Behind their cage,

yellow dinosaur steamshovels were grunting

as they cropped up tons of mush and grass

to gouge their underworld garage.

Parking spaces luxuriate like civic

sandpiles in the heart of Boston.

A girdle of orange, Puritan-pumpkin colored girders

braces the tingling Statehouse,

shaking over the excavations,

The speaker presses against the fence as he had the Aquarium's tanks, but Lowell's language demonstrates that while the actions of the man are the same as those of the boy, the setting has changed dramatically. Gone are animals and the natural world (save mankind's reconstruction in steamshovels of its reconstruction of dinosaurs). His nose does not crawl like a snail to glimpse fish or reptiles, rather he presses against the boundaries and borders which are erected dividing the old city and keeping visitors out of Saint-Gaudens' memorial. The Common is transformed into a cage that holds both

monument and mankind's artificial animals. Likewise, the classical Hades is transformed into an underworld garage where the cars, the poem's symbol for consumerism, become makeshift fish later in the poem, mirroring the old function of the Aquarium. The heart of Boston is turned into the desert of a parking lot while the scaffoled Statehouse reflects New England history only through its bright orange, "Puritan-pumpkin" colored girders for Lowell who embodied the American poet conscious of history and gave voice to its early British immigrants.

This passage serves as a transitional phase from the speaker's earlier reminiscences into the present consumerism and finally into the historical material which serves as the ode's major subject. Contemporary Bostonians had hidden their history behind the material objects of modernity. Saint-Gaudens's memorial stands forgotten and inaccessible. Consumerist, American culture has proceeded apace eclipsing Mauberley's concerns in the section of that poem which was examined earlier. Mauberley's impotent indignation gives way to the speaker of this poem's righteous denunciation and historical memory as moral necessity.

Lowell writes a passage of ekphrasis before moving into the history of Gould and its contemporary significance (ll. 21-28):

as it faces Colonel Shaw
and his bell-cheeked Negro infantry
on St. Gaudens' shaking Civil War relief,
propped by a plank splint against the garage's earthquake.

Two months after marching through Boston,

half the regiment was dead;

at the dedication,

William James could almost hear the bronze Negroes breathe.

Even crippled, as if on a splint due to the construction of the garage, the Shaw memorial's "shaking" strength is undiminished.[51] Its renown and life-like presentation "stick like a fishbone / in the city's throat." Shaw and the 54th Regiment remain a reminder of New England's abolitionist past, a monument to progressive attitudes towards race and how far the country still must progress. It is shuttered away, complicated and troubling. Lowell has again taken the image of the fish and transformed it, showing the poem's as yet undiscussed generation as an ode and Pindaric inheritance. The concerted movement of the images, Lowell's analogical language, comes directly from the Pindaric ode. Where Pindar's construction that moves from image to image, and doubles back follows a carefully designed construction of a symbolic language, bringing in place, family, mythology, and celebration; Lowell's own symbolic language begins with a set of symbols which are constantly reflected, always mutable. In this poem, Lowell uses a set of symbols continually which gives the poem an organic structure, uniting its disparate elements of childhood, history, public memory, political consciousness, and commercial denunciation. His metaphors move throughout the poem, just as Pindar's metonymies produced the movement of his odes. Shaw himself, in the

next two lines, is collapsed into fishbone "as lean / as a compass-needle." Lowell shifts the fishbone to a completely different image, but retains the physical characteristics of the previous image and returning to the weathervane cod. In the next stanza, Shaw is again equated with the positive "vegetating kingdom" through imagery borrowed from the animal kingdom; he is "wrenlink" and has a "greyhound's gentle tautness."

Yet Lowell cannot simply write ekphrastically about the monument; its history (James) is combined with the history of Shaw and the monument's unsettling contemporary significance. The speaker again articulates the disjunct between Shaw and the American mid-century, going further than before:

> He is out of bounds now. He rejoices in man's lovely,
> peculiar power to choose life and die—
> when he leads his black soldiers to death,
> he cannot bend his back.
>
> On a thousand small town New England greens,
> the old white churches hold their air
> of sparse, sincere rebellion; frayed flags
> quilt the graveyards of the Grand Army of the Republic.
>
> The stone statues of the abstract Union Soldier
> grow slimmer and younger each year—

wasp-waisted, they doze over muskets

and muse through their sideburns…

Shaw is out of bounds because he has become one with history, become monument, and because he represents a no-longer viable model of progressive sentiments and heroism. This stanza serves as a response to the question posed by Tate's poem, both that of "What shall we say who have knowledge / Carried to the heart?…Shall we, more hopeful, set up the grave / In the house?" and the larger question of how to commemorate heroism. He stands as an example "to choose life and die," to fight for life and freedom through his own death. Lowell offers an alternative: an active example of the commemoration attempted by Tate's mute man-by-the-gate. In choice of subject matter, namely Union dead, not Confederate, Lowell presents his most significant critique of Tate by choosing the right side, the side that can be celebrated rightly, not despite the Confederacy's bigotry. Such heroism can here be commended because it fought for equality. The grave can be set up in the village green as public reminder of the fought-for and died-for ideals.

The speaker also celebrates here as in the previous two stanzas (i.e., the straight, rigid compass needle, and ll.'s 33-34, "he seems to wince at pleasure, / and suffocate for privacy") Shaw's strength and righteous moral fervor. Shaw "cannot bend his back." As an abolitionist, he could not bend to appeasement or prejudice. Shaw consciously chose death to fight for the ideals in which he believed and thus "break."

The eleventh and twelfth stanzas (ll. 41-58) move from the specific monument dedicated to Shaw to incorporate the other Union dead. New England's abolitionist

inheritance is proclaimed by the churches and the graveyards, holding "their air / of sparse, sincere rebellion." These monuments, unlike Saint-Gaudens', present "abstract Union Soldiers," sculpting not quite the caliber of the Shaw Memorial and growing slimmer each year, although they too are modified with description from the vegetating kingdom (i.e., "wasp-waisted"). These statues present as honorable and unattainable a past as the subject of the poem, which should stand out, appropriate for the occasion of this ode. But, being tied less specifically to history, these statues represent simply that New England inheritance.

The next stanza offers the only major misstep in the poem, possibly confusing the reader by two variant readings:

> Shaw's father wanted no monument
> except the ditch,
> where his son's body was thrown
> and lost with his "niggers."

Refused a burial commensurate with the his rank because he led a regiment of "niggers," the Confederates buried him with his enlisted men. Shaw's father, instead of showing anger at this disrespect, felt thankful because, "They were brave men and they were his men."[52] However, Lowell's stanza here could be read as if his father had said "niggers" and was displeased with his son's progressive attitudes towards race. The historical

background makes this a misreading, but the poem does not specifically warrant one reading over another.

In the subsequent stanza, Lowell continues the image of the ditch and moves back into the contemporary (ll. 53-60):

> The ditch is nearer.
> There are no statues for the last ware here;
> on Boylston Street, a commercial photograph
> shows Hiroshima boiling
>
> over a Mosler Safe, the "Rock of Ages"
> that survived the blast. Space is nearer
> When I crouch to my television set,
> the drained faces of Negro school-children rise like balloons.

Lowell transforms Tate's "ravenous grave" into this ditch where Shaw and his men were thrown. It is nearer to historical truth than to Saint-Gaudens' artificial representation of history. The ditch-as-monument, as Shaw's father wanted it, proclaims his heroism more strongly, more accurately than the monument on the Boston Common. It extols Shaw's forward-thinking, making him and his men equals rather than Shaw on horseback among his footsoldiers. Furthermore, by moving so close to Tate's poem here, Lowell alludes to the same problem of commemoration that animated the "Ode to the Confederate Dead."

Shaw's heroism is difficult, almost unthinkable to the complacencies of contemporary America. It can be commemorated with trumpets and gusto, but it is such a celebration of death that Lowell's speaker finds unsettling. All of this is solidified in the subsequent lines which find no memorial to the Second World War of which Lowell had spent a year jailed as a conscientious objector.[53]

If the reader had not perceived the speaker's denunciation of American commercialism and consumerism, the next lines make it unavoidable. The advertisement for the Mosler safe offers a complete perversion of both Lowell and Tate's poems of commemoration.[54] Modern warfare, typified by the Hiroshima bombing, is too savage too awful for memorials. And in such a vacuum of commemoration, crude advertisement takes its place. For these reasons, the cold, absence of space, now being explored and presenting a new kind of heroism, one not specific to warfare or its attendant sides, is closer to Lowell's audience than such an offensive advertisement.

"For the Union Dead" was written during the desegregation of schools, and Lowell incorporates historical context into his poem through the analogical language and the pseudo-Pindaric associative movement that we have already seen. The African-American children's "drained" faces "rise like balloons." They have entered the poem through associative bounds. The speaker has moved through decades of history from Shaw to the Second World War to the Civil Rights movement. The environment in which the poem was written could not help but effect a poem on Shaw and so concerned with race. Likewise, the speaker doubles back to his own childhood memory of bubbles rising from the noses of fish in the Boston Aquarium, reflecting too the "bell-cheeked

Negro infantry." As innocents, the school-children become a part of the positive force in Lowell's poem, "the dark downward and vegetating kingdom" against the cars, the underworld garage, the girders and fence.

The last two stanzas tie the themes of the poem back together with the same repetition of similar images that designed the movement of the poem:

> Colonel Shaw
> is riding on his bubble,
> he waits
> for the blessèd break.
>
> The Aquarium is gone. Everywhere,
> giant finned cars nose forward like fish;
> a savage servility
> slides by on grease.

Shaw reenters the poem, afloat one of the bubbles that we have seen rising from the fish and like the faces of the African-American schoolchildren. Forced by Lowell into the choice of bend or break, Shaw is still strong and waiting for that break that must stand for his fought-for racial equality.

He concludes the poem by returning again to the Boston Aquarium which is gone. Its fish are replaced by the poem's consistent image of servility, the automobile.[55] The

positive vegetating kingdom is transformed by the poem's end into the negative symbol. The poem's epigraph exists only in its etymological descendant as servility, a complacency that Shaw died fighting against, encapsulating everything around the speaker through automobile pollution. Mankind has made its machines of complacency in the image of the living creatures that grasped the speaker's childhood imagination as these same objects hurt the natural world. The artificial image subsumes what it was made in imitation of as it destroys the original.

The poem was written as occasional, to be performed *à haute voix*. In response to Tate's commemoration of the Confederate dead, Lowell celebrates New England's abolitionist inheritance through Robert Gould Shaw as the central star to the constellation of the poem's other concerns. The poem remains as public and topical today as when it was it was written some fifty years ago. It at once lauds the country and damns it, finding the shimmer of hope in the faces of African-American children being able to attend school.

The major shift in poetic sensibility that Lowell accomplished in *Life Studies* contemporaneously with W. D. Snodgrass' *Heart's Needle*, termed to everyone's dislike Confessionalism, had a large part in renewing the ode as a form in "For the Union Dead." Bringing in childhood memory and nostalgia did manage to avoid the "fixed, brazen tone of the set-piece and official ode," as he wanted to do, but formally this enabled him to soften the ode's beginning and avoid the stiff address or invocation of most odes. The personal reminiscence also provided a frame for the poem which could hide an ode within an exterior shape that resembled a more characteristically modern poem.

"For the Union Dead" represents a transformation of the ode into a jeremiad. It no longer serves a celebratory function, but rather Lowell's ode denunciates the present by turning to a history which the poem's object is to memorialize. In other words Lowell renewed the ode form, most notably away from his immediate predecessor in Tate but also in the Romantic odes where they had become a personal meditation as an address to some object, a bird, an urn. While Lowell abandoned the strict triadic logic, much less structure of the Pindaric ode, he offered a different kind of unifying design, one that also returns to Pindar.[56] He selected two major images, the fish and the car. One positive, the other negative. He weaved them throughout the poem, eventually collapsing the two together with the car-as-victor, servility and consumerism trumping the natural world and history. In line with the patterning of the two central images, he used various elements from the initial stanzas (bubbles, childhood, construction materials, a weathervane, animal life) throughout the rest of the poem. The poetic imagery of "For the Union Dead" is a closed system that feeds upon itself.

4 Conclusion

By the mid-twentieth century the ode has been completely transformed. It contains the rudiments of what it did in Pindar, elements that the poet is at liberty to choose and take from the tradition. But as an inherited form, its strictures are in no way as rigid as those of the sonnet. The ode has decayed into more of a mode, like the pastoral or an elegy, rather than a fixed form. If a poet desires to engage its tradition, he or she can use elements of it and stand the contemporary poem closer to its literary

history or use simply the name as Cocteau did in his odes to give the poem and its readers a simplistic framework of elevation, celebration, or address. Ultimately, any such form that has existed for so long, that dates back to antiquity must loosen what were once its formal trappings if it is to provide any use to the contemporary poet. This does not necessitate experimentation or rule-breaking for its own sake. It is fallacious to assume that because such changes in a given form occurred that they were a necessity.

It is always up to the individual poet on an individual basis to choose what he or she might do with a literary inheritance. Both Tate and Lowell in writing odes emphasized and subverted various elements of their classical inheritance. Tate took the typically public form and a public subject only to produce a poem that has at its very kernel the inability to commemorate publicly. He presented his readers with a poem roughly on the subject of decay. Formally, his poem attempts to approximate this decay by providing a misshapen ode. Lowell wrote an occasional poem concerned with two major, American themes: race and consumerism. He jettisoned the formal conventions of the Pindaric ode for a free verse poem united to a more-or-less Pindaric sensibility achieved through the through-composed unity of images and an analogical language which unifies his poem outside of a metrical, formal skeleton.

Furthermore Tate's and Lowell's poems provide one of the century's most noticeable examples of intertextuality, and one, fitting for this study, that functions in a larger intertextual relationship with the classical tradition. "Ode to the Confederate Dead" stays closer to the Pindaric structure, but it subsumes those formal elements into its thematic concentration on decay and mortality. Tate's "Ode" posits a "reading" of the

classical tradition as dilapidated, distant, and barely attainable. If antiquity is in ruins, and its influence functions through fragments, so then his "Ode" is an imitation in subject and form of the decayed classical tradition. Lowell, on the other hand, rejects outright inherited form as a viable method of designing a poem. Yet, as soon as such a design is abandoned, some unifying structure must take its place. So he turns to an approximation of Pindar. At no point in the writing of the final poem could Lowell have though that "For the Union Dead" would break from its obvious lineage or be read in a vacuum where the occasional poem did not exist. His poem at once steps away from the formal tradition of the ode in poetic form and in name, but then moves closer to it by its analogical construction, his initial reading of it in Boston close to what amounts to the poem's site at the Shaw Memorial, and its overwhelmingly public tone.

The goal of this study is to show through examples the ways in which antiquity was used in the early 20th century. Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" and Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead" present an almost too-perfect, two-part case study of how a classical form, stripped almost to the bone by two millennia, can be used novelly in the twentieth century. When a modern or contemporary artist turns to an ancient form, if handled correctly, the text can rejuvenate the tradition from which it sprung.[57] The tradition, the form provides a seed which can thus germinate depending upon how the artist tends it. Through a calibrated combination of borrowing and ignoring selected elements from the original, incorporating novel approaches, and an overarching design of some sort (be it formal, stylistic, based on theme, as in Tate, or based on image, as in Lowell), the contemporary artist has access to the formal

inheritance of the past, not as something that must be banished, broken, or dusted off, but as a tradition that can be incorporated into Modernity and birth a work of art that weds the classical and the modern.

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[1] T. S. Eliot, "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth" (1922), *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich / Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), 177-178.
[2] Kenner, "A Thousand Lost Golf Balls," *Historical Fictions* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 90.
[3] Joyce's plan of *Ulysses*, which links the chapters of his novel to episodes in Homer, has furnished numerous scholarly texts with a guide to analyzing the narrative similarities of *Ulysses* and the *Odyssey* (see for example Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's Ulysses: A Study* (New York: Vintage, 1955) and Joseph Campbell, *Mythic Worlds Modern Words: Joseph Campbell on the Art of James Joyce* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).). Beyond such narrative discussions, R. J. Schork has two volumes which closely examine all of the classical elements in Joyce's oeuvre. See, R. J. Schork, *Greek and Hellenic Culture in Joyce* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998) and *Latin and Roman Culture in Joyce* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997).
[4] Eliot, 177. While facing *Ulysses*, Eliot overestimated the decline of the novel which has proved to be a fruitful, resilient, and elastic genre.
[5] Ibid.
[6] That is, outside Whitmanic free verse, Hopkins, the French prose poem and vers libre, and eccentrics like Christopher Smart.
[7] See Kenneth Haynes, *English Literature and Ancient Languages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 135 on Browning's "A Toccata of Galuppi's" and Meredith's "Love in the Valley," although he does not recognize dipody at work.
[8] See for example, Yopie Prins, "Victorian Meters," *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 89-113.
[9] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," (1919) *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, 38.
[10] J. A. K. Thomson, *Classical Influence on English Poetry* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 131.
[11] Paul H. Fry in one of the best studies of the ode, argues that the status of the ode as a major poetic capstone, almost as a summative statement for a writer's poetic craft, coupled to its function as a monumental public utterance produces a crisis in the poet and floods the ode without doubt about a poet's vocation and the lyric itself. See Paul H. Fry, *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).
[12] Horace, while praising Pindar, found him inimitable. See, *Odes* IV.ii.1-4.
[13] Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), 224.

[14] The third and fourth Isthmian are often regarded as a single ode, their use of the same meter being one of the reasons for this judgment. Strophic form was constantly varied from poem to poem, while they were rigorously adhered to within a single ode. Robert Shafer, *The English Ode to 1660* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1918), 14.
[15] This format is usually ascribed to Stesichorus of Himera (632-556)
[16] There are however three major types of meter in the odes: the Paeonic (a long and three shorts: ¯˘˘˘, ˘˘˘¯, or ˘˘¯˘ with allowable substitutions), the dactylo-epitritic (dactyl and epitrite, ¯˘¯¯, plus substitutions), and the logaoedic (dactyls and trochees, sometimes tribrachs with substitutions).
[17] Highet, 221.
[18] The Pindaric ode has essentially five divisions: beginning, first transition, centre, second transition, conclusion. Often there is a prelude and another subdivision (called the seal) right before the conclusion. The sevenfold model follows Terpander's (fl. 700) *nome*, supposedly Pindar's model.
[19] Shafer, 19, 23.
[20] For an example of Pindar, this is the first triad of his Second Pythian, commemorating Heiron of Syracuse, the winner of a chariot race. In this passage, Pindar's associative leaps are evident. Pindar initially invokes the city of the charioteer, the charioteer himself, the island of Ortygia near Syracuse, which triggers a litany of deities, turning to a "West Lokrian maiden" supposedly aided by Heiron, her gratitude triggers then the recollection of the ungrateful Ixion spinning in Hades. The translation is by Frank J. Nisetich. Nisetich, *Pindar's Victory Songs* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 163:

Turn 1

Great city of Syracuse,
the war god's sacred ground,
divine support of men
and horses flashing iron,
to you I come, bringing a song,
an announcement from shining Thebes:
the chariot Hieron drove
over the echoing earth has won.
He has crowned Ortygia,
where Artemis is enthroned,
the goddess
who joined him
when he tamed those mares,
she and the man together,
gently lifting the intricate reins.

Counterturn 1

For the maiden of the showering arrows
and Hermes, god of contests,
together make a radiance
glisten about him
when he yokes his powerful team
to the burnished chariot,
takes the reins in hand,
and calls on Poseidon,
the trident-wielding, wide-dominioned god.
Men have praised
other kings, too, for their virtues,
and the voices
of the Kyprians
often sing of Kinyras—
whom Apollo gladly cherished

Stand 1

and Aphrodite loved, her favored priest,
hymned by his people, surely, in return
for his kindness.
So the West Lokrian maiden
sings of you before her house, O son of Deinomenes!
Thanks to your power, she looks forth, free
from the hopeless stress of war.
But they say that Ixion,
spun, every way upon a winged wheel, proclaims,
under command of the gods,
his lesson to mankind:
Repay your benefactor honor's kind return!

[21] Hart Crane, March 2, 1923 letter to Gorham Munson, *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane*, Eds. Langdon Hammer and Brom Weber (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997), 137.
[22] Shafer, 17. And, for Jonson, the notorious break on his name "Ben // Johnson" connecting the counter-turne to the stand of the third triad and that of "twi- / lights" occurring in the same stanza that begins with "Johnson." For excellent discussion on this enjambment see John Hollander, "The Metrical Frame," *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 141-143. Hollander argues that the separation of Ben and Jonson is the cause, almost, of a garden path reading where it is at first the familiar appellation of the author (for Cary, Morison, and

the Tribe) followed by a public one (since this is a public poem). However Hollander neglects to consider how this too is central to the major meaning of the poem. Just as Cary and Morison have been separated, so has Jonson's name. But not only does it show separation, this notorious enjambment also fuses the two stanzas together by moving from the separation of Morison and Cary, to Morison's eternal life, to the nobility of their friendship. Finally we understand the full picture from the second grotesque break of "twi-/lights." As Hollander does point out the breaking of the twilights refers to not only the breaking of the friendship of Cary and Morison, but also the breaking of the tenor in the metaphor Jonson is using with that exact word—the twilights, the twin lights, compared immediately to the dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, born from the same egg and likewise separated.

[23] Dante at least knew his Satires.

[24] Shafer, 34. Shafer goes so far as to say that few of Horace's odes can indeed be called odes with the current English meaning of the term.

[25] Paul Claudel's *Cinq grandes odes* are unabashedly Pindaric, the fourth, "La Muse qui est la grâce," is even broken into strophes, antistrophes, and an epode. Claudel, far more even than Yeats in "Sailing to Byzantium," weds classical form to an explicitly Christian project. Paul Valéry's "Le Cimetière marin" owes much to the Pindaric tradition including its epigraph from the Third Pythian. Likewise Fernando Pessoa's heteronym Álvaro de Campos wrote an acclaimed "Ode Marítima" although it is more avant garde. Victor Segalen and Ezra Pound wrote books of odes, but they both used the Chinese Confucian model instead of a classical one. Similarly Cocteau's odes are only odes in name, borrowing little if anything from Pindar or Horace.

[26] Allen Tate, "Narcissus as Narcissus (1938)," *Essays of Four Decades* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1968), 593-607.

[27] Ibid., 607.

[28] Ibid., 602.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 593.

[32] Ibid., 607.

[33] Langdon Hammer, *Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 86. For the sake of full disclosure, Hammer says the martial points to the metrical, not vice versa.

[34] Tate, 598.

[35] Ibid., 595-596.

[36] Ibid., 598.

[37] Ibid., 604.

[38] Ibid.

[39] In "Narcissus as Narcissus," Tate argues that the sea "is life only insofar as it is the source of the lowest forms of life, the source perhaps of all life, but life undifferentiated, halfway between life and death." Ibid., 601.

[40] Ibid., 600-601.
[41] Jeremy Ingalls, "The Classics and New Poetry," *The Classical Journal* 40.2 (November 1944), 89.
[42] D. S. Carne-Ross, "The Gaiety of Language," *Essays on Classical Literature*, Ed. Niall Rudd (Cambridge: Heffer, 1972), 71ff.
[43] Lillian Feder is the only scholar I have seen who recognizes Tate's source. See Lillian Feder, *Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 400 and "Allen Tate's Use of Classical Literature," *The Centennial Review* IV.I (Winter 1960), 99-100.
[44] The best discussion of the historical background of this poem and of Shaw remains Paul Kavanagh, "The Nation Past and Present: A Study of Robert Lowell's 'For the Union Dead,'" *Journal of American Studies* 5.1 (April 1971): 93-101.
[45] Robert Lowell, *Collected Poems*, eds. Frank Bidart and David Gewanter (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 1065 (note on the poem).
[46] Yeats had written several similar political and personal poems, but none odes.
[47] 27, June 1960 letter from Lowell to Tate. Uncollected and quoted in William Doreski, *The Years of Our Friendship: Robert Lowell and Allen Tate* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 145.
[48] Tate, 603.
[49] Steven Gould Axelrod calls this Lowell's brilliant "analogical language," in which these mirror images "creat[e] in us a kind of knowledge that is not paraphrasable, a knowledge of feeling and perception" (174). See Steven Gould Axelrod, *Robert Lowell: Life and Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 173-175.
[50] Brent Garner gives a Bloomian reading of Tate and Lowell's poems, finding "For the Union Dead" a far stronger poem than "Ode to the Confederate Dead" that breaks from not only Tate's influence, but also that of Eliot upon both poets. Its should be noted that Lowell had already made his stylistic break from the presiding Modernist influence, and even a break from his own earlier style in *Lord Weary's Castle* and *The Mills of the Kavanaughs*, by the time of the poem's composition. See Brent Garner, "Anxious Odes of Tate and Lowell," *Journal of American Studies* 25.1 (April 1991): 93-99.
[51] The African-American soldiers are bell-cheeked because of both Saint-Gaudens' craftsmanship in making the relief emerge from its background and literally because the color of the bronze tends to be that of a bell as well.
[52] Lowell, *Collected Poems*, 1066. The phrase "with his niggers" was reportedly said by the commanding officer at Fort Wagner. See Axelrod, *Robert Lowell*, 164.
[53] See *Life Studies*' "Memories of West Street and Lepke."
[54] Lowell's analogical language does lead him to a regrettable verbal pun on "Boylston" and "boiling," Christopher Ricks, however, defends this as "an attempt to match the effrontery of the photograph itself[.]" Christopher Ricks, "The Three Lives of Robert Lowell," *Critics on Robert Lowell*, ed. Jonathan Price (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1972), 98.

[55] As Ricks observes, the automobiles slide on grease because they are powered by it—the fossilized remains of the "vegetating kingdom." Ricks, 99.
[56] Customary to discussions of odes in decades past, scholars were wont to define such and such poem an ode and then wrench it into turn, counterturn, and stand, most noticeably in analysis of Milton's Nativity Ode. If one were to perform such a feat upon "For the Union Dead," it would not be difficult (stanzas 1-6 strophe, 7-13 antistrophe, 14-17 epode—it breaks fairly easily) but its utility would be suspect.
[57] Whether or not subsequent artists return to the renewed form is incidental to my argument. After all, each generation must renew what has come before them.

Chapter Five:

Synthetic Classicism

I. Introduction to Synthetic Classicism

Synthetic Classicism, my final type, corresponds to works of art and literature that use a large part of some element of the classical tradition but in a way that does not completely dominate the text at hand. More difficult to quantify than the other types, it uses the classical past to critique and interpret an artist's present. Antiquity might still represent a pinnacle of aesthetic craft, but in such a text it is not used simplistically as a symbol. Rather the classical past is organically interwoven into a text and subjugated by a larger aesthetic project. We have seen in the previous types classical symbols and narratives dominating a text; the weight of the past becomes too heavy for the Modernist artist and he or she must respond in a variety of ways. In Symbolic Classicism, an artist transforms antiquity into an empty signifier. In Traditional Classicism, adapting a narrative forces the text to be controlled by it and to dictate an audience's expectations. Formal Classicism works differently by its very nature and can as in the odes we examined open up possibilities to the writer instead of closing them. A writer enlists different tropes, as we have seen, to aide their control over the classical material, through fragmentation, arresting time, enlisting the past as an ideal and part of a political project, or through idealizing the past in contrast to the present. Yet Synthetic Classicism transcends these other avenues and incorporates the classical tradition into an element, not fragmented but integral to the Modernist text.

The Synthetic classicist approaches such an endeavor heuristically, imitating elements from the classical tradition, but eclipsing a simple evocation of the past or comparison of its height to the degradation or decadence of the present. In Auden's "Shield of Achilles," the poet pursues analogies between the Homeric scene and a dystopic present in response to the Second World War. Auden illustrates his version of Hephaestus' shield with images of modern warfare and brutality. In "The Statues" Yeats writes an idiosyncratic history of Western culture which culminates with the Easter Revolution, and a meditation on Ireland's position, its connection to antiquity, and the role of art and form in modern Europe. While both poems are traditionally formal, Auden's juxtapositions are strikingly modern and collage-like, and Yeats combines linguistic density and historical narrative, which succeeds, as Pound's *Cantos* did not, in achieving political immediacy. Both poems, in the mainstream of modern poetics, subsume their classicism into their modernity. Without engaging in any form of primitivism, the poets concentrate on the contemporary instead of searching for a renewable fountain of inspiration from an appropriated past. Classicism essentially works in conjunction with Modernism rather than in a struggle with it.

These works use motifs, images, and mythology from the classical tradition, but they are modern in their concerns. Auden and Yeats are not trying to recreate the classical past or utilize it as a stylistic for their modern work. They find parallels in classicism and use it to critique the present and the past, to place their texts within the framework of understanding the human experience, particularly the dehumanization they found in the twentieth century. These poems stand, at least to my mind, as the most

successful attempts to accomplish what Maurice Denis had articulated in the last decade of the 19th century: the classical and the Modernist work together to achieve a single, unified text.

As the types proceed in terms of complexity from Symbolic to Synthetic, so does self-consciousness on the part of the artist. While Symbolic Classicism easily adopts unproblematic symbols and Traditional classicism adapts classical narratives, both Formal and Synthetic approach antiquity beyond a simple recontextualization of the classical into a contemporary space by engaging a larger, more complicated tradition of poetic form and the use of classical structure instead of amorphous symbols in the former and subsuming classicism into Modernism in the latter.

II. Yeats, "The Statues," and the Classical Tradition

II.I Introduction

Yeats' early poetry, full of Symbolism and Irish mythology, would have enshrined his name as a significant minor poet with an exceptional ear, but it is the later poetry, beginning with *Responsibilities* (1916) and continuing through *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919) to the *Last Poems* (1938-1939)[1] which made him a poet of the first tier. His stylistic transformation is often attributed to the influence of Ezra Pound, his "secretary" from 1913-1916 during the winters the two poets spent at Stone Cottage. While Pound revised some of Yeats' poems and urged him towards "tightness," the change lies instead in Yeats' reading of Ben Jonson.[2] Through an intensive study, Yeats was able to distance

himself from his earlier pseudo-symbolism and produce his later hard-edged style. In terms of classicism, Jonson as an early neoclassicist was a model for a direct style of modern language, for importing classical forms into English, and for classical symbolism. In this last respect, Yeats united classical mythology with Christian in his own syncretic theosophy, as we have seen in "Sailing to Byzantium."

However, Yeats' great innovation in Modernism was not his mythic system, what Auden called "essentially lower middle class" or "Southern Californian,"[3] rather it was in the personal and the formal, through a classical emphasis, as it offered Lowell too in "For the Union Dead." Regarding "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," Auden observes the "personal note of a man speaking about his personal friends in a particular setting—in *Adonais*, for instance, both Shelley and Keats disappear as people—and at the same time the occasion and the characters acquire a symbolic public significance" which makes the poem "something new and important in the history of English poetry."[4] In other words, the poem is symbolic without denigrating individuals to symbols. This innovation stems from classical influence, and Yeats likewise could not relegate the classical into a mere symbol.

Thus the example of Yeats unites two sources for appropriation, but not in a pejorative sense—that of using an inherited form, which was de rigeur, but demonstrating Yeats' Modernist craft in the how of how he did it, and that of allowing Greco-Roman symbols into his verse. Advocates of free verse and trends in literary criticism extrapolating from the former argue that the imposition of a poetic form or meter upon a literary work prevents the free-flow of the individual, in other words, a mid 20th to 21st

century version of Romantic inspiration. That using a common language of reference in classical symbolism, or using a working definition of poetry that is almost three thousand years old, is hegemonic. It is not hegemonic, rather it is an elite, not an elitist, form of literacy. Poetry exists because of a common language of referral and understanding contingent upon a measure of leisure and learning. As we have already seen in "For the Union Dead," though that poem's classicism is strongly hidden in its formal elements, the twin poles of the classical past and the modern present can combine and produce a text that is progressive both politically and formally. Its Pindaric movement provided something new.

Likewise, as Yeats revolutionized his own style through a change in metrical craft and modernized some elements of form, the imposition of classical material was also a way to open his poetry through limitation. Brian Arkins argues that not just Yeats, but also Eliot, Pound, and Joyce, "use Greco-Roman material to help them *write about their own preoccupations*, with the result that the ancient themes are transformed, metamorphosed, into something new."[5] This really can be used to discuss the whole of 20th-classicism. Greco-Roman material is a language with which artists could assume their audiences were familiar and understood. Thus, it could be employed as starting point, mirror, or sounding board within a text. For Modernists, distortions of myth and preoccupations ricocheted off the material and formed structural principles behind the use of classicism. As Arkins observes, Erich Auerbach "admirably summ[s]" up this position in his discussion of Rabelais, "[H]is indebtedness to antiquity does not imprison him within the confines of antique concepts; to him, antiquity means liberation and a

broadening of horizons, not in any sense a new limitation or servitude; nothing is more foreign to him than the antique separation of styles, which…led to purism and 'Classicism.'"[6] Similar to the use of poetic form, which produces limitations or hurdles that in turn open up the possibility for new developments, in Synthetic Classicism the classical tradition provides fodder for the new rather than a reductionism of transforming the past into an evocative though empty signifier or a borrowed narrative. For Yeats and the Modernists antiquity provided fodder for their own texts, and, while thoroughly modern, could not be generally divided as "modernist" or "classicist."

In "The Statues" Yeats' historical narrative projects temporally from the classical past to the Easter Revolution, but antiquity is transformed into a site launching the Irish, native to the "ancient sect," into the formless tide of modernity and despite it to renew the lineaments and measure of the formally precise. For Yeats and for other early 20th-century Irishmen, there was a strange connection between ancient Greece and modern Ireland based on similarities of a heroic age and poetry, an oral tradition, a diverse mythology, and the role of the artist connected to the nation. As Michael Silk has shown, Yeats explained an early play *Deirdre* through comparison with the Trojan war. Furthermore, Yeats argues that "we Irish poets…reject any folk art that does not go back to Olympus."[7] And Patrick Pearse one of the leaders of the Easter Rebellion commemorated by Yeats suggested that "what the Greek was to the ancient world the Gael will be to the modern." "The Statues" even more than his adaptations from Sophocles' demonstrates the strong connection that Yeats felt for himself, his art, and his country to the classical tradition.

II.II "The Statues"

Measurement began our might.
"Under Ben Bulben"

"The Statues" is a poem about form. More specifically it is about the passion which can be found in proportion. Its heritage in the classical tradition is stated from the outset, and shows how Yeats' understanding of an artistic tradition was based on both a study of form and a study of the classical past.

> Pythagoras planned it. Why did the people stare?
> His numbers though they moved or seemed to move
> In marble or in bronze lacked character.
> But boys and girls pale from the imagined love
> Of solitary beds knew what they were,
> That passion could bring character enough;
> And pressed at midnight in some public place
> Live lips upon a plummet-measure face.

In discussing this stanza, John Frederick Nims has said, "Pythagoras is given credit for the emphasis on proportion in Greek sculpture, which might seem cold to the cold observer. But boys and girls saw their dreams of love embodied in these perfect

shapes."[8] To the unaccustomed viewer of Hellenic art, such idealistic depictions of men, women, and gods, might at first seem to lack character—Hellenistic art seems far more palatable to a contemporary audience because its representations might actually be real people. Yeats says that art based on formal precisions seems to 'lack character." But immediately he retracts by turning to the young, always a loaded subject in late Yeats who cannot divorce himself from his own old age. These youths look to these sculptures and find in them mirrored their own lusts. The undercurrent of sexuality reflects upon their own lives as they imagine the love that they will soon share. Passion, both sexual and a passion for form, brings enough character to the Hellenic ideals without the crafting of the realistic. Beyond this, these ideals become a kind of erotica for young people. There, carefully crafted lie the curves of which adolescents dream—even today such ideals in art or elsewhere are necessarily encountered first. So, the young creep into public at night and kiss these faces which have been measured so exactly.

For Yeats then formal precision develops almost a sexual connotation, or at least such a connotation becomes possible in a work of art.[9] The classical past, metaphorically the source of art in general and formal regularity particularly, is something quite different here than as we have seen it before. It literally means more than in the other texts we have examined where it was reduced by some means for a singular aesthetic project. Yeats still fabricates a classical past, but it is one that could have existed—there have been enough famous statues associated with virility or childbirth, sexuality and luck that his proposition becomes believable. Likewise Yeats transforms Pythagoras, a sort of metonymy for mathematics in general, into the source of artistic perfection and develops

essentially a lovely fable that need not be true. Various Yeatsian themes have all come together in the first stanza—the dichotomy of youth and age, love, form triumphal (metonymically for his art, the Western tradition, this poem, as program for future art)—all under the rubric of the classical tradition, a classical subject.

The ideal moves the lovers to passion in Yeats' poem. Seemingly characterless form, gives rise to passion, which gives character enough. Richard Ellmann argues that"Greek boys and girls fell in love by seeing in each other's eyes the beauty of some statue of Phidias, which was itself not an emotional outpouring but the result of passion bounded by the most careful calculation."[10] Yeats sees Pythagoras' numbers as the origin of Classical Greece and classical aesthetics. History is read as the conflict between Greece and the West's formal proportion and against the vague, abstract illusions of the East.

We find periphrasis in the first stanza—in the eighth line. The young lovers press their "Live lips upon a plummet-measured face." Yeats could have just as easily said "well-measured," or "proportioned" or something of that sort. This highlights periphrasis at its best. Incessantly derided, periphrasis can simply become the Flaubertian *le mot juste*, an enchanting way of saying something, which can be otherwise stated in banal terms—"weight-measured."

In the second stanza of the poem, Yeats recounts an idiosyncratic Greek history. He argues that the Greek sculptors (metonymically signifying the Greek artists in general) were the ones who defeated the Persians at Salamis. They stopped for a little while the encroachment of "Asiatic vague immensities."

No; greater than Pythagoras, for the men

That with a mallet or a chisel modelled these

Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down

All Asiatic vague immensities,

And not the banks of oars that swam upon

The many-headed foam at Salamis.

Europe put off that foam when Phidias

Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass.

As Nims says, Greek aesthetics are seen "as defending the precision of Athenian ideals against the abstractions of Eastern thought."[11] Ellmann quotes Yeats' prose from *On the Boiler*, where he says,

> "There are moments when I am certain that art must once again accept those Greek proportions which carry into plastic art the Pythagorean numbers, those faces which are divine because all there is empty and measured.[12] Europe was not born when Greek galleys defeated the Persian hordes at Salamis, but when the Doric studios sent out those broad-backed marble statues against the multiform, vague, expressive Asiatic sea, they gave to the sexual instinct of Europe its goal, its fixed type."[13]

The stanza begins immediately with restrictio (l. 9). Yeats says no, for the sculptors did more than merely kindle youth's dreams of love, rather they created Europe, in a sense. Yeats again takes up Pythagoras' "calculations (l. 10)" which function in the same manner as the "numbers" of line two. The abstraction of "Asiatic vague immensities (l. 11)" reinforces the phrase's content by being both vague and grandiose. Likewise the phrase itself is a bit immense, being nine syllables.

We yet again find periphrasis, here, in line thirteen with the "banks of oars;" it would be far easier to have said "sailors," but Yeats' choice has a far richer ring to it. The final line of the stanza (l. 16) stands to be explained a bit—Phidias' sculptures inspire women, giving them dreams (these are the same inspiring dreams of love and lovers from the first stanza, although the women are presumably older). Likewise, Phidias gave to these ideal, imagined lovers their own mirror.

For Yeats, the Hellenic artists transcended their already-exalted position of artisans of the utmost craft and perfection and became the defenders of Western aesthetics from Eastern colonizers. It is they, and not the Greek sailors, who defended the homeland against the Persians. Their calculations, their craftsmanship transformed marble into "casual flesh" opposing "vague immensities" through specific, concrete aesthetics. Obviously false, Yeats advances a heroic history of art in which Phidias becomes a Greek general by making a visual representation of dreamed ideal.[14]

In the third stanza, Yeats continues with his world history—a Greek figure (image) did in fact cross into Asia probably thanks to Alexander. Yeats metonymically uses Hamlet as an image for Europe and Buddha as that for Asia. Buddha's empty

eyeballs refer to the East's abstractions, divorced from passion. Grimalkin, it should be noted, is a fiendish cat in Celtic mythology. Here it becomes an image for man, trivializing him.[15]

> One image crossed the many-headed, sat
> Under the tropic shade, grew round and slow,
> No Hamlet thin from eating flies, a fat
> Dreamer of the Middle-Ages. Empty eye-balls knew
> That knowledge increases unreality, that
> Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show.
> When gong and conch declare the hour to bless
> Grimalkin crawls to Buddha's emptiness.

The image of Greek aesthetics which crosses over the foam gives rise to the pinnacle of civilization that Yeats saw in Byzantium. As Engelberg observes, "The 'one image' can by now be viewed as a very rich one: it embodies all that has been suggested in the motion of history from Pythagoras through Alexander, from Byzantium through the Renaissance. That the image crosses…[means] that it neutralizes, literally crosses over, though does not cancel out, the 'many-headed[.]'"[16] Here we see just how the Byzantine empire can be a part of the classical tradition. Hamlet represents not simply the Shakespearean character but also the impulsive, active and passionate man, as Engelberg notes.[17] He is consumed away by his own energy and experiences the

"nervous anxiety of freedom which, in the Renaissance spirit, makes Hamlet self-conscious of the awful implications of being free."[18] Hamlet, however ascetic, represents for Yeats the ideal of passion which is integral to form, each giving forth the other. The East's mirrors and knowledge forsake the passions which will be consummated in the following stanza's revolutionary ideals and transforms modern Irish history into a continuation of the classical tradition and the celebration of the ideal and formal aesthetics.

The fourth stanza is a stunning, thundering conclusion to the poem. Yeats' version of history is brought-up to the present. The classical tradition collides with the Irish tradition and recent political realities. Patrick Pearse replaces Phidias; discipline and measure are exchanged for the formlessness of modernity:

> When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
> What stalked though the Post Office? What intellect,
> What calculation, number, measurement, replied?
> We Irish, born into that ancient sect
> But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
> And by its formless, spawning, fury wrecked,
> Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
> The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.

In the Easter Revolution Patrick Pearse called on Cuchulain, the mythological, Irish hero, to help rally his men; Yeats sees that by means of summoning him, Pearse also summoned the ancient values of Europe—intellect, calculation, number, measurement. The modern world in its confusion has been flooded with Eastern "formlessness." The Irish, "part of that ancient sect," are of the Greek aesthetic tradition—of form and of proportion—tied to it, as discussed earlier, by similar heroic and poetic traditions which Yeats equates with each other. Diametrically opposed to the mess of modernity, these values revolt against them.

The key word of the final stanza is "formless" which clearly pertains to Yeats' derision of his Modern time. For Yeats, the abstractions and asceticism of the East had, in the end, triumphed over Europe, and those people who still held to the old ways of form and proportion revolted against the formless "modern tide."

By repeating the final line of the first stanza, Yeats has tied the poem back to its beginning. He yokes the young, inexperienced lovers whose imagination is charged by the curves of Phidias, to the experienced, Romantic revolutionaries who sought to change the world. While the connection between the 1916 Easter Rebellion and Hellenic art must necessarily be a personal, idiosyncratic belief on Yeats' part, as a rhetorical, oracular poem, "The Statues" succeeds. Yeats collapses the Irish and Greek poetical-heroic traditions into one heritage, interrupted only by the historical movement which he has traced. The poem becomes, in the final stanza, similar to the section earlier discussed in *Mauberley*, namely a denunciation of contemporary decadence, a culture divorced from the classical tradition. Yet Yeats sees tradition as renewable. The Irish, and artists

in general, must ascend to their "proper dark," a positive image seen also in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul." This "proper dark" corresponds to a creative zone where artistic production, aesthetics, and measured art occurs. Such a place where artifice is pursued allows both the poet and his intended audience to return to the ideals of Greek art and, importantly, discover yet again passion from the height of aesthetic craft.

Doric discipline or Apollonian control must be exerted formally to control not only the formless fury but also the formal precision of Phidian calculations. The source, as in Picasso and Ingres, is not a gentle stream but a torrent, a tide itself to be controlled through modern form against classical form. "The Statues" conjoins numerous themes in Yeats: aesthetic form, history, the classical tradition, Irish mythology, politics, his mystical system, passion, youth and age. Yeats brings all of his major preoccupations and concerns into this poem-as-historical treatise. Needless to say, the truth of his narrative exists only as a poetic, personal truth, that is, it is fictive. Yet as a poem, "The Statues" is rich and the reader can believe him within it because of its rhetorical and poetic strength.

What emerges from "The Statues" is Yeats' evident belief in the efficacy of the classical tradition. He produces a classical, Modernist work unlike any that we have seen before which synthesizes the two. While there are familiar elements, the poem becomes something new. Yeats expresses a desire to preserve the past, but it is not fragmented or out of historical necessity. Rather the classical tradition for Yeats necessitates preservation because of its aesthetic achievement. Phidian sculpture is essential because of its accomplishment, not for what it symbolizes. Yeats' idiosyncratic history, when the

reader moves away from the poem, collapses into a metaphor for the history of art and the history of the classical tradition in particular. As Engelberg observes, "'The Statues' celebrates the single, conscious, countable and measurable image of art as it climbs out of the vast design of history—the tide of the engulfing flood—which it conquers. It also celebrates the artist and his work as the vital life-blood in the history of a culture."[19] Analogous to "Sailing to Byzantium," which prized Constantinople as a site where art and life were integrated, this poem seeks that same integration between the work of art, culture, and individual lives. For Yeats, as for each of the other writers and artists which have been examined, antiquity and its preservation through the classical tradition transforms into almost a moral, cultural necessity. Here classicism works in conjunction with modernity and becomes a utopian practice, at the very least in the realm of art. Form, Modernism, and the classical tradition can all be united, as Yeats does here, to produce an art which gestures toward what is to come through looking at the past and crystallizing in aesthetic form the passing.

III. Auden and "The Shield of Achilles"

Synthetic classicism also recognizes and exploits the limitations of the Greco-Roman in the context of modernity. Auden's "Shield of Achilles" narrates the Homeric episode but illustrates the shield with contemporary scenes of brutality. In the *Iliad*, the shield is a microcosm of life, depicting a city at peace, another under siege, and scenes of the pastoral, capturing the dualities of life. The Homeric shield section conveys a belief

in the harmony of nature, or at least a balance between peace and war. It is also a self-reflexive celebration of the artist creating a work of art. In Auden's poem, the shield's microcosm remains, but the balance has vanished, replaced wholly by mechanized violence and misery. Thetis looked for pastoral trees and vines, disciplined cities, religious sacrifice, marriage, games, but Hephaestos had decorated it with a barren plain full of multitudes vaguely martial.

> She looked over his shoulder
> For vines and olive trees,
> Marble well-governed cities
> And ships upon untamed seas,
> But there on the shining metal
> His hands had put instead
> An artificial wilderness
> And a sky like lead.

A plain without a feature, bare and brown,
 No blade of grass, no sign of neighborhood,
Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down,
 Yet, congregated on its blankness, stood
 An unintelligible multitude,
A million eyes, a million boots in line,

Without expression, waiting for a sign.

Out of the air a voice without a face
  Proved by statistics that some cause was just
In tones as dry and level as the place:
  No one was cheered and nothing was discussed;
  Column by column in a cloud of dust
They marched away enduring a belief
Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief.

Auden counterpoints specific descriptions of landscape, motivation (or rather the lack thereof from a radio broadcast), execution with vague generalizations which are universalized. The second stanza's multitudes are "unintelligible" in that their "boots in line" are unspecified. What they await, their future, and their purpose are not defined, but their menace is clear. This mixture of description and understated generalization is best achieved in the torture of ll. 42: "What their foes liked to do was done[.]" Clearly an atrocity is committed, but the understatement of the line leads the reader's imagination to conjure particularities more terrible than what Auden could have written. Likewise the "logical belief" that the radio voice (the owner of which is unnamed again allowing the reader to decide if it belongs to a politician, apologist, war-monger, etc.) proves by statistics engenders some horror that leads the multitudes to an undefined grief. In other words, Auden avoids the mistake of most overtly political poems by wedding specificity

of imagery, instead of shrill politically charged axioms or specific contemporary editorializings, to generalities of human suffering, making a universal poem that is not time-bound to a half-life of a reader's historical memory, sentimentality, or obvious platitude that such-and-such is wrong.[20]

At the end of the first stanza, Auden describes, "An artificial wilderness / And a sky like lead" which Hephaestos had put upon the shield. The contradiction of an "artificial wilderness," namely man-made nature, is, in fact, a true statement in that the wilderness is a likeness of a wilderness upon the shield. Additionally, the sky is simply grey, but equally is, in fact, made out of lead. This attunes the reader to one of the major undercurrents of the poem, namely its self-consciousness as an ekphrastic poem, a work of art about a work of art. Hephaestos is the artist within the poem who has crafted all of the scenes upon the shield and shocked Thetis. But the poem directs the reader to Auden's art as well, in the realm of prosody and in the balance between the two different stanzaic forms which are as formally different as they are materially different.

The first, fourth, seventh, and ninth stanzas present the classical narrative of Thetis and Hephaestos and alternate with the ekphrastic stanzas describing the scenes upon the shield. The "classical" eight-line stanzas are comprised of seven loose trimeter lines and a penultimate tetrameter. Lines two and four and lines six and eight rhyme. Lines one, three, and five of the first three of these stanzas have feminine endings. Furthermore these same three stanzas begin with the same line. Anthony Hecht argues that the final lines of three of the "classical" stanzas can all be scanned in the same manner with three stresses lumped in the three final syllables, i.e.,

˘ ˘ ´ ´ ´

And a sky like lead

Hecht offers no argument, though, on why “like” should receive stress in his pell-mell scansion. A combination of anapest and trochee is plausible and requires no prosodic hurdles for explanation, although the lines would then be dimeter:

˘ ˘ ´ ˘ ´

And a sky like lead

˘ ˘ ´ ˘ ´

But a weed-choked field

˘ ˘ ´ ˘ ´

Who would not live long[21]

However, line 30, would become an acephalous trimeter:

´ ˘ ´ ˘ ´

Quite another scene

The only other feasible scansion is that all four of the final lines are the same acephalous trimeter,

´ ˘ ´ ˘ ´

And a sky like lead

Etc.,

but the final line of the poem is the only one preceded by an unstressed syllable in the above line. No matter the specific scansion of these lines, which is relatively symptomatic of the bulk of the lines in the "classical" stanzas, these illustrate the loose prosody of these stanzas set up in opposition to the rigid rime royal of the other stanzas.

These rime royal stanzas host a number of initial substitutions, the single most common and conventional deviation in iambic pentameter, so wide-spread it causes little concern amongst prosodists.[22] Importantly, however, there are no other substitutions within these lines. There are a few patches here and there of metrical tension (l. 20, 31, 37, 38), but they can easily be scanned as regular iambic pentameter. This, of course, is central to these stanzas. The mechanized violence of the modern world depicted in the rime royal stanzas is mirrored in the rigidity of the prosody. Individuality has been erased, as in fascistic neoclassicism: all of the figures in the rhyme royal stanzas are anonymous compared to Thetis, Hephaestos, and Achilles. The mark of the poet upon the meter through careful substitution has likewise been erased.

The expectations of Thetis in the looser, classical stanzas are consistently exploded in the rime royal stanzas which, in turn, respond in kind to what Thetis looked for over Hephaestos' shoulder. The virtues prized by antiquity are nowhere to be seen in the modern world and are, in fact, travestied. The second stanza delivers a bleak,

featureless plain full of the expressionless multitudes where Thetis looked for an arcadian grove and well-governed cities. Nature has been rendered "bare and brown" with no grass. Instead of a carefully ruled city, there is half a million people waiting. The government which would have ruled the peaceful city Auden reduces to the faceless voice upon a radio which connives to validate a war; good government has been transformed into totalitarianism.

In the fourth, fifth, and sixth stanzas, the particularities of the Greek religion and penitence before its gods have been replaced by a perversion of the crucifixion. Three prisoners bound to posts driven into the ground await their execution and are watched by a "crowd of ordinary decent folk" entranced by the public spectacle.

> The mass and majesty of this world, all
> That carries weight and always weighs the same
> Lay in the hands of others; they were small
> And could not hope for help and no help came:
> What their foes like to do was done, their shame
> Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride
> And died as men before their bodies died.

The anonymous tortured victims died as individuals, as people, before they physically did. Auden sacrifices people instead of "white flower-garlanded heifers" at an execution ground "[w]here the altar should have been."

Thetis expects dance, that is art, men and women at a marriage or such a celebration in the seventh stanza. But in the eighth, Auden delivers violence and rape.

A ragged urchin, aimless and alone,
    Loitered about that vacancy; a bird
Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone:
    That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,
    Were axioms to him, who'd never heard
Of any world where promises were kept,
Or one could weep because another wept.

The thin-lipped armorer,
    Hephaestos, hobbled away,
Thetis of the shining breasts
    Cried out in dismay
At what the god had wrought
    To please her son, the strong
Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles
    Who would not live long.

Athletes at their games Auden exchanges for an urchin hurling a stone at a bird and missing it. Given the Homeric precedent, the athletic games are likely funerary, which

leads into the final stanza where death and violence encroach upon antiquity and the "man-slaying" Achilles' whose own death, after he kills Hector, was imminent.

Importantly the last of the rime royal stanzas stands by itself unlike the previous such stanzas which were in pairs. This highlights the stanza's centrality to the poem as does its shift from the previously martial content to the civilian and "quotidian" life of contemporary "normalcy" that has returned to "that spot" since the multitudes, crowd, official, and sentries abandoned it. This, according to Auden, is average life in the world of the poem. The governing irony of this stanza too is that, more than the previous rime royal stanzas, it alludes back to antiquity. While a "voice without a face" could feasibly be a god if it were in the classical world, and the three pale figures represent a travesty of the crucifixion, the Christian present for the Christian Auden is not a world "where one could weep because another wept," Christ's golden rule. Yet the un-Christian, even pre-lapsarian, world of Achilles, full of its own tragic violence, is one. Namely, it is Achilles himself who wept because Priam wept and sought clemency from the iron-hearted man-slayer to retake the corpse of his son, Hector.

For the Christian Auden, the classical pagan world provided some idea of virtues in the expectations of Thetis, in the pity of Achilles; Auden saw a balance there, one which the modern landscape he depicts lacks. Free will and agency are absent on Auden's shield; "The mass and majesty of this world…Lay in the hands of others. (l. 38, 40)" Achilles, named in the poem's final line, chose immortal fame through death instead of obscurity and a long life, however honorable. That God-given free will is a possibility in the pagan past but not in the Christian present. "The Shield of Achilles"

falls into Synthetic Classicism because it uses antiquity to critique the present, and both pieces, the classical and the modern, work in conjunction but also at odds with each other. Auden writes modernity onto Hephaestos' shield. The balance between happiness and misery of the Homeric shield is itself parodied formally in the balance between the two different stanzaic forms—there are more rhyme royal stanzas than there are trimeter-tetrameter stanzas. Even though the "classical" stanzas are longer, the lines are longer in the illustrative stanzas. There's only violence on Auden's shield, as there is only violence and the memory of love throughout the entire poem, which ultimately ends in death.

Furthermore, the trope of ekphrasis dominated Auden's poem almost completely. The rigid, modern stanzas are quite literally all description of the scenes depicted upon Achilles' shield. Where the more classical stanzas present Thetis' expectations, the descriptions flaunt those, presenting 20th century brutality. Essentially, Auden inscribes the classical shield with the modern. The bare classical form is retained, shorn of dualities, and filled with harsh, 20th century content. As in the Homeric episode where the shield transforms in a microcosm of the human experience, Auden uses his version oft the shield in a manner that allows readers to understand it as a microcosm of the use of the classical tradition within Modernism. If metaphorically, Modernists attempted to write the classical onto the Modern in an ekphastic manner, Auden tangibly performs this very action. Auden inscribes Modernism onto one of the most major symbols inherited from the classical antiquity.

Auden engages the classical tradition more self-consciously than the Modern dramatists by appropriating the past and molding a Homeric precedent into a poem which plays with the original dichotomy of love and strife. Auden demonstrates his superior skill by subsuming classicism instead of letting it dictate the entire work of art. He did not imitate but he incorporated it into his modern work of art. While Symbolic Classicism imports symbols and images which refer to antiquity, Auden's Synthetic Classicism wholly engages with the image of Achilles' shield on Auden's terms. Not awkward or unwieldy, not an abbreviation made to do the work of the author and mean for him, Auden gives more meaning to the shield than was there originally. Auden's Synthetic Classicism renews and enriches.

IV. Conclusion to Synthetic Classicism

Synthetic Classicism brings together in an organic relationship both the classical and the modern. In some ways, Formal Classicism can be used within the final type. Where the other types use classical material in a very specific, reductionist way, Synthetic Classicism opens a larger space for the classical in a Modernist text or work of art. Artists like Yeats and Auden explore the implications of such a synthesis in highly individual ways. While the earlier types close the work of art by means of combinatory use of the modern and the classical into a set of delimitations, Synthetic Classicism opens a text through the same variety of synthesis through various possibilities never limited by the means with which they pursue their mélange of the classical tradition.

This type does not reduce a multifaceted image, trope, style, or allusion into a vacant signifier. Rather in the two poems which we have examined, the classical serves as an impetus, central to the meaning of the poem and its genesis, that allows the classical and the modern to reflect upon each other and produce through a surplus of signification—Achilles' shield, for example, is not simply a microcosm of life or an evocative emblem or self-referential work of art, but all of these and more—a heuristic work of art which doubles back upon itself, creating as its central metaphoric significance, the very reflection which it produces. In short, the wedding of the classical and the modern, becomes in Synthetic Classicism, its own subject. In "The Statues," for instance, Yeats' fictive history becomes an aesthetic or metaphorical truth through the act of tracing his idiosyncratic beliefs, making the reader believe, if only for the time it takes to read the poem, that form and measurement become not simply the classical tradition but also the Western aesthetic tradition, enveloping not only works of art but revolutionary ideals. Whether or not Patrick Pearse really believed that the Easter Revolution was seeded in Phidian sculpture is of no real value for the poem. His dream of a free Ireland is metaphorized into an aesthetic, classical ideal. "The Statues" posits art as the central, defining characteristic of culture, and Yeats equating revolution with art exalts even a failed revolution into a thing of "terrible beauty," something that can be appreciated for its nobility but likewise feared for its human cost.

At no point in "The Statues" does such inevitable death becomes a total good. Rather the speaker is questioning, exploring. "What happened when he did this? How does such an abstractly beautiful ideal really correspond to the classical, aesthetic

tradition." "What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect, / What calculation, number, measurement, replied?" Yeats offers no answer, but rather a suggestion for what should be done: to return to that place where art is made, entailing a removal from society into the interior life of the creative act, so that his audience can trace—follow, imitate, appreciate—the measured face of the work of art.

The classical tradition, in "The Shield of Achilles," affords Auden a moving beyond the singular work of art. Throughout the poem there is a longing for another place, be it classical or contemporary, where Thetis' expected images could possibly exist. Antiquity did not have it, clearly the contemporary does not offer it, but the speaker in looking back at the past and looking towards the future searches for a kinder place where music can be danced to, where "the mass and majesty of this world" can be attained or appreciated in an individual life, or where sympathy can be found for another's pain. The pedestrian, most simplistic method of making such a poem would have been to exalt the past as a better place, a golden age, but Auden could not allow such a reading. The poem prevents such an interpretation with its final line, returning to the man-slaying Achilles, who "would not live long," victim too of bestial humanity.

Synthetic Classicism is then the most difficult of the types because its classical material must be handled in such a way that it is not reduced. The artist must have total control of his or her material. And in effect, the artist critiques both the past and the present by balancing both the classical material and the modern material in a stronger, fuller way than the other types can afford.

[1] The section corresponding to *Last Poems* in a collected Yeats is comprised of a drastic re-ordering of two small, privately printed books that were ordered by Yeats, *New Poems* (1938, the first thirty-five poems) and *Last Poems and Two Plays* (1939, published posthumously). In 1940, *Last Poems and Plays* brought the two volumes together and incorporated a number of poems that Yeats chose not to include in his last book. Traditionally, *Collected Poems* have used the 1940 edition. Jon Stallworthy, "Introduction," *Yeats. Last Poems: A Casebook*, ed. Jon Stallworthy (London: Macmillan, 1968), 11.
[2] See Hugh Kenner, *A Sinking Island: The Modern English Writers* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 77-86, but particularly 82ff. For a book length study of Yeats and Pound's time together, see James Longenbach, *Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats, and Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
[3] W. H. Auden, "Yeats as an Example," *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden: Prose, vol. II (1939-1948)*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 385.
[4] Ibid, 388.
[5] Brian Arkins, *Builders of my Soul: Greek and Roman Themes in Yeats* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1990), xviii.
[6] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Task (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 278.
[7] Michael Silk, "W. B. Yeats and King Oedipus," *Times Literary Supplement* (March 3, 2010).
[8] John Frederick Nims. *Western Wind: An Introduction to Poetry*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), 310.
[9] Likewise, not far from Yeats' text stands Rilke's sonnet which we have previously discussed and demonstrates much of the same conjunction between sexuality, art and its formal power, and an individual's life.
[10] Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 188.
[11] Nims, 310.
[12] Yeats, here, somewhat surprisingly anticipates much of my own argument advanced earlier—that classicism is malleable because it is upon one level empty of signification. It is more about formal precision and craft then content, at least retrospectively from the early 20th century where the realities of a certain myth become far less important than the art itself—not just the *Elgin Marbles* but also Michelangelo's *David*. There is the rock, there is the gaze, but it really might as well be the city state of Florence or Apollo.
[13] Ellmann, 188.
[14] As Edward Engelberg notes, Yeats' chronology is a bit sketchy. Phidias would have only been about twenty during the battle of Salamis, but we grant the poet his fictive

history. Edward Engelberg, *The Vast Design: Patterns in W. B. Yeats's Aesthetic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 201. Engelberg's study of this poem, pp. 180-204, remains one of the best discussion's of the poem, concentrating on the philosophical component, particularly Pater's influence.

[15] Ellmann is worth quoting again on this stanza. He says, "Yeats describes how the Greek sculptors' image of man followed Alexander's armies into India. There it lost western energy and paradoxically gave a form to eastern passivity, which otherwise would have been formless. If Hamlet, nervous, desperate for knowledge, and full of self, embodies Europe, Buddha with empty eyeballs, rapt beyond passion or knowledge or self, embodies Asia…Against this image of man [grimalkin], trivialized with a cat's name, and cringing before a god who denies form, comes the 'heroic cry' of the final stanza (189)."

[16] Engelberg, 202-203.

[17] Ibid., 203.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 204.

[20] See, for example, W. D. Snodgrass's discussion of Randall Jarrell's "Protocols" in "Tact and the Poet's Force," where Snodgrass enumerated what Jarrell avoided doing in a poem on the murder of Jewish children in the Holocaust. W. D. Snodgrass, "Tact and the Poet's Force," *In Radical Pursuit: Critical Essays and Lectures* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 12-16.

[21] In *The Hidden Law*, Hecht scans "weed-choked" as two stresses. This is impossible since the first syllable in such a compound always receives stronger stress. Anthony Hecht, *The Hidden Law: The Poetry of W. H. Auden* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 427-428. In the line "Who would not live long," I assign stress to "not," which would normally not receive ictus, yet, following upon William K. Wimsatt's argument in "The Rule and the Norm," within the context of the foot it receives more stress relative to the first two syllables, all the while being lighter than "live" which in turn is lighter than "long." See, William K. Wimsatt, "The Rule and the Norm: Halle and Keyser on Chaucer's Meter," *College English* 31.8 (1970): 781. The matter of prosody in "The Shield of Achilles" is not only essential to comprehending the meaning of the poem and the central balance, or explicit lack thereof, between the two types of stanzas, but also it provides a panacea the numerous discussions of the poem which make generalizations and plain errors such as Rainer Emig's "rhymed octets in trimeter" in *W.H. Auden, Towards a Postmodern Poetics* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 208

[22] See, for example, Reuven Tsur's computation of Spenser, Thomson, Pope, Milton, and Shelley, that the greatest percentage of substitutions occur in the first foot. Reuven Tsur, *Poetic Rhythm: Structure and Performance, an Empirical Study in Cognitive Poetics* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998): 36-39.

Conclusion

I. The Descent of Classicism

In the post-World War II environment, the avant-garde militarized with a polemical mouthpiece that was more divisive than ever. The movement became supported by universities, and the avant-garde was institutionalized. Abstract Expressionism banned figurative painting, Serialism staunchly forsook tonality, and free verse poets vilified formalism. Progressive art aligned itself with progressive politics, and by doing so connected traditional styles to a reactionary political position. Neoclassicism, explicitly tied as a style to fascism, was dead. The politicization of art led to the triumph of the avant-garde but only within its own hermetic circles. Adorno, having consistently denounced the traditional in opposition to the avant-garde, and Pierre Boulez, the most inflammatory of the new breed, became the spokesmen for the new music, and symptomatic of the trends in art.[1] Adorno, entrenched in the aesthetic of the Second Viennese School, was dated in his tastes, but figured as a model for the critical, avant-garde perspective.

Boulez and Adorno are symptomatic of not only the polemics of the avant-garde, but of the avant-garde's hegemony over artistic styles. The artists of the avant-garde and the critics who supported them produced the canon of twentieth century Modernism, which ostracized traditional artists like Stanley Spencer, Maurice Ravel, Nancy Mitford, and Theodore Roethke. Clement Greenberg anointed Abstract Expressionism as the au courant style of painting, heaping vitriol on figurative painters. Ezra Pound became the

elder statesman of Modernist poetry, almost a sybilline figure in St. Elizabeth's, despite his political ties. The New Critics, the academic wing of the High Modernists, and particularly R. P. Blackmur, essentially defined the major Modernist poets. F.R. Leavis selected appropriate novelists. In *Axel's Castle*, Edmund Wilson canonized the most significant writers. And Hugh Kenner continued this trend, sealing, at least temporarily, the gates of the canon. Our conception of the avant-garde is based almost entirely on which artists and writers these critics wrote about. Critics could easily analyze the most innovative writers by observing how they diverged from the tradition. Thus the artists labeled progressive for formal and stylistic innovation became the canon of 20th century Modernism. Despite recent trends against a canon, the High Modernists remain at the century's center. However great these artists were, it is the job of the contemporary scholar and critic to analyze not simply these central figures, but also the others who were pushed to the margins, to recognize a fuller geography of Modernism and not concentrate on those who are à la mode. However central these artists are to the grand narrative of artistic progress, such canonizing polemics obscure figures of great artistic merit and movements central to the matrix of European Modernism. Contemporary critics intent upon demolishing canons emphasize art of geographical, cultural, and racial distance, ignoring American and European artists who have also been marginalized, but for stylistic reasons.

Lyrical poetry at mid-century began to change as well, but not completely through the effect of the Modernists. Schools of poetry developed as always. The Modernist strain (particularly the influence of Pound and Williams) continued through Objectivism

and Projectivism, the two schools most closely associated with the High Modernists, and gradually developed into the New York School. The Beats, linked to the Modernists through Kenneth Rexroth, evolved and remained strongly divided from other poetic movements. The Confessional school, emerging from Snodgrass and Lowell, began with an Academic perspective, initially more closely tied to formalism and occasional moments of classical allusion than the others. The influence of the High Modernists continued, outside of schools as well. Notably, Eliot, Yeats, and subsequently Auden influenced generations of poets across poetic styles.

It is clear now that the alignment of the two wings of both art and politics was a polemic produced by the vested interests of an institutionalized avant-garde. The ode, for example, demonstrates that an inherited form can easily be coupled with a progressive politics, that form alone cannot prove reactionary political tendencies. The avant-garde produced a bait-and-switch which obfuscated an aesthetic controversy as a political one, and from a historical perspective, this succeeded resoundingly and is still prevalent today in the antagonism between poets writing in traditional form versus those writing in free verse. The problem for a critic unvested in the controversy is to recognize the jeremiads of both sides as historical phenomena, not as historical realities. That said, the avant-garde did succeed for a time, long enough to banish classicism as a viable style to address a historical milieu.

Classicism was tarnished by the fascist tendencies of the greater part of its adherents, though it would be simplistic to indulge in the fifty-year-old rhetoric of the post-war avant-garde which dismissed it and traditionalism as a whole. Classical

tendencies and individual works were still produced, but as a movement or a trend it was irredeemable.

The political motivation was evident. Artists who came of age during World War II in continental Europe were forced to distance themselves from the regimes in which some of them fought. More importantly, as is typical of any artistic style, group, or movement, the avant-garde defined itself in opposition to the past (their polemics even denounced the earlier Modernists in some cases) and virulently against both contemporaries who worked in styles unlike their own and their competition within their own style.[2] Through this, they produced a master narrative still privileged within the academy even by those who wish to dismantle such narratives and canons on other grounds.

The narrative of artistic innovation privileges only the Modernists who pursued formal experimentation. However, the presence of such experimentation by no means defines a text as Modernist, as Irving Howe argues in "The Idea of the Modern." Howe sees a fundamental re-envisioning of the world, a new way of seeing reality as a condition of Modernism. As Howe says, "Formal experimentation may frequently be a corollary or a consequence of modernism, but its presence is not a sufficient condition for seeing a writer or a work as modernist."[3] However, the inverse is also true; a new "'vision'…of the world and man's existence,"[4] his vague definition of Modernism, does not entail formal experimentation. This applies directly to classicism. Mussolini's Rome is clearly a new vision of the world with a style adopted from the past. Yeats too offers a new narrative of history and a new mythology in poems like "Two Songs from a Play"

and "The Statues," that are formally traditional. Cocteau's vision of Oedipus in *La Machine infernale* presents a radical reinterpretation of traditional myth in a moderately traditional play.[5]

Paul Fussell makes a valuable distinction between the Modernists and the Moderns in "Modernism, Adversary Culture, and Edmund Blunden:"

> A Modern…is capable of incorporating into his work contemporary currents of thought and emotion without any irritable need to quarrel with the past—intellectually, psychologically, or technically. A Modern can embrace the past and not just feel but enjoy its continuity with the present…Disdain for their literary forebears is not their stock in trade, and they can produce their art without strenuous adversary gestures toward either the past or a present which differs from them in some of its critical opinions…In a critical world dominated, as ours tends to be, by Modernist theory, the mere Moderns get systematically shortchanged, relegated to a position in the canon equivalent in the restaurant to the little table back near the kitchen door."[6]

Fussell's analysis applies directly to neoclassicism. Classicists clearly embraced the past, and used it to their own devices to forward the goals of Modernism. They sought to construct a vision of the modern man and a way to represent the 20th century through art of a visceral immediacy, but one which did not quarrel with the past. Modernism continually emphasized the primitive which was both the source of art and itself an initial

reaction to the human experience, renewed, refreshed, and productive. The ability for classicizing art to dialogue with both antiquity and comment upon the contemporary milieu, in ways ranging from a modern odyssean journey, to the idiosyncratic and classical myths in which Yeats and Pound sort of believed, music forgotten from centuries before that could be reconstructed and transformed into monetary and artistic success for the Ballets Ruses, even dictators could embody legendary classical rulers by "enjoy[ing the past's] continuity with the present" in Fussell's words.

However, Fussell's argument is limited because it accepts the cliché of the total rejection of past art, the position espoused by the Futurists which was taken for granted as the belief of all the Modernists.[7] Both Howe and Fussell ultimately accept the avant-garde's narrative by defining Modernism in reaction to the past, though both Howe and Fussell argue that the movement stems from Romantic individualism. Personal stylistic experimentation, solitary artistic production, and independence from the past were prized positions, but this approach limits the scope of Modernism and renders Eliot and Pound anomalous within it for insisting that their readers be familiar with the whole of world literature, art, and culture. Such an approach divorces classicism and even the Neue Sachlichkeit from the matrix of Modernism. The classicizing artists used the past in conjunction with Modernist techniques

What is then needed is not a narrative of Modernism, but a new litero-artistic history, one which holds experimentation as possibly the greatest trait of Modernism, but does not ignore art and literature that combined the advances of the avant-garde with traditional elements. Innovation and tradition, difference and similarity, are not always

binaries, and their interplay constructs much of the classical tradition. *Ulysses*, on the one hand, is classicizing through Joyce's classical frame upon a completely accepted Modernist novel. In *Orphée*, Cocteau appropriates a classical narrative, clearly producing a neoclassical film, and modernizes it through setting and character. While the former is a more innovative and more accomplished work of art, both texts are distinctly modern. Where classicism uses classical styles and narratives more completely producing a text unified through its play upon the classical, classicism extracts classical elements in a work less outwardly tied to the past, avoiding what is essentially a conceit or metaphorical parallel of the modern and the antique. While such a conceit or metaphor formally constructs a work like *Ulysses*, the marrow of the text is not wholly dominated in subservience to the parallel.

II. Conclusion to 20th-century classicism

The four types of neoclassicism in addition to cataloguing the ways in which the style was deployed demonstrate how the aesthetic project was malleable to political ends, pursued the same ideals and goals as fascism, and often, when a work was explicitly political, espoused fascist concerns and ideology. While Auden's "Shield of Achilles" clearly exemplifies how classicism can be political, it is atypical for the wing upon which it rests. While there is nothing particularly political about invoking Achilles or a muse, the concept of renewal is agitated by right wing politics.

While the types group individual works together for the ways in which they use the classical tradition, the political dimension reaches across the types. It would be

inaccurate to argue that there is some quality within a classicizing work that is inherently fascistic. There is no *sine qua non* that a reader can pluck out of a text and thus tint the whole; fascist classicism depends upon the artist who made the creation. A reader can find a trait that is frequently used in fascist work, one conducive to a fascist agenda, a trait often fascistic within an apolitical or left or middle of the road work, but it is simplistic to argue that such a thing might make a work "fascist." In "The Shield of Achilles" the rigid regularity in the rime royal, the impersonality, the weighing of antiquity against the present are all deployed in fascist classicism, but the poem is clearly anti-totalitarian.

Classicism is a highly malleable style for both artistic and political ends; the types themselves demonstrate the ways in which it can be used, tropes of classicism which are appropriated as tropes of fascism. It virtually always presupposed a belief in the inherent value and confidence in the aesthetics of classical antiquity, providing a sturdy, fertile ground for the uncertainties of the twentieth century.

The fragments of antiquity and European history in general could be reassembled for a makeshift narrative of predestination as in Mussolini's *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* or for a consciously anachronistic poetic narrative as in Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius*. The 1937 *Augustan Exhibition of Roman Civilization* celebrated Rome's classical past and the reign of Augustus in particular, it also contextualized 1932's *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*. The fascist revolution was triumphant and its history was being written. Italian fascist mythology, written after the fact, presented the fascist revolution as a modernized Augustan revolution. Pound's *Homage* presents an

Augustan poet of up-to-the-minute modernity, prefiguring, in fact, Pound's own style by 2,000 years—clearly a historical anachronism with "frigidaires (I.60)," allusions to Voltaire,[8] Yeats,[9] Kandinsky,[10] and Ernest Dowson,[11] "Roman policemen" in Tibet (VI.18), and "Wordsworthian" lines (XII.51).

Pound's adaptation of the original Latin texts is synthetic, making a narrative where there was not one. Pound chose the texts that he used from across the second and third books of elegies[12] sometimes even extracting from three Propertian poems for a single section of the *Homage*. Synthetic Classicism represents a technique within classicism with the goal of modernity, but is open to wild departure from the original. On the other hand, Mussolinian typological classicism, also concerned more with the present than the past, recycles classical iconography for propaganda. Such typological classicism can be considered a trope of the classicizing style—a tool of the artist which effects the meaning of a given phrase, image, text, or, more ethereal, political agenda.

Classicism, which uses a dominant pseudo-classical stylistic for a work of art or engages the classical past by means of allusion, symbolism, and referral, is a major style in the first half of the 20th century. It comprises the classical tradition and its breadth from texts like Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un poète*, in which classical symbols are empty signifiers for an undifferentiated classicism, to Auden's "The Shield of Achilles" which organically, even dialogically, combines a narrative of the classical with a description and critique of the modern in an initial forking-path reading.

The four types group individual works across different media according to the techniques artists used to engage the classical tradition. The types recognize the

generalized ends of such works, without infringing upon the intentions of an artist. For example, Anouilh's *Antigone* applies the Sophoclean model to the context of wartime France, and Jeffers' *Medea* revels in a Euripidean violence which is itself characteristic of Jeffers. The types also recognize works which use the classical tradition, but have not traditionally been considered "neoclassical." Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est," which no one would consider a "neoclassical" poem, responds explicitly to Horace *Odes* III.ii completely subverting both the Horatian dictum and the propaganda of Jessie Pope with lungs "froth-corrupted" by gas warfare, while Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead" engages the tradition of the ode as an occasional, public poem addressing Augustus Saint-Gaudens' *Colonel Robert Gould Shaw Memorial*, racism and the atomic bomb. The four types enable a reader to recognize all of these various reactions to antiquity under the generalization of the classical tradition, while at the same time appreciating the fundamental differences from work to work.

Inspired by Greco-Roman art, styles, and ideals, artists pursued their neoclassicism in different ways from each other and from work to work; however, the four types correlate generally similar manners of responding to antiquity. The differences from one work of art to the next demonstrate significantly various manners of using and adapting antiquity. However, most works which use the classical tradition are underpinned by a fundamental belief that classical art crystallizes the human experience with the greatest formal expertise.

Symbolic Classicism, the least accomplished mode of incorporating the classical tradition, controls its classical material by reducing it to a hollow icon or vague signifer

which only pregnantly gestures towards antiquity. Traditional Classicism, as an adaptation of a classical narrative, becomes completely controlled by its borrowings; it offers an easier route than the more advanced types but is nevertheless subservient to the adapted narrative. It can provide a highly accomplished work of art but encodes much difficulty through relation to its forebear and in trying to make an original rupture from the past, impossible through its very existence as an adaptation. Formal Classicism offers more possibilities because it borrows simply a vacant form which can then be injected with modernity, but depending upon the text, it can collapse into any of the other types. Finally, Synthetic Classicism necessitates a careful balancing of the classical material, not reducing it to symbolic meaning, but producing a novel narrative or mirroring-effect, that controls its various elements designed into a modern theme or objective.

A Neoclassical "school" or close-working group of individuals never truly existed in the twentieth century. The command in Modernism was, after all, "make it new."[13] Our very understanding of Modernism as the plurality of styles existed within classicism. Artists continued inventing styles, growing in rapidly divergent ways unlike, say, the slow crafting of a technique in a gradual curve upwards during the Renaissance or other earlier periods and movements. The new made change. Classicism grew, changed, and populated various places. Artists began with it, or tried it, or returned to it throughout their careers.

In the late 19th century, Maurice Denis in large part articulated what would occur in the classicizing art of the 20th century; artists wed Modernist tropes, styles, and ways of seeing the world to a classical material, producing both something new and rekindling

the significance of the old for a new century and a new audience. These artists imbued the empty relics of the past with a radical, Modernist significance. Artists renew the classical tradition with every generation, bringing to it a novel interpretation, changing our understanding and its meaning—the whole existing order becomes altered.[14] By focusing on the 20th century, my analysis exposes the simplistic understanding of Modernism as a rejection of past forms, and it returns the classical to its position, as inspiration and foil, for the Modernists, whose innovations can now be seen more clearly as synthesis not break.

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[1] Olivier Messiaen also opposed neoclassicism in music, and in his brief career as a more public figure than his later as a "composer apart," attacked Cocteau's neoclassical manifesto, *Le Coq et l'arlequin* (1918). "[J]e n'approuvais pas du tout (11, n. 15)." And of Satie, "Je trouvais cela complètement inutile et sans intérêt (ibid)." See Stephen Broad, "Messiaen and Cocteau," *Olivier Messiaen: Music, Art and Literature*, eds. Christopher Dingle and Nigel Simeone (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007): 1-12.
[2] Limited to poetry: the Georgians, such as Blunden, Sassoon, and others; the late Symbolists like Ernest Dowson and Yeats' first style; the apocalyptic poets such as John Heath-Stubbs and Charles Williams; and The Movement which consisted of John Wain, Kinglsey Amis, Donald Davie, Robert Conquest, and Philip Larkin. All continued writing formalist poetry, but their reputations have sunk drastically. Larkin's is as strong as ever, as the greatest British poet after Auden, and Amis' as a novelist has remained.
[3] Irving Howe, "The Idea of the Modern," *Selected Writings, 1950-1990* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990) 148.
[4] Ibid.
[5] One could, of course, argue that *La Machine infernale*'s acts which are divided sometimes by years and even decades prefigure Brechtian epic theatre's autonomous scenes, although this seems like so much straw-grasping
[6] Paul Fussell, "Modernism, Adversary Culture, and Edmund Blunden," *Thank God for the Atom Bomb and Other Essays* (New York: Summit Books, 1988), 250-251.
[7] This demonstrates the success of Marinetti's public technique of saturation-bombing by means of manifesti in major newspapers. One of the great stereotypes of Modernism is the wholesale rejection of the past. This study, hopefully demonstrates that it is an ill-informed cliché. Furthermore, Fussell's argument demonstrates how integral Futurism was to Modernism, despite being ignored for decades due to the Futurists' romance with fascism.
[8] Section IV, line 19 uses the word "orfevrerie." Pound probably took this word from Voltaire's "Épitre connue sous le nom des *Vous* et des *Tu*." Pound had translated portions of this poem for the first section of "Impressions of François-Marie Arouet (de Voltaire)" of 1915-1916, but he did not translate the line in which the word appeared.
[9] Line 23-24 of section IV, "the desolated female attendants / Were desolated because she had told them her dreams" is a parody of the refrain of Yeats' "The Withering of the Boughs," "The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams."

[10] At X.33, "You will observe that pure form has its value," Pound obliquely alludes to Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* translated, extracted, and reviewed by Edward Wadsworth in the first issue of *Blast*, particularly the discussion of the importance of form at 122-123 which Pound extrapolated to verse.

[11] At section XII, l. 4 Pound alludes to a translation of Propertius by Dowson, which takes as its title l. 23 from Propertius II.XV "Dum nos fata sinunt oculos satiemus Amore," that makes use of the image of a pomegranate in a more less execrable line 15, "O red pomegranate of thy perfect mouth!"

[12] Or the second, third, and fourth books if one follows Karl Lachmann's argument that the second book should in fact be divided into two, although the MSS divide the corpus into only four books of elegies. The five book division is followed in the Teubner edition which Pound used, while the four book is followed in Loeb.

[13] Kurt Heinzelman observes that the phrase "make it new" appears relatively late in the history of Modernism. It was first used by Pound in either *Canto* 53 (the date of which is unknown beyond the early 1930s) or as the title for his collection of essays of 1934. The phrase does not appear anywhere else in his book. "Make it new" is Pound's own version of four Chinese ideograms from the 18th century B.C. by the emperor Tching Tang. Kurt Heinzelman, "'Make it New': The Rise of an Idea," *Make It New: The Rise of Modernism*, ed. Kurt Heinzelman (Austin: Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, 2003), 131-133.

[14] To paraphrase Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich / Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), 38.

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