



Dreaming Empire: European Writers in the Fascist Era

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Dreaming Empire: European Writers in the Fascist Era

A dissertation presented

by

Robert Dean Kohen

to

The Department of Comparative Literature

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Dreaming Empire: European Writers in the Fascist Era

Abstract

This dissertation explores how literary writers from across Western and Central Europe—namely Germany, Italy, Britain and France—invoked Europe’s legacy of empire and colonialism in their attempt to come to terms with the specter of fascism. It argues that empire became the site upon which a wide range of writers built their critiques, sometimes overt and other times subvert, against a rising tide of fascist ideology in the 1930s and 1940s. What results is a condemningly critical—and in the case of writers publishing within fascist regimes, outright subversive—reading of fascism. Fascist racial ideology, hyper-militarism, economic policy, absolutist rule and expansionist policies are recurring targets of censure among these writers. By placing empire and fascism into dialogue, their writings not only proffered a powerful critique of fascism but also set into motion a critical rethinking of the project of empire. Uncomfortable affinities between a purportedly benevolent European overseas colonialism and the horrors committed by fascist powers within continental Europe challenged conventional wisdom about the colonial *mission civilisatrice* at the same time as they offered the raw material for a sustained critique of fascism. From a methodological perspective, this dissertation is concerned with literature as a historically and culturally situated product. While its primary objects of focus are literary texts, it draws on both cultural and political history, as well as, where relevant, knowledge of the author’s life in order to better illuminate these works. The dissertation examines a range

of texts—literary, historical, biographical, personal, critical—and makes use of close, analytical reading. The primary writers it treats are Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Joyce Cary, Gerhart Hauptmann, Marguerite Yourcenar, Hermann Broch, Dino Buzzati and Ennio Flaiano.

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Introduction

This dissertation takes as its subject the works of literary writers from Western and Central Europe—namely Germany, Italy, Britain and France—composed in the era of fascism. The works examined were all published between the years 1932-1951, although most were composed largely during fascism's high point from 1935-1945. The authors of these works all had intimate experiences with fascism, either living under fascist governance for some period of time or in neighboring states that saw the rise of domestic fascism. While some works were published under fascist censorship, others were published outside the confines of fascist administrations. In both cases, however, a sense of urgency about the rise and effects of fascism accompanies all of the works as living products of the fascist era.

The primary question of the dissertation is how European writers constellate imperialism and colonialism with fascism. It argues that for a number of these writers, imperialism and colonialism provide an essential frame through which contemporary fascism might be critically assessed. What results is a condemningly critical—and in the case of writers publishing within fascist regimes, outright subversive—reading of fascism. Fascist racial ideology, hyper-militarism, economic policy, absolutist rule and expansionist policies are recurring targets of censure among these writers. By a countermovement within this moment, however, fascism also forces a reframing of imperialism and colonial experience. Thus the often conservative colonial policies of nations such as France or Britain, for example, are necessarily cast in a new light by Germany's territorial and racial policies on the continent. If we are to agree with Aimé Césaire's claim in *Discourse on Colonialism* that Hitler rehearsed "colonialist procedures

which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria [and] the ‘coolies’ of India,” then how do French and British writers make sense of national claims to a “war of right against might” with Germany in view of this legacy?¹ When traces of imperial and colonial ideology resurface in fascism, how do writers come to terms with this unpleasant affinity? This question is one the dissertation will constantly ask of these writers as it explores the constellation of imperialism and fascism in their works.

One might ask why this dissertation explores the juxtaposition of “empire and colonialism” with fascism, rather than simply empire and fascism or colonialism and fascism. Not only are these terms hermeneutically related—to the point that they can be construed as identical, depending on the particular definition one employs—but they are also intricately related historically and within the literary works the dissertation addresses. As Hannah Arendt notes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, colonialism can be distinguished as a sub-category of empire, namely as the administration of *overseas*, rather than contiguous, territories, and was often propelled by purely economic rather than nationalistic motives. Historically, however, the distinction was often blurred: Pan-German nationalists, as she points out, often conceived of Germany as a “continental” state that therefore, unlike France and Britain, had to seek out its colonies on the continent itself. At times even German lands were subject to domestic “colonialization,” such as Bismarck’s policy of *innere Kolonisation* in which Germans were moved to historically Polish territories within German Prussia. Interchangeable with this use of the colonial vocabulary was the vocabulary of empire: to the west, German Alsace-Lorraine, whose German residents often described life there as living in a “colony,” was classified

¹ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 36.

as a *Reichsland*, or imperial territory, rather than just another province during the reign of Bismarck.² Some Pan-Germanists even went so far as to propose treating certain continental nationalities—such as Poles, Czechs, and Jews—in the same way that overseas imperialism had treated natives on non-European continents. As historians such as Woodruff Smith have noted, the National Socialist ideology of *Lebensraum*, central to Germany’s continental expansion, was initially developed and articulated by pro-colonial groups and writers. Similarly, as Aristotle Kallis argues, it was the legacy of Germany and Italy’s former imperial hegemony in continental Europe and the Mediterranean that spurred enthusiasm for their colonial adventures. In view of these destabilizing affinities, some scholars today, including Robert Nelson, Kristin Kopp and Pascal Grosse, interpret imperial and Nazi Germany’s administration of Polish Prussia and the Slavic east in colonial terms, suggesting a continental colonial empire.³

In the fascist era, the political structures of empire and colonialism shared a fundamental feature: absolute rule by a centralized authority. Such a structure unsettles conventional distinctions between the colonizer as a ruling, empowered force and the colonized as a powerless and dominated subject. Political and racial persecution, censorship, and the restriction of civil liberties by a centralized authority were not only features of colonial governments but also of fascist dictatorships. German and Italian citizens often faced forms of persecution similar to those encountered by the native inhabitants of their colonies. The absolutist, anti-democratic administration of colonial

² Robert L. Nelson, “From Manitoba to the Memel: Max Sering, Inner Colonization and the German East,” *Social History* 35 (4) (2010): 443.

³ See Kopp and Grosse’s essays in *Germany’s Colonial Pasts*, ed. Eric Ames (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press: 2005), and Nelson, “From Manitoba to the Memel.”

territories thus mirrors in many ways the anti-democratic rule of fascist governance. As early as 1919, F.T. Marinetti contrasted Italy's heroic conquest of colonial Libya and successful territorial expansion during the First World War with the perceived inefficiencies of its republican government in his "Al di là del comunismo." Marinetti's militaristic nod toward colonialism is intertwined with an aversion to democratic rule, suggesting that empire demands a technocratic government composed of young men rather than a democratically elected parliament. Similarly, writing from within the turbulent Weimar Republic around the same time, Carl Schmitt decried similar republican inefficiencies that he saw as threats to the Weimar Republic's very survival. Schmitt thus advocated for the legitimacy of a sovereign rule that might temporarily suspend and re-fashion law during a state of emergency (the *Ausnahmezustand*), forming the will of its people in order to defend both democracy and the people's interests against themselves. As forerunners to the advent of fascism, both Marinetti and Schmitt attest to the approaching rise of an absolutist rule in Italy and Germany, an absolute rule that would be marked by shared affinities both at home and abroad.⁴

The French empire, or the *Empire colonial français*, was in the fascist era composed largely of France's overseas territories, just as the German empire, or *Deutsches Reich*, extended to the *Kolonialreich* up until the Treaty of Versailles following the First World War. Both Hitler and Mussolini sought to rehabilitate the legacy of empire. For Mussolini, the Italian fascist state was construed as a return to the Roman Empire, a reclamation of the "*mare nostrum*" and the territorial dominance the

⁴ For a rethinking of Schmitt's *Ausnahmezustand* that points to the dangers of its normalization and potentially indefinite extension, see Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

empire once enjoyed. It was precisely Italy's colonial exploits in Africa that laid the backbone for Italy's attempts at empire building. Empire and colonialism are also interwoven in the German context, as Hitler's rehabilitation of the term *Reich* gestures toward Germany's pre-war colonial empire, one which Hitler himself often envisioned eventually re-establishing as part of the *Reich*. Far from the fringe of the fascist imagination, empire and colonialism are nonetheless interwoven and essential terms of its own projects and discourses.

The term fascism is itself often contested within cultural studies and historiography, and I am aware of the difficulties of using the term as a totalizing concept.⁵ Some scholars have defined fascism's very hybridity as its central feature.⁶ I do not seek to work with an absolute, trans-national conception of fascism. German, Italian, French and British fascism are marked by both continuities and divergences. While ideologies of anti-Semitism and racial purity eventually played a role in Italian fascism, for instance, they only did so after Italy turned increasingly toward its German alliance. In France as in Britain, the great diversity of fascist thinkers and organizations meant often differing attitudes toward the question of race, with groups like the *Croix-de-Feu* not only rejecting anti-Semitism but welcoming Jewish members into its ranks. Whereas Italian and German fascism restricted women's access to the workplace, the British

⁵ Many scholars have proposed competing frameworks for conceptualizing and defining fascism. For some of the most prominent examples, see John Weiss, *The Fascist Tradition: Radical Right-Wing Extremism in Modern Europe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter, 1991), and Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo: Storia e Interpretazione* (Roma: GLF editori Laterza).

⁶ See, for example, Erin Carlston, *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 10-12.

Union of Fascists (the most influential and vocal representative of British fascism) not only supported women's right to work but also argued for completely equal rights and pay for women. Similarly, the degree of authoritarian control and the extent to which civil liberties were repressed within fascist regimes was not entirely uniform, leading Hannah Arendt to reject the classification of "totalitarianism" for Mussolini's Italy while applying the term to Hitler's Germany. Attitudes toward violence and militarism also often differed: while Britain saw the use of violence by the British Union of Fascists' paramilitary units, many French fascist organizations restricted themselves to ideological, intellectual and political—rather than violent—activities. At the same time, however, both the British Union of Fascists and numerous fascist groups in France, much unlike the fascist regimes of Germany and Italy, advocated in the late 1930s for peace with neighboring states rather than military aggression. A search for a fascist "bare minimum" in all four nations, however, does yield some recurring fundamental ideological similarities: hyper-nationalism, an anti-Marxist soft-socialism founded on syndicalism, anti-democratic rule by a virile and charismatic leader, and the valorization of the collective above the individual. Such core features, however, were not exclusive to Europe, and could also be found as far away as Hirohito's Shōwa Japan.

This dissertation maintains a high level of vigilance with regard to the unique circumstance of fascism wherever manifested. Beyond paying heed to critical discontinuities as well as continuities, it is important to note that this dissertation is not attempting to propose a unified theory of fascism. Rather, it is invested in what fascism means to individual writers. Fascism as a product of the literary imagination will be a

more pressing concern for this dissertation than fascism as an historical event, although careful attention will be paid to both.

This dissertation situates itself among a number of immediately relevant areas of scholarly inquiry. First and perhaps most importantly, as a treatment of fascism it joins a growing body of work by literary scholars on literature and fascism. In the past ten to twenty years literary studies of fascism have been on the rise. Scholars have taken many approaches to studying the relationship between literature and fascism. Some scholars, for instance, have sought to explore the inherent interrelations between literary aesthetics and fascism, following in the tracks of Walter Benjamin's famous proclamation that whereas communism politicizes art, fascism aestheticizes the political. Studies of this sort include David Carroll's *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism and the Ideology of Culture* (1994), which attempts to link literature, especially its totalizing capacity and the defense of literary integrity, with fascist political extremism, arguing for the inseparability of aesthetics and politics. Carroll's study is much akin to Richard Wolin's more recent *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (2006), an intellectual history that sets post-modern thinkers and writers (both literary and philosophical) in intellectual, and often historical, concert with fascist ideology. A work by Mary Ann Frese Witt, *The Search for Modern Tragedy: Aesthetic Fascism in Italy and France* (2001), traces the relationship between aesthetics and fascism in French and Italian modernist theater. Similarly, Andrew Hewitt's *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics and the Avant-Garde* (1993) examines how modernist writers—notably Filippo Marinetti—make a home for themselves within fascism.

In addition to the work done on fascism and aesthetics, a number of literary scholars have constellated fascism and gender in recent years. Erin Carlston's *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity* (1998) is a comparative work arguing that female modernists, often reacting against fascism and its vision of women, nevertheless employed and participated in fascism's very own discourses. In her detailed discussion of Margeurite Yourcenar, whose writings this dissertation will later explore, Carlston suggests for instance that Yourcenar resists the xenophobia inherent in fascist nationalism while at the same time falling prey to the very cultural elitism and exclusivity that so often defined European fascism. Marie-Luise Gättens joins Carlston in detailing the complicated and often conflicting relationships between women and fascism in *Women Writers and Fascism: Reconstructing History* (1995). While female writers like Virginia Woolf critically linked fascism to patriarchal notions of gender, she argues, others actively collaborated with fascist regimes. Gender, for Gättens, thus offers an important, albeit morally complex, perspective on assessing fascist history. Departing from a reading of fascism in strictly gendered terms, critic Laura Frost examines how otherwise anti-fascist texts are rendered problematic by their sexualization of fascism in *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism* (2002). Over the course of her book, which she characterizes as a work of cultural studies, she traces the fetishization of fascism back to the modernist era when Allied governments aligned "deviant" sexuality with the "deviancy" of fascism. Frost's exploration of the implicit ambivalence toward fascism in anti-fascist culture aligns her work with that of Carlston and Gättens, who refuse to offer a simplistic vision of the relationship between gender, culture and fascism.

Other works of literary studies on fascism are more difficult to classify broadly. Judy Suh, for instance, in her *Fascism and Anti-Fascism in Twentieth Century British Fiction* (2009), foregoes a discussion of the connections between fascism and avant-garde aesthetics to explore how British fascists tried to exploit traditional cultural narratives for their own use. She argues that both fascists and anti-fascists in Britain enlisted the conventions of middlebrow literature rather than those of modernism for their cause. Critics who attempt to link fascism to a radical aesthetics and the avant-garde, she therefore argues, overlook the essential role traditional narratives played in bolstering fascist ideology. Looking across the Atlantic, the relationship between fascism and American literature is explored by Americanist Robert Brinkmeyer in his *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930-1950* (2009). While Brinkmeyer argues that fascism was largely condemned in the United States, he notes that its recurrent emphasis on regionalism and agrarianism, most notably encapsulated by Hitler's *Blut und Boden* philosophy, was recognized in the United States as bearing an undeniable resemblance to white Southern culture. Consequently, white Southern writers, while producing a range of responses to fascism, were frequently preoccupied with fascism as a mirror-image to their own society. While Suh and Brinkmeyer explore the relationship between fascism and British and American literary traditions, Valerio Ferme's looks to Italian writers under fascism in his 2002 *Tradurre è tradire*. Ferme, in his analysis of Italian writers Cesare Pavese and Elio Vittorini, argues that their translations and literary assimilation of American authors allowed them a subversive position from within fascist Italy. Departing from more conventional and broader studies of fascism's relationship to modernism, the aesthetic avant-garde and gender, Suh,

Brinkmeyer and Ferme's work provide unique perspectives on how national literatures grappled with the prospect of fascism in original ways.

Although so many of these works are comparative, the study of literature and fascism occupies a special place within German literary studies. German literature of this period is typically divided into three separate areas: fascist literature, non-fascist literature, and anti-fascist literature. The field continues to be a fertile source of new research. Karl-Heinz Schoeps' two recent works, for instance, *Literature and Film in the Third Reich* (2004) and *Literatur im Dritten Reich* (2000), trace the legacy of all three forms of writing in relation to the cultural policies of the National Socialists. A number of historical-cultural studies address the broader relationship between culture and the state in Nazi Germany, including Michael Kater's *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (1992) and Alan Steinweis' *Art, Ideology and Economics in Nazi Germany* (1993). These writers stress the relative de-centralization of Nazi cultural policy, a de-centralization that occasionally allowed for subversive cultural production. In Germany literary studies, such subversive work falls under the heading of *Innere Emigration*, or Inner Emigration.

In building on this body of research on literature and fascism, the dissertation seeks to open up new directions within the field, as it is the first work of literary studies to propose thinking of fascism alongside empire and colonialism in the literary imaginary. In doing so, it forces a re-contextualization of colonial studies within the broader narrative of empire and fascism and interrogates the structural affinities between forms of domestic political governance and territorial governance. It argues that colonialism, because of these structural affinities, becomes an important trope for fascist-

era writers who seek to criticize the oppressive, racially hierarchized and militaristic culture of fascist governments—not simply a means for buttressing fascism, as in the case of German novelist Hans Grimm, whose colonial novel *Volk ohne Raum* (1926) articulated the concept of *Lebensraum* later adopted by the Nazis. Even Marinetti's African writings during this period, despite being occasionally complicated by aesthetic concerns, largely upheld the fascist ideology of colonization and empire building. While such explicitly pro-colonial and often fascist colonial literature has been studied by scholars such as Giovanna Tomasello and Thomas Nolden, little attention has been paid to works that explore the colonial as a subversive and potentially critical site during this period. Such a lack of scholarship is not surprising, given the existing colonial literature of the period: not only was fascist colonial literature supported by Mussolini's regime for propagandistic ends, but Italian colonial literature traditionally presented a highly romanticized image of Africa that was detached from the political realities of colonization. Similarly, German colonial literature unsurprisingly reinforced national beliefs about colonialism, repeatedly portraying the physical and cultural superiority of the typical German colonist, settling and fertilizing otherwise untended land. It is thus the rare work of colonial literature, outside of and often against this tradition, that this dissertation seeks to address. The one exception to this focus is the discussion of Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, a work for which, as the dissertation proposes, the colonial schizophrenically becomes a conflicted site of an anti-fascist critique and a proto-fascist ideology.

This dissertation will make a meaningful contribution to the ongoing study within German Studies of Inner Emigration, the second major field to which it seeks to

contribute. The term “Inner Emigration” is much contested, having been defined in various ways since its inception, but it can generally be taken to mean a willful turn away from Nazi ideology within the private, and by extension literary, lives of Germans who remained in Germany during the Nazi era. Scholars of Inner Emigration have often undertaken rigorous biographical, historical and textual research in order to better assess the true sympathies, writings and claims of authors who worked under National Socialism. Hans Dieter-Schäfer has argued for the existence of a movement of young writers who emerged during the Third Reich whose work was marked by a return to form and the classics, as well as the excision of any immediate political or historical context. Leonard Olschner has similarly argued that poets of the Third Reich fled the regime through the timelessness manifest in their writings, and H.R. Klieneberger has examined how many German writers of the fascist era, despite being conservative and nationalistic, protested the immoralities of Nazism through a predominantly Christian humanitarianism. My research will build upon the work of Frank Trommler, who has researched the socialization of literature in the Nazi state, as well as Colin Riordan, who has written of the importance of establishing a counter-image, or *Gegenbild*, to the Nazi regime in the writers of Inner Emigration. Both my treatment of Gerhart Hauptmann as an Inner Emigrant—considered a National Socialist by many and not traditionally read as a member of Inner Emigration—and my assessment of colonialism as a critical frame through which Inner Emigrant writers clandestinely attempt to subvert fascism, suggest new directions within the field of Inner Emigration at the same time as they build upon prior scholarship.

The third major field of literary studies to which this dissertation seeks to make a substantial contribution is that of colonialism. This is an exciting time for the field, particularly within German Studies. Long neglected by historians and literary critics alike, colonial experience's relevance to fascism is increasingly being recognized. A number of publications, particularly within the past five years, speak to this growing relevance. Despite Susanne Zantop's call for the contextualization of the Holocaust in the larger historical framework of colonial fantasies in her seminal work *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870* (1997)—a call originally made by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and now taken up by historians who argue for a “continuity thesis” between colonialism and fascism—little work has been done to pursue this connection in literary studies. Marcia Klotz has written about the similarity between German narratives about overseas colonialism and those thematizing the cultural supremacy in Germany's own eastern regions. Similarly, Pascal Grosse has explored the connection between German colonialism and fascism, arguing that eugenicist ideas of racial selection, reproduction and territorial expansion are essential links between the two interrelated ideologies. Kristin Kopp has argued for the ongoing relevance of the colonial experience in Germany's colonization of Poland and the East, the subject of her forthcoming work *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space* (2012). A recent historical volume, *German Colonialism: Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany* (2011), traces the relationship between colonialism and the Third Reich in a series of new essays, while Christian Davis' recently released *Colonialism, Antisemitism and Germans of Jewish Descent in Imperial Germany* (2012) examines the mutually reinforcing relationship

between anti-Semitism and colonialism in German history. This dissertation will assert the significance of this contemporary movement in historiography for literary studies by arguing for the fusion of colonialism and fascism within the European literary imaginary.

From a methodological perspective, the dissertation is concerned with literature as a historically and culturally situated product. While its primary objects of focus are literary texts, it draws on both cultural and political history, as well as, where relevant, knowledge of the author's life, in order to better illuminate these works. In writing the dissertation, I examine a range of texts—literary, historical, biographical, personal, critical—and make use of close, analytical reading. My intention is to use this sort of a methodology to best support my work's argument, rather than writing my dissertation as an exclusive argument for any one particular methodology.

The dissertation is structured along thematic and broadly chronological lines. While all of the works it examines use the concept of empire to critique fascism, they each present unique concerns and criticisms of the movement and reflect their own particular place and moment in history. Each chapter groups texts based on one or more of these focal concerns, which are presented in broad chronological order.

Chapter One explores 1930s fiction written from within non-fascist regimes. These works use the colonial space to express critical attitudes toward fascism, especially toward fascist economic policy, and manifest an anxiety about the potential rise of fascism at home in Britain and France. It first discusses Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932) and *L'Église* (1933), in which numerous aspects of fascist ideology are contested within the colonial sphere, including racially-motivated discrimination and violence, the syndicalist fusion of state and corporatism, and the dangers of absolute

power and dictatorship. France's "Roman" colonial administration, evocative of both domestic fascism and fascist Italy's own "Roman" project, mounts a mutually reinforcing criticism of rising fascist ideology and colonial policy. At the same time, however, Céline's text embraces a proto-fascist ideology, one where economic injustice and racial prejudice rise to the fore. Read in light of Céline's later pamphlets, wherein he often stressed the prevalent idea that "*Le Juif c'est déjà du nègre,*" the novel's suggestion of racial prejudice aligns strongly with Céline's later anti-Semitism, a widespread feature of much French fascism.

The chapter then moves to Joyce Cary's novels *The African Witch* (1936) and *Mister Johnson* (1939), both of which attest to an anxiety about the rise of fascism in Britain. Not only do British colonists themselves appropriate distinguishing features of British fascism in the novels—racial prejudice, anti-democratic values and violence—but it is precisely these features of British colonial policy that engender extremism in the colonial subject. Thus the "goose stepping" Mister Johnson is eventually driven to extreme and fruitless violence, just as Louis Aladai, often associated with German culture throughout the novel, wins the fanatical support of his people as he moves closer toward political extremism and violence. By explicitly linking British persecution of native Africans with the German persecution of the Jews, both in *The African Witch* and in his 1941 political tract *The Case for African Freedom*, Cary also raises concerns about the spread of fascist brutality to the British Empire both abroad and at home. Similarly, the economic policy of the British Union of Fascists—extensive and highly leveraged stimulus spending—finds echo in Cary's depiction of the debilitating effects of debt and government spending in *Mister Johnson*. These novels both point to the ways in which

British colonial policy risked fostering fascist extremism and challenge the widely-accepted British policy of appeasement toward fascist Germany. As in the case of Céline's work, the dangers of replicating or too readily accepting fascist ideology and practice shed new light onto British colonial experience.

Chapter Two moves from pre-war works that betray an anxiety about the rise of fascism in Britain and France to the veiled, subversive anti-fascist literature of German Inner Emigration. It explores Gerhart Hauptmann's 1939 *Der Schuß im Park*, arguing that the novella is an anti-fascist work that uses colonial cultural and racial practice to subversively contest fascist ideology on the advent of the Second World War, thereby suggesting a dangerous connection between fascist violence and European colonial practice.⁷ While critics have been quick to note the novella's potentially critical attitude toward the National Socialists, who were instrumental in preventing a second edition of the work from being published, Hauptmann has never before been extensively treated in the scholarly literature on Inner Emigration. That Hauptmann would write a veiled criticism of the Third Reich, despite his choice to remain in Nazi Germany and his explicitly public support for the regime, is logical in view of his earlier pacifism and his many privately voiced discontents over Hitler's rule. In opposition to the racial ideology of National Socialism and German colonialism, both of which outlawed forms of miscegenation, *Der Schuß im Park* posits a world of racial mixing in which Germans frequently couple with ideologically inferior races without any loss of dignity. The

⁷ Credit is due to Judith Ryan for unearthing this text, which she brought to my attention at her graduate seminar at Harvard entitled *Colonial Theory and German Colonial Literature*. In an unpublished talk given at Dartmouth in 2005, Ryan both argued that Hauptmann's novella presents a counter-narrative to dominant colonial fantasies and suggested that the novella can be read as a commentary on the violence of the Nazi era, a violence that it has displaced onto the African scene.

National Socialist privileging of German and Western *Hochkultur* is also challenged by Hauptmann, who constructs his novella as a structural hybrid that moves between an emphasis on traditional textual narrative and African oral literature, a literary form Hauptmann champions despite being outside the privileged Germanic-Aryan circle and official disdain for colonial blacks. It is precisely this practice of cultural hybridity that makes Hauptmann unique among writers of Inner Emigration, especially given his traditional exclusion from their circle. In addition to Hauptmann's challenge to fascist racial ideology, the novella also offers a veiled criticism of its militaristic and expansionist policies. Written only a few months after Germany's annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland, its reproachful portrayal of German violence and expansionism in the colonies cannot be read completely apart from this context, especially as German colonialism had already been used by writers such as Hans Grimm as a defense of German expansion on the continent. In his representation of the violent relationship between German colonizer and colonized, Hauptmann provides the raw material for an anti-fascist criticism of both Germany's territorial conquests at the time in Europe and the colonial legacy to which they hearkened back.

Chapter Three considers wartime novels that, while joining the literature of the first two chapters in their anti-fascist stance, interrogate the possibility of humane empire in the wake of Hitler and fascism. It focuses on Hermann Broch's 1945 *Der Tod des Vergil* and Marguerite Yourcenar's 1951 *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, two tales of ancient Roman empire that not only use their images of empire in order to contest modern-day fascism, but manifest a deep ambivalence toward the redemptive possibilities of empire and colonialism in the modern world. Broch's magnum opus, *Der Tod des Vergil* offers a

veiled critique of National Socialism through Broch's evocation of ancient Roman empire. Whereas Hauptmann offered the dissertation a perspective on Inner Emigration, Broch offers a perspective on exilic German literature in the fascist era. Broch's critique extends from fascism to European colonialism, and in so doing problematizes the implicit connections and uncomfortable affinities between both movements. At the same time as Broch's work offers a challenge to fascism and colonialism that echoes the one Broch makes in his own political writings, his novel remains deeply ambivalent about the concept of empire. If *Der Tod des Vergil* contests the sort of empire building enacted by the fascists and European powers of its day, it also holds out the possibility of a more "benevolent" empire unencumbered by their injustices. Thus confronted with the contemporary specter of self-interested, aggressive territorialism and hyper-nationalism on the part of European powers, of fascism's "evil" empires, Broch rehabilitates the possibility of morally righteous and "good" empire. Continually wavering in its critical vision of the imperial project, torn between an image explicitly evocative of fascism's misdeeds and one inspiring hope in the possible justness of empire, *Der Tod des Vergil* plays out a deep ambivalence about the potential of empire in the modern era.

After discussing *Der Tod des Vergil*, the chapter turns to Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, composed between 1934-1937 and 1948-1951, which also looks back on the legacy of ancient empire from both within the era of fascism and shortly after its fall. Like her contemporary Broch, Yourcenar uses the figure of the Roman Empire to challenge fascism's own imperial aspirations and claims to "Roman" greatness. Her portrait of Hadrian, the centerpiece of the novel, provides an ameliorative counter image to Hitlerian fascist leadership. In so doing, the novel rehabilitates and suggests the

possibility of good or benevolent empire while at the same time critiquing the abuses of fascism. While often optimistic about the possibility of empire, however, *Mémoires d'Hadrien* betrays a deep ambivalence about its potential in the modern world. While Hadrian's imperial administration often provides a moral alternative to that of fascism, the novel suggests that it often veers dangerously close to the policies and practices of fascist Europe. Coupled with this ambivalence toward empire in the wake of fascism is an ambivalence toward modern colonial empire, specifically the empires of France and Britain. While Yourcenar's novel seems to suggest French and British visions of empire pose an ethically viable alternative to those of fascism, it also problematizes a clear distinction between the two systems. *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, like *Der Tod des Vergil*, does not simply use empire as a critical counter image to fascism, then, but at the same time suggests the dangerous affinities between fascism and other forms of imperial rule often taken to be more enlightened or humanitarian.

Chapter Four explores Italian fiction that not only uses the colonial scene to offer a veiled critique of fascism but also confronts the prospect of national amnesia after its fall. It discusses the work of Dino Buzzati and Ennio Flaiano, who, writing during and immediately after the Second World War, criticize the nationalistic, bureaucratic and militaristic cultures of fascist Italy through their evocation of empire. Buzzati's own experience in the Italian colonies during the Second World War places him in a unique position among wartime Italian writers and informs much of his masterpiece *Il deserto dei tartari* (1940). Both *Il Deserto dei Tartari* and *La Famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* (1945), written from within fascist Italy and under the threat of censorship, surreptitiously subvert fascist codes of militarism and anti-Semitism as well as the assault

on individual liberty that fascism brought to Italy. At the same time, Buzzati's landscapes fantastically merge the colonial space, where he himself spent much time, with that of his native northern Italy. In so doing, Buzzati sets the stage for a concomitant critique of colonialism, the privileged child of Mussolini's fascist empire. By linking Italy's overseas colonial experience, notably its legacy of territorial aggression and racist ideology, with that of its aggressive irredentism at home on the continent, *Il Deserto dei Tartari* and *La Famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* problematize and complicate the relationship between overseas colonialism and domestic fascism, highlighting and interrogating their mutual symbiosis while at the same time using each to question the moral authority of the other.

After discussing Buzzati, Chapter Four looks to Ennio Flaiano's *Tempo di Uccidere* (1947), written only one year after *La Famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* was published. Flaiano's novel confronts the specter of Italian fascism through its radical representation of the colonial scene. Unlike the majority of Italian colonial narratives of its era, *Tempo di Uccidere* refuses the lure of fascist propaganda in favor of a critical demythologizing of fascist ideology. The novel uses the figure of its unnamed protagonist to challenge fascism's valorization of militarism, collectivism and racism. In its critique of fascist racial doctrine in the colonies, the novel often alludes to fascist anti-Semitism, thus building a problematic bridge between Italy's colonial exploits and its participation in Hitler's Final Solution. At the same time, *Tempo di Uccidere* reflects on the national amnesia toward fascism, colonialism and the persecution of the Jews that overtook much of Italy in the period immediately following the Second World War. In so doing, the novel not only unveils the troubling affinities between the two targets of its critique,

fascism and colonialism, but also suggests an urgent need to confront both specters even after Mussolini and Hitler had already fallen.

Chapter 1. The Rising Tide of Fascism: Louis-Ferdinand Céline and Joyce Cary's Colonial Narratives

In an era that saw Europe shaken by growing political instability, chaos and violence, two of its greatest novelists, Louis-Ferdinand Céline and Joyce Cary, momentarily turned their eyes away from home. They wrote of Africa, a land they had both spent time in as colonists, capturing their complicated feelings toward the dark continent. If their writings unfolded elsewhere than home, however, home was no less on their minds. Céline's now canonical *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932) and play *L'Église* (1933) and Cary's novels *The African Witch* (1936), *Castle Corner* (1938) and *Mister Johnson* (1939) all reflect back on and process the trauma and turbulence of 1930s European experience through the lens of the colonial space. The specter of fascism in Europe finds displaced voice in this space, as Céline and Cary's works betray both an anxiety toward its rise and a critique against its many manifestations. For both writers, it becomes increasingly difficult to write about colonialism outside the context of the rising tide of fascism. Fascism effectively re-frames colonial experience, highlighting uncomfortable affinities between fascist governments like those of Mussolini and Hitler, and those of the authors' own democratic nations. In so doing, it poses a threat to the integrity of the democratic principles those democracies held so dearly, both within the colonies and at home in Europe.

Céline's early work from this period betrays a harshly critical attitude toward fascism in its many manifestations. *Voyage au bout de la nuit* recounts the story of Ferdinand Bardamu, who after the First World War travels deep into Africa where he witnesses the abuses of French colonialism in the imaginary country of Bragamance. The

images of French colonialism in *Voyage* were first formulated in Céline's play *L'Église*, which recounts the catastrophic colonial administration of Monsieur Pistil. Critics of Céline have yet to explore this critical attitude toward fascism in his early work; some scholars even going deny his early writings any historical specificity. Luc Rassin, for example, argues that *Voyage au bout de la nuit* in some sense stands outside of historical time, foregoing a specific critique of colonialism and European society in favor of a general critique of human nature itself: "*Voyage*: ce texte qui ne peut pas ne pas être lu comme une critique féroce des sociétés occidentales avancées, refuse en même temps de s'interroger sur le fonctionnement politique concret, par exemple, de la colonisation. Ainsi se voit incriminée non pas la colonisation même, mais une nature humaine intemporelle."⁸ [*Voyage*: that text which can not be read other than as a ferocious critique of advanced Western society, refuses at the same time to examine concrete political operations, for example, colonization. Thus it is not colonialism itself that is incriminated, but a timeless human nature.] Quite to the contrary, however, by linking French colonial experience with Italian fascism, *Voyage au bout de la nuit* lays the foundations upon which its critique of militarism, syndicalism, racism and dictatorship challenge the fundamental premises of the movement. *L'Église* builds upon and extends this critique, laying bare French misdeeds that stand in sharp contradistinction to the nation's purported *mission civilisatrice*. Reframed in light of affinities to fascist experience, French colonialism loses its pretence to democracy and *noblesse oblige*.

⁸ Luc Rassin, "'Chacun Sa Place': L'Anticolonialisme Dans Heart of Dearkness (1899) Et Voyage Au Bout De La Nuit (1932)," in *L'Exotisme: actes du colloque de Saint-Denis de la Réunion*, ed. Alain Buisine et al. (Paris: Diffusion Didier-Erudition, 1988), 277. All translations are my own.

In *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, French colonial misdeeds threaten the very fiber of French democratic processes and values. The anxiety toward fascism that Céline's writings betray is not only an anxiety toward foreign fascism, then, but an anxiety toward the prospect of growing domestic fascism and the dangerous slide toward fascism that such colonial misdeeds and loosening values might imply. At the same time, however, Céline's early work betrays a distinctively proto-fascist sensibility in its isolated instances of racism, instances that would proliferate in his work as the 1930s progressed. However schizophrenically conflicted and inconclusive they may be, however, both *Voyage au bout de la nuit* and *L'Église* provide a substantive critique of fascism and its attendant dangers.

That Céline would confront fascism not only as a foreign specter, well entrenched in neighboring Italy and on the rise in countries like Germany, Japan, Finland, Hungary Portugal and Austria, but as an internal threat to French society and state, is not surprising given the rise of the far-right and home-grown fascism in pre-World War II France. Like these nations and many others in Europe, France saw the rise of domestic fascism within its own borders throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Although a fascist government never actually seized control of France, it was there, argues Zeev Sternhell, that for the first time Europe's radical right would acquire the essential characteristics of fascism.⁹ Divided into diverse schools and political organizations that made up many of France's *ligues d'extrême droite*, fascist groups like the *Croix-de-feu*, *Jeunesses Patriotes*

⁹ Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 1.

and the *Faisceau* shared a number of essential fascist features.¹⁰ Like Italian and German fascism, they emphasized a cult of extreme nationalism at the expense of the individual.¹¹ They championed youth, heroism and virility and challenged the tenets of democracy.¹² At their least offensive they argued for the replacement of capitalism with syndicalism, the economic system often employed by fascist governments wherein government and big business are fused through confederations of non-competitive trade and industrial unions, typically to the ultimate benefit of the state.¹³ At their worst, they exhibited anti-Semitic agendas that would later be forcefully echoed by Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy and France itself during the occupation.¹⁴

Perhaps the most prominent of all French fascist groups, Lieutenant Colonel François de La Rocque's *Croix-de-Feu* was founded as early as 1927. Like other fascist organizations at the time, the *Croix-de-Feu* embraced a paternalistic social vision, ultranationalism and xenophobia.¹⁵ Like Mussolini's *camicie nere* and Hitler's *Sturmabteilung*, the organization showed a marked contempt for parliamentary democracy and a willingness to engage in paramilitary violence.¹⁶ Other fascist groups

¹⁰ Ibid., 7.

¹¹ Ibid., 8.

¹² Ibid., 11-12, 19.

¹³ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴ Ibid., 13-14.

¹⁵ Sean Kennedy, *Reconciling France Against Democracy: The Croix De Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1927-1945* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2007), 15.

¹⁶ Ibid., 22.

also employed paramilitary violence, such as Georges Valois' *Faisceau*. Launched in 1925, the *Faisceau* similarly stressed class collaboration in a syndicalist environment, the preservation of social hierarchies and an authoritarian political system.¹⁷ Similarly, as Sean Kennedy argues, La Rocque and his followers “shared with Hitler and Mussolini a virulent hostility to Marxism and liberalism...emphasized ultra-nationalism, the leadership principle, and a rhetorical desire to end social conflict. The political strategies they developed to advance their agendas were also very similar to the leading exemplars of European fascism.”¹⁸ Around the time Céline wrote *Voyage au bout de la nuit* and *L'Église*, membership in the group rose rapidly. Whereas in January of 1930 the group had only 8,922 members, by the following January membership had nearly doubled to 16,240. In early 1932, the year *Voyage au bout de la nuit* was published, membership again grew by as much as forty percent, up to 22,644 members.¹⁹

If one takes into account membership figures across all of France's fascist organizations, the numbers tell an impressive story. The 155,000 members of French fascist groups in 1926 had more than doubled to 370,000 members by 1939. To put those numbers in context, Hitler assumed power in 1933 with only 850,000 Nazi party members, and Mussolini assumed power with only 200,000 *camicie nere* in 1922.²⁰ Furthermore, support for fascism often extended beyond the confines of party

¹⁷ Ibid., 20-21.

¹⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹⁹ Ibid., 37.

²⁰ Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The First Wave, 1924-1933* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), xi-xii.

membership, as French conservatives during the 1920s and 1930s commonly collaborated with fascist groups to further shared goals.²¹ During the 1920s, even the French government at times co-opted fascists in the struggle against radical trade unions.²² Both at home and abroad, then, the 1920s and 1930s during which Céline lived and wrote saw the emergence of fascism as a formidable threat.

Beyond manifestations of fascism as a politically organized force, Europe witnessed the rise of literature and art created and appropriated for the service of fascist ends. While many writers wrote explicitly fascist work, such as F.T. Marinetti and the authors of *Blut-und-Boden* fiction, critics have pointed to other, more subtle manifestations of fascism among literature of this period. David Carroll, for instance, building on Walter Benjamin's famous dictum that "the logical result of fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life," has argued that France saw its own variant of literary fascism.²³ Drawing attention to the totalizing capacity shared by both literature and fascism, Carroll argues for the fundamental inseparability of aesthetics and politics among a number of French writers of the 1930s, including Céline, for whom, he argues, aesthetics played an essentially political role.²⁴ Similarly, Elliot Neaman has pointed to a distinctly "fascist aesthetic" in the writings of German author Ernst Jünger, marked by a

²¹ Ibid., xii.

²² Daniel Woodley, *Fascism and Political Theory: Critical Perspectives on Fascist Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2010), 59.

²³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 243.

²⁴ David Carroll, *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

kitschy aestheticization of violence, destruction and death.²⁵ Recently, Mary Ann Frese Witt has taken up the critical pursuit of an “aesthetic fascism” in her readings of French and Italian modernist theater.²⁶ The connections between modernist literature and fascism, particularly the case of F.T. Marinetti, have been treated extensively by Andrew Hewitt, who explores how fascism accommodated Marinetti’s modernist project.²⁷ Whether or not one agrees with the connection between fascism and literary aesthetics made by these critics, it is clear that Céline’s own aesthetic in *Voyage au bout de la nuit* and *L’Église* cannot be easily considered a “fascist” one. There is no readily apparent pleasure taken in the violence described by Bardamu, the narrator of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, nor is there a stylistic aestheticization of such moments as one finds in Jünger’s writings. When Céline describes the beating of a native at the hands of a French colonist, for example, the description is direct and lacking aesthetic elaboration: “*Le Directeur se levant alors, agacé, d’une détente, le reçut le boy, d’une formidable paire de gifles et de deux coups de pied dans le bas ventre.*”²⁸ [The director suddenly rose, annoyed, striking the boy with two great slaps across the face and two kicks to the lower abdomen.] Nothing in the passage suggests a perverse pleasure taken in the boy’s pain of the kind Neaman describes, and there is no poeticizing the event.

²⁵ Elliot Neaman, *A Dubious Past: Ernst Jünger and the Politics of Literature After Nazism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

²⁶ Mary Ann Frese Witt, *The Search for Modern Tragedy: Aesthetic Fascism in Italy and France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

²⁷ Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

²⁸ Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, in *Romans* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 129.

Alice Kaplan suggests a potential political dimension to Céline's style by pointing to his pioneering use of argo in *Voyage au bout de la nuit*: "that way of writing is profoundly national," she declares, "it is nearly impervious to accurate translation in other native slangs."²⁹ Céline's use of untranslatable argot may be considered "national," but it would be difficult to consider it nationalistic in a work in which nationalism finds itself repeatedly under attack. In its act of deconstructing a traditional, univocal and high French, Céline's novel adopts a stylistic anti-authoritarianism that makes it a difficult candidate for the sort of fascist aesthetic literary critics have sought to identify in works from the period. In view of neighboring fascist Italy's attempt to standardize Italian around the time the novel was written, ousting both foreign words and native dialects, Céline's practice of dethroning standard French appears, if anything, directly contrary to fascist policies.³⁰ Nevertheless, the presence of such an aesthetic in works of the period is a potent reminder of fascism's reach during Céline's early years.

The critical attitudes toward fascism that emerge in Céline's early writings are not surprising when read in light of some of Céline's own political convictions at the time. Céline viewed state-sponsored monopoly capitalism as practiced by France in its colonies—a close cousin to Italy and Germany's official economic policy of syndicalism—as marking the rise of a "dehumanizing and bloodthirsty new order"

²⁹ Alice Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 118.

³⁰ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 138.

brought about by Germany.³¹ Similarly, Céline often criticized a mass political behavior that he believed had become the norm during his age.³² While he would later embrace increasingly fascist positions, “up to 1934,” writes Patrick McCarthy, “Céline had made few political pronouncements...[he] had warned against ‘extreme nationalism’, declared Hitler an ‘epileptic’ and fascism a menace and France ‘surrounded by whole nations of anaphylactic fools.’”³³ That Bardamu’s narrative criticizes such features of fascism is not surprising, then, especially as Céline encouraged readers to identify him with Bardamu.³⁴ Similarly, the anxiety toward the rise of fascism and France’s gradual movement toward it finds echo in Céline’s beliefs of the time. “Our society is rotten, dying, we are going, flying towards Fascism,” he wrote in 1935, believing fascism would triumph “because it was the ultimate evil.”³⁵

The most explicit link between French colonialism and fascism drawn by Céline in *Voyage au bout de la nuit* and *L’Église* connects the colonies to Italian fascism. French colonial administrator Monsieur Pistil’s excessive road building in *L’Église* calls to mind Mussolini’s massive road building projects that drastically surpassed vehicular demand and failed to spur mass motorization. “*Y me fait faire des routes et on y passe jamais rien dessus, y a personne ici...!*” [I made roads there and no one ever passes through, not a

³¹ Jack Muray, *The Landscapes of Alienation: Ideological Subversion in Kafka, Céline and Onetti* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 132.

³² *Ibid.*, 157.

³³ Patrick McCarthy, *Céline* (London: A. Lane, 1975), 124.

³⁴ Muray, *The Landscapes of Alienation*, 130.

³⁵ McCarthy, *Céline*, 125.

person...!] declares Pistil at one point in the play.³⁶ This is echoed in *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, where Tandernot, a French administrator, builds roads that go unused both by colonialists and natives until eventually “elles disparaissaient sous la végétation fort rapidement.”³⁷ [they quickly disappeared beneath the vegetation.] Similarly, in *Voyage au bout de la nuit* French colonial processes are repeatedly linked to the Roman Empire, of which Mussolini saw his fascist project as an extension and continuation. Lieutenant Grappa is described as “néronien” [Neronian] and one of his colonial subjects wears a “pagne à la romaine.”³⁸ [a Roman loincloth] “À la romaine” [in the Roman style] is exactly how the narrator describes Grappa’s vicious system of colonial justice against the natives.³⁹ Grappa’s name—the same as that of the Italian liqueur—also links his brutal administration of justice “à la romaine” to Italy.

In linking French colonial brutality to the Italian state, Céline’s writings echo a domestic turn toward Mussolini among the French right. Georges Valoi’s *Faisceau* movement, named after the Italian *fascisti*, claimed inspiration from fascist Italy⁴⁰, and Charles Maurras, leader of the anti-Semitic, anti-democratic and ultra-nationalistic *Action Française*, was also very sympathetic toward Italian fascism.⁴¹ As Robert Soucy writes of

³⁶ Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *L’Église: Comédie En Cinq Actes* (Paris: Les Éditions Denoël et Steele), 28.

³⁷ Céline, *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, 134.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴⁰ Kennedy, *Reconciling France Against Democracy*, 20.

⁴¹ Soucy, *French Fascism*, xvii.

Marraus and those on the French far-right, “[He] and his colleagues welcomed Mussolini’s accession to power in 1922 with great enthusiasm. Bainville praised fascism for having broken the socialist wave in Italy, called upon the Duce to establish a full-fledged dictatorship, and regretted that France was no longer ‘the most reactionary country in the world.’ Daudet hoped that a similar counterrevolutionary movement would develop in France...he...predicted that should France be threatened from the left as Italy had been, the French right would copy Mussolini by mobilizing fifty thousand men before parliament in a show of force. Daudet asked potential contributors to the AF to imitate Italian industrialists who had donated to fascism.” Similarly, recounts Soucy of Maurras, “In July 1923 [he] characterized the doctrines of Italian fascism as ‘close cousins and even twin sisters’ of those taught by the AF for the previous twenty-five years. When it came to tactics...he was quite willing to pay Mussolini’s blackshirts the homage of imitation.”⁴² The *Action Française* frequently praised Mussolini’s “Latin monarcho-dictatorship,” contrasting it with the “democratic-parliamentary-socialist plague” that had taken over France. “In 1929,” writes Soucy, “Murras described the Duce as a ‘statesman of the first magnitude’ and marveled that ‘so far there has not been a single fault in the curious association of wisdom and genius’ that characterized the dictator.”⁴³ Not only did France’s far right and fascist contingency admire Italian fascism, but they also sought to imitate it at home.

Often, the very fascist groups that looked to Italy as a model for a new France were some of colonialism’s most prominent supporters. In suggesting a kinship between

⁴² Ibid., 17.

⁴³ Ibid., 12.

fascism and colonialism, then, Céline's writings reproduce the tight link that already existed between both movements abroad and at home. Just as Mussolini envisioned his fascist state as a revival of Imperial Rome and the *Mare Nostrum*, expanding Italy's colonial reach toward this end, so French fascists envisioned a colonial empire as an essential bedrock of a fascist France. Pierre Taittinger, head of the *Jeunesses Patriotes*, for example, was a staunch supporter of French colonialism as was *Faisceau* leader Georges Valois and members of the *Croix-de-Feu*.⁴⁴ Criticizing France's purported *mission civilisatrice*, Valois "concluded that civilization was more important than democracy and that the 'pure humanitarian' lacked a 'taste for reality.' He rejected the 'dogmas of the free fraternity of peoples' when he found himself faced with the 'savagery' and 'barbarism' of Asia."⁴⁵ The affinities shared by fascism and colonialism were not lost on French fascists at the time.

If the French fascists and adjoining far-right organizations staunchly supported colonialism, it was not a colonialism dictated by the necessities of *noblesse oblige* and the *mission civilisatrice*, those imperatives to which France's republican government claimed to adhere, but a colonialism more in line with that of Italian and German colonial practices, where naked national self-interest was their sole justification and native interests were largely neglected. Not only did many of the French *ligues d'extrême droite* draw thousands of settlers to the colonies during the 1930s, but they were markedly hostile to "any concept of a republican imperialism or a colonial system to which

⁴⁴ Ibid., 86.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 131.

Republican values were transmitted.”⁴⁶ In an illustrating example, La Rocque, staunchly pro-colonialist leader of the *Croix-de-Feu*, had volunteered to take part in France’s brutal 1925 suppression of Abd el-Krim’s Riffian forces in Morocco.⁴⁷ Having deliberately provoked a war with Abd ek-Krim, most historians believe, France went on to use poison gas against Rif natives, bomb villages containing only women and children, and ultimately exile of 150 natives.⁴⁸ As Martin Thomas describes, fascist and far-right support for colonialism in France often took on its own distinctive characteristics: “Maurras praised imperial settler communities as the embodiment of a lost patriotic virtue based on powerful masculinity, ardent Catholicism, and attachment to the soil...*Croix-de-Feu* organizers in Algeria and their local ultra-rightist rivals in Doriot’s PPF even tapped into the residual anti-Semitism of the settler community and some elements of the wider Muslim population.”⁴⁹ It is precisely this vision of an empire ruled by racism, authoritarianism and fanatical male leadership—one sought by domestic and foreign fascists, both in Europe and overseas—that is contested in Céline’s early writings.

Although no critic has yet explored the connections Céline’s early writings pose between colonialism and fascism, most agree that *Voyage au bout de la nuit* manifests a sharply critical attitude toward French colonialism. Its unique mixture of extreme leftism and occasional racism, and its stark contrast to Céline’s later arch-conservative writings,

⁴⁶ Martin Thomas, *The French Empire Between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ David S. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif: Abd El-Krim and the Rif Rebellion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), 169, 202, 208.

⁴⁹ Martin Thomas, *The French Empire Between the Wars*, 11.

however, have left many critics puzzling over how to make sense of the novel's politics. In general, critics have responded one of three ways. Some, such as Anne-Marie C. Hampton, have declared the work to be staunchly anti-colonial and leftist, drawing a clear line between it and Céline's later work. For them, *Voyage au bout de la nuit* contests French claims to innate superiority over colonial natives and challenges the national narrative of the *mission civilisatrice*.⁵⁰ At the other extreme, some critics have attempted to put the novel on a continuum with Céline's later anti-Semitic and conservative writings. Philippe Almeras, for example, points to the connection the novel makes between Jews and Africans in an attempt to link its racism to Céline's later anti-Semitism.⁵¹ A third critical position, the one to which this study belongs, acknowledges both ideological poles at play in the novel. Rosemarie Scullion, for example, argues that Céline's vacillation between the left and the right reflects the ambiguity of protofascist ideology, which "involves the takeover of an anti-capitalist and anti-liberal rhetoric, historically associated with the Left's critique of the bourgeois order, by a militant, anti-democratic and nationalist Right."⁵² For Luc Rassin, the novel, along with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, is marked by its dual critique of colonialism and participation in its cultural mystification: "Textes sévères, à n'en pas douter, symptômes clairs de la mauvaise conscience européenne, qui ont sans nul doute contribué à créer un climat propice au développement du sentiment anticolonialiste en Europe; mais textes

⁵⁰ Anne-Marie C. Hampton, *Gide, Maran, Céline et l'Afrique: Exotisme, Colonialisme et Humanisme* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 182.

⁵¹ Philippe Almeras, "Towards a Third Reading of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*," *Bulletin of Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association* 26 (1) (1972): 22-28.

⁵² Rosemarie Scullion, "Madness and Fascist Discourse in Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit*," *French Review* 61 (5) (1988): 716.

profondément confirmateurs aussi, inaptes à échapper aux contraintes du discours européen sur l’Afrique.”⁵³ [Harsh texts, without a doubt, clear symptoms of the European bad conscience, that without a doubt contributed to the creation of a climate favorable to the development of an anticolonial sentiment in Europe; but texts that are also profoundly confirming, unable to escape from the constraints of the European discourse on Africa.] Henri Mitterand also echoes such sentiments in his *Le discours du roman*, where he views *Voyage au bout de la nuit* to be both critical of and sympathetic to African natives and colonialism as a whole.⁵⁴ Although the African passages of Céline’s novel appear largely critical of the colonial project, laying bare its violence, intolerance and miscarriages of justice that contradict the professed national premise of the *mission civilisatrice*, that a subtle racism emerges in his writing, evocative of his later turn toward fascism, cannot be denied.

While scholars of Céline’s early writings have addressed his criticism of French colonialism, none have explored the connections his writings pose between colonialism and fascism. If French democratic leaders of the period criticized Italian fascism, Céline’s work seems to answer that they need to take a closer look at France’s own practices.⁵⁵ Upon arriving at Bambola-Bragamance, for example, Bardamu encounters the colony’s fearsome and megalomaniac unnamed governor. The governor embodies, like the *Duce*, the fascist leadership principle: virile and imposing, he leads his state absolutely. He is both feared—“*ses militaires et ses fonctionnaires osaient à peine respirer quand il*

⁵³ Luc Resson, “Chacun Sa Place”, 280.

⁵⁴ Henri Mitterand, *Le discours du roman* (Paris: PUF, 1980), 101-104.

⁵⁵ H. James Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period 1918-1940* (Westport: Praeger, 1997), 27.

daignait abaisser ses regards jusqu'à leurs personnes"⁵⁶ [his soldiers and his civil servants hardly dared to breathe when he deigned to lower his gaze toward them]—and loved, by those to whom he teaches "*le droit et la façon d'admirer le Gouverneur.*"⁵⁷ [the right and the proper way to admire the Governor.] Garbed in full uniform and medals, the governor's clothing evokes the medal-studded military dress of Mussolini: "*[il] avait l'air...de promener sur son uniforme tout l'or de ses finances, et avec du soleil dessus c'était à ne pas y croire, sans compter les plumes.*"⁵⁸ [he had the air...of displaying on his uniform all the gold of his wealth, and with the sun shining there it was nearly unbelievable, without counting the feathers.] A symbol of his absolute importance, he resides in a "palace," the largest building in the colony, even larger, as the narrator sarcastically notes, than the hospital.⁵⁹ Adhering to a central tenet of fascist ideology, state and ruler are united in the figure of the governor, who composes, along with "*des vols d'objets possibles et impossibles et enfin de la sexualité*" [the theft of possible and impossible objects and finally of sexuality], the "*trois couleurs du drapeau colonial*" [the three colors of the colonial flag].⁶⁰ Such a governing figure of absolute authority evokes no sympathy in Céline's narrative, which labels him a "*tyran*" [tyrant] whose "*inexpiable muflerie*" [unpardonable foolishness] is discussed often among the

⁵⁶ Céline, *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, 125.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

colonialists.⁶¹ The governor bears a host of offenses to his name, as the narrator describes: “*Quant au Gouverneur, le bruit de son rappel circulait chaque matin depuis dix bonnes années et cependant le télégram si intéressant de cette disgrâce n’arrivait jamais et cela en dépit des deux lettres anonymes, au moins, qui s’envolaient chaque semaine, depuis toujours, à l’adresse du Ministre, portant au compte de ce tyran local mille bordées d’horreurs très précises.*”⁶² [As for the governor, talk of his dismissal circulated each morning after ten good years and nevertheless the telegram, so interesting, detailing that disgrace of his never arrived and all that in spite of two anonymous letters, at the least, that were sent each week, since forever, to the address of the Minister, detailing very precisely that local tyrant’s thousand horrors.] Céline’s text itself functions as one of these “*lettres anonymes*,” calling the misdeeds of French colonialism to public attention.

The French administration’s failure to keep Bragamance’s tyrannical governor in check, let alone call him to account for his injustices, recalls France’s own frequent inability to stand up to fascist Italy’s misdeeds. When, in 1923, Mussolini bombarded and occupied the Greek island of Corfu, France, unlike Britain, openly supported Mussolini’s actions. More ethically questionable than their support for Mussolini was their ground for doing so: fear of drawing attention to their own military occupation of the Ruhr.⁶³ Similarly, although France had pledged to defend Yugoslavia against any aggressors, France did not take any action in support of Yugoslavia when Mussolini had his army

⁶¹ Ibid., 143.

⁶² Ibid., 146.

⁶³ Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period*, 24.

occupy and take Fiume in 1923.⁶⁴ In failing to confront Bragamance's Mussolini-like governor, the French administration of *Voyage au bout de la nuit* echoes France's own failure to confront the growing misdeeds of fascism and sounds the alarm against a dangerous loosening of ethical values on the part of the French themselves.

Pistil of *L'Église*, another figure whose futile road building suggests an association with Italian fascism, is characterized by Tandernot as a “*saligaud*” [bastard] and an “*exemple lamentable d'Européen dégénéré*” [lamentable example of a European degenerate] whose presence in the colonies demoralizes the native Africans.⁶⁵ Recalling fascist militarism and Mussolini's policies of excising high taxes to the impoverishment of Italians, Pistil is chastised by his peers for using French infantrymen to collect unjustly high taxes from the natives.⁶⁶ In exposing Pistil's wrongdoings, which the French administration in the play attempts to keep hidden from public view, Céline's work replicates *Voyage au bout la nuit*'s commitment to exposing the unspoken misdeeds of French colonialism.⁶⁷ Pistil's connections to Italian fascism underscore not only the threat to French society posed by overseas colonial practice, but by an ideology of authoritarianism and racism to which, Céline's writings suggest, the French are themselves susceptible.

Grappa, another ruler recalling Italian fascism, is as unflattering as both Pistil and the governor. Grappa raises a native militia without even providing enough rifles or shoes

⁶⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁵ Céline, *L'Église*, 20.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 24.

for his men, as the narrator protests with an exclamation mark. Each, however, true to Grappa's nationalistic fervor, receives his own flag.⁶⁸ Grappa's second-in-command Alicide insults and kicks the native soldiers "*assez injustement*," [rather unjustly] notes the narrator. Grappa similarly meets out indiscriminate injustice, ordering multiple beatings simply out of disinterest and frustration with his judicial duties. "*Allons!*" [Let's go!] he at one point declares, "*Vingt coups! Qu'on en finisse! Vingt coups de chicote pour ce vieux maquereau!...Ça l'apprendra à venir m'emmerder ici tous les jeudis depuis deux mois avec son histoire de moutons à la noix!*"⁶⁹ [Twenty blows! Get it over with! Twenty blows of the rod for this old mackerel!...That will quickly teach him to come bother me here every Thursday for two months with his story of hopeless sheep!] In its act of witness, Céline's narrative again challenges the perceived silence and indifference with which such abuse is met, like Grappa's assistants who "*se turent pendant que ça durait.*"⁷⁰ [remained quiet while that lasted.]

In his fanatical quest to extract tax money through harsh corporal punishment, so that "*toutes les minuscules disponibilités indigènes demeurent cela se comprend pour l'impôt*" [all the available natives funds remaining will be taken for tax]—an administrative practice "*à la romaine*," as the narrator notes, Grappa evokes the Italian fascist practice of collecting excessively high taxes to the detriment of the populace. In his general violence toward and neglect of the natives—he would rather feast his eyes on the sea than aid those natives "*ahuries de misère, ravagées par mille pestes*" [stupefied

⁶⁸ Céline, *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, 150.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

with misery, ravaged by a thousand pests]—Grappa evokes fascist Italy’s neglect and mistreatment of its own colonial natives.⁷¹ Closely interwoven with this neglect of colonial natives was Italy’s own prejudice against racial difference. Such prejudices find repeated echo in *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, where natives are not only unjustly beaten but also insulted, racially slandered and vociferously hated with great frequency by the inhabitants of the governor’s colony. By suggesting a link between French colonial practice and fascist Italy, Céline’s novel highlights the dangers of fascist racial ideology and violence, dangers into which the French themselves risked sliding. Italy attacked racial difference both at home in continental Europe, along France’s own borders, and abroad in the colonies. In so doing, the regime demonstrated the potential continuity of fascist ideology across diverse geographic barriers: what happened in the colonies might just as easily happen at home in Europe.

If, as Mary Ann Frese Witt has argued, belief in the superiority of one’s own race was one of the central tenets of fascism, then Italy was no exception.⁷² Mussolini sought the “neutralization” of non-white races, viewing such mixed-racial spaces like America as sites of a deviant modernity.⁷³ In the Italian colonies, as in the German, fascists worried about miscegenation among Europeans and natives, which they had outlawed, and as well as the spread of non-white races.⁷⁴ Although racially mixed children could become Italian citizens before 1940, such a policy was not out of acceptance of racial

⁷¹ Ibid., 157.

⁷² Mary Ann Frese Witt, *The Search for Modern Tragedy*, 6.

⁷³ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 20, 41.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 124, 129, 128.

difference, but intended to “build a two-tier society in which the distinction between colonizers and colonized was clear.”⁷⁵ Whereas the French sought, at least officially, to integrate natives into French culture and society, governing Italians rigorously enforced distinctions between them and African natives. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat explains, the colonies provided Italian fascists with “a laboratory” for their own “fascist social engineering projects.” “Italian colonial authorities and experts,” she writes, “felt that assimilationism on the French model led to the loss of white prestige by encouraging the colonized to mimic their European rulers. They advocated the propagation of a politics of difference that would continually remind the Africans of their inferior status.”⁷⁶ In aligning French colonial practices with those of fascist Italy, practices which the Italians also instituted at home on the continent, Céline’s early writings point to the dangerous consequences of embracing racial prejudice.

Attitudes of racial superiority often facilitated extreme brutality toward those outside the privileged Italian circle. Fascists employed extreme brutality in the administration of colonial Libya, where their “ruthless suppression of native opposition” was completed just one year before *Voyage au bout de la nuit*’s publication.⁷⁷ Mussolini was the first to violate the 1925 Gas Protocol when he ordered the use of gas warfare against natives in Libya and Eritrea during the 1920s.⁷⁸ In Cyrenaica, a region of Libya,

⁷⁵ Giulia Barcera, “Patrilinearity, Race, and Identity: The Upbringing of Italo-Eritreans during Italian Colonialism,” in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. Ruth Ben-Ghiat (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 97-98.

⁷⁶ Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 129-130.

⁷⁷ Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period*, 35-36.

⁷⁸ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 4.

fascist Italy subjected natives to mass population transfers, forced marches and mass detention in concentration camps during the late 1920s.⁷⁹ In these camps “punishments, executions, and deaths by starvation” occurred daily. Of the 100,000 total Cyrenaicans fascist Italy interned, a staggering 40,000 died.⁸⁰ Once again, fascist colonial practice surpassed the French in racism and brutality. “On the point of internment policies,” argues Nicola Labanca, “neither French nor British colonial policy compared to Italian fascism.”⁸¹

In addition to racism and brutality against natives, general neglect, such as Grappa demonstrates, was common under Italian fascism. In Somalia, for instance, there was virtually no education system throughout most of the colonial period. “The history of European education in Italian Somalia,” writes Robert Hess, “could, in fact, be characterized as virtually complete neglect.”⁸² Native Somalians were moved away from white city centers to neglected urban peripheries, reinforcing an apartheid system that stressed the superiority of Italians and discouraged any mixing with or assumption of native culture.⁸³

Racial prejudice was not reserved by fascists for the colonies, but similarly played out on the continent. Ethnic minorities within Italy were labeled as “anti-Italian” and

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Nicola Labanca, “Italian Colonial Internment,” in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. Ruth Ben-Ghiat (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 32.

⁸¹ Ibid., 34.

⁸² Robert Hess, *Italian Colonialism in Somalia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 169.

⁸³ Andrea Naletto, *Italiani in Somalia: Storia di un colonialismo straccione* (Verona: Centro studi Ettore Luccini, 2011), 39-41.

forced to adopt new “national” surnames.⁸⁴ Ethnic Germans living in South Tyrol, for instance, faced severe restrictions at the hands of the fascists. Like Italy’s colonial natives, they were stripped of any autonomy or democracy they had once possessed and forced to adapt to fascist policies. Administrated by the military, like much of the colonies, the area saw the removal of locally appointed leaders who were replaced by fascist appointees.⁸⁵ The use of German was banned, and in 1925 local German presses were closed.⁸⁶ As in the colonies, fascist racial ideology became a dangerous weapon that threatened the rights, independence and very existence of a racial other. In alluding to such a system, Céline’s novel points to the dangers of France’s own oft-unspoken racism. If *Voyage au bout de la nuit* appears sympathetic to African suffering at the hands of racism, violence and authoritarian oppression, all cornerstones of fascist ideology, it is important to note that such sympathy seems short-lived in the context of Céline’s writings. Only a few years later Céline would attack the Jews in his anti-Semitic pamphlets, treating Africans and Jews as an ensemble. “*Le Juif*,” he would write in his *Bagatelles pour un massacre* (1937), “*dont les nerfs africains sont toujours plus ou moins de "zinc", ne possède qu'un réseau de sensibilité fort vulgaire, nullement relevé dans la série humaine, comme tout ce qui provient des pays chauds, il est précoce, il est bâclé.*”⁸⁷

[The Jew, whose Africans nerves are more or less always made of “zinc,” does not possess anything more than a network of vulgar sensibility, in no way seasoned in a

⁸⁴ Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 18-19.

⁸⁵ Rolf Steininger, *South Tyrol: A Minority Conflict of the Twentieth Century* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 24.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 25.

⁸⁷ Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Bagatelles Pour Un Massacre* (Paris: Denoël, 1937), 114.

human classification, just as everything that comes from that hot country, the Jew is premature, the Jew is botched.] Similarly, in *L'École des cadavres* (1938) he would write that “*Les Juifs, hybrides afro-asiatiques, quart, demi-nègres et proches orientaux, fornicateurs déchaînés, n'ont rien à faire dans ce pays.*”⁸⁸ [The Jews, hybrid Afro-Asians, a quarter, half-blacks and near Oriental, out of control fuckers, do not have anything to do in this country.] If one is to accept Nicholas Hewitt's contention that “Céline's anti-Semitism is part of an integral racism extending from his disparagement of the Blacks in Africa,” then it must at least be conceded that as late as 1932 Céline's writing betrayed a clearly sympathetic attitude toward African identity.⁸⁹ While the narrator's declaration that “*la gentillesse relative des indigènes à mon égard s'expliquait de la plus crapuleuse des façons*” [the relative kindness of the natives appeared to me to be of the most villainous sort] alludes to the racism to come in Céline's writings, it does not erase the largely sympathetic portrait of the exploited natives that he sketches in *Voyage au bout de la nuit*.⁹⁰

In establishing parallels between French colonial practice and Italian fascism, Céline's works betray an anxiety toward the rise of fascist ideology in Europe. If the French are themselves not careful, his work seems to suggest, they may suddenly discover themselves succumbing to the dangerous beliefs, values and practices operating both among their Italian neighbors and within their own borders. The domestic institutionalization of racial prejudice and scapegoating is alluded to when Bardamu

⁸⁸ Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *L'École des cadavres* (Paris: Denoël, 1938), 128.

⁸⁹ Nicholas Hewitt, *The Life of Céline: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 175.

⁹⁰ Céline, *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, 183.

declares that the crew about the *Admiral Bragueton*, who have made him a scapegoat for their troubles by virtue of his difference, must have his image imprinted upon their minds “*comme celui de criminel célèbre qu’on publie dans les journaux.*”⁹¹ [just as the one of that famous criminal that was published in the papers.] When Bardamu is forced to declare his unending love for the French empire and military to save himself from the French officers aboard the ship, singing the praises of Charles Mangin, the French officer who occupied the Rhineland and tried to create a pro-French Rhenish Republic to deny Germany the Rhine’s west bank, the dangers of forcing an aggressive nationalism and militarism upon France is suggested.⁹² In Bardamu’s affirmation of the officers’ nationalistic and militaristic ethos, the novel underscores the dangers of too-easily succumbing to growing right-wing and fascist pressures among the French.

Voyage au bout de la nuit often collapses the distinction between the colonies and France, between a radical “there” and a democratic “here.” A makeshift housing establishment in Bragamance appears to the narrator almost identical to La Garenne-Bezons, and within the African forest Bardamu imagines “*un métro entier*” [an entire subway] easily moving through the towering trees.⁹³ If the novel suggests that the misdeeds of French colonialism and fascism might just as easily happen within continental France, it also suggests that they might just as easily happen to the French themselves rather than to a clearly defined racial other. Bardamu compares the misery of the natives, who most frequently fall victim to French violence, hatred and oppression, to

⁹¹ Ibid., 114.

⁹² Ibid., 120.

⁹³ Ibid., 127, 162.

that of “*les pauvres de chez nous.*”⁹⁴ [the poor back at (our) home.] Having witnessed Grappa’s tyrannical system of justice, Bardamu fears that he himself might fall victim to its wrath. “*Ils me feraient arrêter sur!*,” he protests, “*Qui me jugerait alors? Des types spéciaux armés de lois terribles qu’ils tiendraient on ne sait d’où, comme le Conseil de guerre, mais dont ils ne vous donnent jamais les intentions véritables et qui s’amusent à vous faire gravir avec, en saignant, le sentier à pic au-dessus de l’enfer, le chemin qui conduit les pauvres à la crève.*” [They’ll have me arrested for sure! Who will judge me the? Those special types, armed with terrible laws that they grasp from no one knows where, like the War Council, but who do not ever give you their true intentions and who amuse themselves by making you climb, bleeding, the path to the top of hell, the road that leads the poor ones to the cold.]

In his fear of French authorities, Bardamu calls attention to the dangers of the law. “*La loi,*” he declares, “*c’est le grand << Luna Park >> de la douleur. Quand le miteux se laisse saisir par elle, on l’entend encore crier des siècles et des siècles après.*”⁹⁵ [The law is the great ‘Luna Park’ of suffering. When the pitiful allow themselves to be seized by it, one hears them cry again and again for centuries and centuries afterward.]

Bardamu’s critique of Grappa’s “*loi*” throughout *Voyage au bout du la nuit* echoes fascist Italy’s use of law toward its own authoritarian and racial ends. Not only did Mussolini enact domestic and colonial legislation intended to uphold the racial supremacy of Italians, culminating in the 1938 anti-Semitic laws, but the entire fascist government was retrospectively legitimized through legislative means. The original Italian constitution,

⁹⁴ Ibid., 142.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 173.

the Albertine Statute, was preserved, albeit suspended, while a second constitution went into effect as long as the (perpetual) state of emergency Mussolini had declared lasted.⁹⁶ In fearing that he himself might fall victim to a tyrannically-welded law, Bardamu points to the dangers of Grappa's justice "à la romaine." Should the French themselves adopt a characteristically fascist use of the law against an ethnic other in the colonies, his works suggest, they risk having such a practice turned against them. Just as Mussolini used the law to legitimize his own authoritarian rule and persecute those who opposed him, so Bardamu fears persecution at the wrath of the new "law" the French have implemented.

In its evocation of Italian fascism, Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* and *L'Église* suggest the dangers of French racial prejudice, authoritarianism and violence. Composed in an era of rising fascism, these texts both critique fascist practice and attest to an anxiety about its gradual rise. What might once have been conceived of as mere abuse of power or bigotry among French administrators takes on a new and sinister profile in light of startling affinities to fascist practice and ideology. Céline's writings invite the reader to contemplate the repercussions of such practices, repercussions that extend far beyond the confines of France's African colonies.

Only a few years after the publication of Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* and *L'Église*, novelist Joyce Cary would also explore African colonialism, this time from the vantage point of the British Empire. Three of his novels from this period, *The African Witch* (1936), *Castle Corner* (1938) and *Mister Johnson* (1939) are either in wholly or in part concerned with the empire, and, like Céline's writings, all suggest a connection between colonial experience and fascism. *The African Witch* tells the story of Louis

⁹⁶ Daniel Woodley, *Fascism and Political Theory*, 90.

Aladai, a young Nigerian nationalist and successor to the Rimi throne who returns to Nigeria upon graduating from Oxford and attempts to rightfully seize power in Rimi. Aladai is unsuccessful in garnering the support of the British, and eventually launches a rebellion against them at the end of the novel in which he is ultimately killed. In *Mister Johnson*, an African colonial subject, Mister Johnson, helps a British official, Rudbeck, to devise schemes to steal British funds in order to promote his own administrative projects. When their crime is discovered, Johnson, like Aladai, is killed by the British. *Castle Corner* tells the epic story of the Anglo-Irish Corner family, made up of John Corner, who inherits and administers the family's Castle Corner, and Felix Corner, who travels to West Africa to make his fortune. The connection these three works posit between colonial experience and fascism has yet to be explored by critics, who, since an outpouring of Cary scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s, have since confined the writer to critical neglect. In recontextualizing British colonialism in light of growing European fascism, Cary's novels offer a criticism of fascist racial and economic policies at the same time as they attest to anxiety about the rise of fascism within Britain. These novels both point to the ways in which British colonial policy risked fostering fascist extremism and challenge the widely-accepted British policy of appeasement toward fascist Germany. As in the case of Céline's work, the dangers of replicating or too readily accepting fascist ideology and practice shed new light on British colonial experience.

Although Cary wrote from within a democratic Britain, free from the weight of authoritarian rule that neighboring nations experienced, his native land did see its share of fascist fervor as the movement spread across Europe during the 1930s. Fascist and anti-democratic parties and ideologues proliferated during this period, with the British Union

of Fascists being by far the largest, most influential and most vocal.⁹⁷ Like Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy, The British Union of Fascists argued for the replacement of capitalism with syndicalism in Britain and disregarded democracy as too cumbersome and inefficient a political system, calling instead for a strong masculine leader.⁹⁸ Like most British fascist organizations, the British Union of Fascists espoused anti-Semitism, unofficially from its early days and officially as of 1934. Fiercely nationalistic and militaristic, they imitated, like many of the French fascist organizations, the *camicie nere* and *Sturmabteilung* through their use of organized paramilitary violence.⁹⁹ Fascism's influence in Britain extended far beyond the British Union of Fascists and similar fascist parties, however. As late as 1936, British enthusiasm for Nazi Germany affected a sizable portion of the population and saw a steady increase.¹⁰⁰ In suggesting a potentially dangerous relationship between British colonial governance and European fascism, then, Cary's novels speak to the seductive lure of fascism even outside of its host countries. While no scholars have yet considered how Cary's writings respond to fascism, work has been done investigating explicitly fascist and anti-fascist writing in Britain. Judy Suh, for example, has argued that British writers used middlebrow literature as a vehicle to both

⁹⁷ Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travelers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-9* (London: Constable, 1980), 45.

⁹⁸ Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39: Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 90-91.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁰⁰ Griffiths, *Fellow Travelers of the Right*, 191.

promote and criticize fascism.¹⁰¹ Fascists in particular, she argues, attempted to exploit traditional cultural narratives, that is to say the ordinary and the familiar, rather than daring aesthetics and the avant-garde, to advance their own ends.¹⁰² Whether one is to agree with Suh's perspective or that of critics like Elliot Neaman, who points to a distinctive fascist aesthetic that glorified violence and death, Cary's work is not easily assimilatable into either model.¹⁰³ Like Céline, his often stylistically traditional writings betray little that could be construed as a "fascist aesthetic." Cary's descriptions of violence and injustice fail to glorify or aestheticize their subject matter. When Mister Johnson is executed, for instance, the narrative refuses to linger over or embellish the scene: "Rudbeck leans through the door, aims the carbine at the back of the boy's head and blows his brains out. Then he turns and hands it back to the sentry," writes Cary succinctly.¹⁰⁴ Nor do Cary's novels visit the ordinary and familiar in order to exploit them to political ends, as Judy Suh suggests of British fascist literature, opting instead to treat the exotic and unfamiliar. In turning their attention toward empire, however, Cary's works, like Céline's, allow for a rich and multilayered engagement with fascism that transcends a simply "anti-fascist" critique, pointing toward uncomfortable and threatening affinities between British policy and culture and fascist practice.

That Cary's writings betray an anxiety about fascism comes as no surprise given his

¹⁰¹ Judy Suh, *Fascism and Anti-Fascism in Twentieth Century British Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰³ Elliot Neaman, *A Dubious Past: Ernst Jünger and the Politics of Literature After Nazism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 106-120.

¹⁰⁴ Joyce Cary, *Mister Johnson* (New York: Harper, 1951), 253.

own concerns over fascism's growth and his passionate commitment to democratic values. "Joyce," as Malcolm Foster explains, "like many other people, was concerned about what was happening in the political world of Europe. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the weak attitude displayed by the Conservative Government toward it aroused a great many people in Britain. Both the Liberal and the Labour Parties took much stronger stands against the revolt of the Spanish generals and the aid which they were given by Hitler and Mussolini."¹⁰⁵ Cary was himself a member of the Labour party, which favored standing up to fascists rather than Britain's existing policy of appeasement.¹⁰⁶ Cary was troubled not only by the rise of fascism abroad and what he saw as Britain's failure to adequately confront it, but by the growing tide of fascist sentiment within Britain. He was, as Foster puts it, "a strong defender of political democracy and parliamentary government at a time when these beliefs were being challenged with great force from the Left and the Right."¹⁰⁷ Cary's juxtaposition of fascism and colonialism also makes sense in view of the critical positions that he often took toward British colonial practice. "I really believe there is no government in the world so mean as the British," he wrote in 1917, "so mean, so time serving, so short-sighted, so hypocritical...Lugard is a mean man, and a spiteful man. He will take a great deal of trouble to put an emir or a critic out of the way."¹⁰⁸ In Cary's African novels, his criticism of Frederick Lugard, the British colonial administrator under whom he served in

¹⁰⁵ Malcolm Foster, *Joyce Cary: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968), 309.

¹⁰⁶ M.M. Mahood, *Joyce Cary's Africa* (London: Methuen, 1964), 68.

¹⁰⁷ Foster, *Joyce Cary*, 281.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 152-153.

Nigeria, will be both echoed and compounded by his growing concerns over the rise of fascism.

If Céline contemplated Italian fascism in his writings from 1932 and 1933, Cary's work from 1936-1939 looks to the most towering specter facing Europe during those years: German fascism. Such a focus is not surprising given the radical actions taken by Germany at the time and the continuity between domestic British fascism and German fascism. Just as French fascists had looked to Mussolini to provide a model for themselves in the early 1930s, so British fascists looked to Hitler to provide a model for themselves when the Nazis rose to power. The largest fascist organization in Britain, the British Union of Fascists, for example, whose ideology of nationalism, militarism, syndicalism, anti-Semitism, and authoritarianism closely matched that of Nazi Germany's, became increasingly fond of Germany throughout the 1930s. In 1936, their movement acquired "National Socialist" in its title, in homage to Germany.¹⁰⁹ It was German influence on the British Union of Fascists that moved them toward official anti-Semitism in the mid 1930s, by which time the party embraced a policy of official support for Nazi Germany.¹¹⁰ Oswald Mosley, leader of the group, met with Hitler as early as 1935 and would go on to marry Diana Mosley, a close friend of Hitler. At their wedding, which took place in the house of Joseph Goebbels, Hitler was one of the only six guests in attendance.¹¹¹ Cary's focus on the dangerous relationship between Britain and German fascism echoes this pre-existing romance that he so strongly detested.

¹⁰⁹ Linehan, *British Fascism*, 105.

¹¹⁰ Griffiths, *Fellow Travelers of the Right*, 85, 106.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

Just as British fascists looked to Germany to provide a model for themselves, so Germany looked to Britain, and particularly to British colonialism, to provide a model for their own endeavors. Cary's use of the colonial space to interrogate the relationship between British policy and German fascism, then, builds on Germany's own use of British colonialism as a model for its practices. As Gerwin Strobl describes, before the outbreak of war one of the Nazi's key objectives "was to forge an alliance with Britain and to emulate the 'ruthlessness' of the British Empire in dealing with Eastern Europe."¹¹² It was because of this "ruthlessness" and "absence of moral scruples" that Hitler saw in Britain that he so admired them.¹¹³ The Nazi party often argued to the German people that, as Strobl describes, that "British history...had demonstrated time and again that the use of force—or the threat of it—was the surest way of safeguarding national interests. And as Britain's international standing proved, this approach did not preclude diplomatic respectability. On the contrary, it was essential in securing and maintaining Great Power status. What had worked for Britain would now also work for the Third Reich."¹¹⁴ Germany often pointed toward British militarism and territorial conquest in the colonies as a defense of their own aggressive actions on the continent. When Germany remilitarized the Rhineland in violation of the Treaty of Versailles and to the outcry of France in 1936, for instance, they justified their action by comparing it to Britain's successful military standoff with France over control of the Nile River.

"Comparing the crises on the Rhine and the Nile made the Third Reich seem moderate,"

¹¹² Gerwin Strobl, *The Germanic Isle: Nazi Perceptions of Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Preface.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

writes Strobl. “[Germany] had, after all, in the famous phrase, ‘merely invaded its own front garden.’ Events at Fashoda, on the other hand, had been an undisguised exercise in imperial expansion. Britain had had neither legal nor substantive moral rights in the Sudan. And if European claims were to be admitted, French claims on the Nile were no less credible than those of Britain. But British interests were at stake, and all other considerations duly took second place.”¹¹⁵ The main illustrated weekly newspaper in Germany at the time, the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, described how Britain had “[seized] the opportunity brutally” in Fashoda and described how Reich party leaders saw Germany simply following in the footsteps of imperial powers like Britain.¹¹⁶

Throughout the 1930s, the German state-controlled press often invoked British colonialism in its pages, featuring stories highlighting British militarism and brutality in the colonies.¹¹⁷ Articles pointed to the Tasmanian genocide, for example, in which the British introduction of disease and warfare into Australia resulted in the extinction of the Tasmanian race, and to the 1919 Amritsar massacre in India, in which British General Reginald Dyer ordered the shooting of native subjects resulting in the death of around 1,000 Indians, including many women, children and elderly.¹¹⁸ Nazi persecution of the Jews was defended in the press immediately after *Kristallnacht*, when papers ran stories comparing German actions to British colonial atrocities.¹¹⁹ “Britain’s imperial record

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 62.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 168.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 170.

made the country genuinely vulnerable in propaganda terms,” argues Strobl. By the time Britain was in a full-fledged war with Germany, “Britain’s past record and the pronouncements and evident conviction of her wartime leaders...undermined substantially the credibility of Allied intentions,” he writes. “The British Empire as an institution was fundamentally incompatible with the principles of the Atlantic Charter for which Britain claimed to be fighting. Since Britain chose to take her stand on the loftiest moral ground, the Third Reich was happy to highlight, domestically and in occupied Europe, the limitations of that stance.”¹²⁰ During final years of the 1930s in which Cary wrote his African novels, such “limitations” became increasingly pronounced.

If fascist Germany spoke of its actions as following in the footsteps of British imperialism, it also consciously modeled them after Britain. Such was the case with the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, which occurred the year that *Mister Johnson* was published and shortly after Germany had occupied the Czechoslovakian Sudetenland the previous year. The Reich explicitly modeled the occupation of Czechoslovakia after the British colonial system, labeling Czechoslovakia a “protectorate,” the term the British used for their colonies and one that had no true precedent in German history. Rather than immediately annexing Czechoslovakia upon its occupation, Germany declared the state a protectorate in order to replicate the British colonial system of indirect rule. As Strobl explains, “Allowing the Czechs all the trappings of independence, from postage stamps to presidential guard, was not just designed to facilitate collaboration. The fiction of Czech self-government under the ‘protection’ of the Reich was intended above all for British eyes. For the new dispensation in Prague was a deliberate mirror image of Britain’s own

¹²⁰ Ibid., 180-182.

relations with the so-called Princely States in India. President Hacha, it was implied, would now receive avuncular guidance from Baron Neurath in much the same way that British Residents assisted Indian maharajahs in governing their states. Creating such parallels was an act of conscious malice. Britain, it was hoped, could thus be shamed into silent acquiescence.”¹²¹ If fascist Germany sought to shame Britain by drawing similarities between their own imperialistic, militaristic and racist ideology and Britain’s own practices overseas, it did not have to look far to find examples of uncomfortable affinities between the two states. The Germans’ frequent invocation of British imperialism was not generally based on fabrications, nor was it a simply propagandistic measure. For fascist Germany, British imperialism served as a legitimate model of power politics to which they aspired. In connecting British imperialism to German fascism, then, Cary’s writings turn fascism’s own arguments against themselves, sounding a warning rather than a note of approval over such unpleasant affinities.

While Joyce Cary scholarship saw a flourishing in the 1960s and 1970s, much of which considered the political implications of Cary’s African novels, critics have yet to move beyond the colonial context to consider how Cary’s writings reflect on the then rising tide of fascism in Europe. That at a very minimum, however, Cary’s writings offer a criticism of British colonial practice, has been argued by a number of, although not all, literary critics. Cary criticism can be generally divided into three camps. The first includes critics who, like B.R. Smith, argue that Cary’s literary work is more interested in the personal and individual struggles of its characters than in any larger political

¹²¹ Ibid., 62-63.

trends.¹²² Thus the struggles of a figure like Mister Johnson and his various relationships with British colonialists bear no political signification, but must be read on an entirely diegetic level. The second and third critical positions, much more common than the first, argue that Cary's African novels do indeed have an important political dimension to them. Critics of the second camp, including Sharon Stockton¹²³ and Robert M. Wren,¹²⁴ argue that Cary's work is decidedly pro-colonialist, that is to say that it unquestioningly participates in and reproduces the official discourse of British colonialism. For Stockton, for example, the resolution of *The African Witch*, in which the Anglicized African protagonist Aladai revolts against the British, upholds an inevitable racial divide between white colonists and black natives.¹²⁵ Opposing this view is a third critical camp, to which this work belongs, that argues that Cary's African novels frequently criticize and contest British colonial practice. Such critics include Arnd Witte¹²⁶ and Chantal Zabus¹²⁷, who, in paying close linguistic attention to native speech as portrayed in Cary's African novels,

¹²² B.R. Smith, "Moral Evaluation in Mister Johnson," *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction* 11 (2) (1969): 101-110.

¹²³ Sharon Stockton, "Vertigo and the Sovereign Individual: Late Imperial Narrative and Transport Technology," *Modern Language Studies* 30 (2) (2000): 181-198.

¹²⁴ Robert M. Wren, "Mister Johnson and the Complexity of 'Arrow of God,'" in *Awakened Conscious: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*, ed. C.D. Narasimhaiah (New Delhi: Sterling, 1978), 50-62.

¹²⁵ Stockton, "Vertigo and the Sovereign Individual," 188.

¹²⁶ Arnd Witte, "Things Fall Apart: The Portrayal of African Identity in Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* and Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*," in *Exiles and Migrants: Crossing Thresholds in European Culture and Society*, ed. Anthony Coulson et al. (Brighton: Sussex Academic, 1997), 126-135.

¹²⁷ Chantal Zabus, "Mending the Schizo-Text: Pidgin in the Nigerian Novel," *Kunapipi* 14 (1) (1992): 119-127.

refutes claims that Cary's writings enforce any sort of infantilization of native speakers.¹²⁸

The work of those critics who argue that Cary's novels offer a critical window onto British colonialism is reinforced by Cary's own non-literary pronouncements on colonialism, which he often criticized. If Cary acknowledges that the British Empire had brought numerous benefits to Africa, such an acknowledgment did not prevent him from waving a critical finger at numerous British colonial practices. Cary often criticized the British system of "indirect rule," which found its most extreme articulation in the Nigeria of his African novels, as simply an autocratic means of rule that was no different than direct rule. It entailed, he wrote, "ruling people for [British] advantage, while leaving them to think that they ruled themselves."¹²⁹ Similarly, in his political tract *The Case for African Freedom* (1941), Cary criticized those British who "care less for people than politics, and cannot be troubled with the problems of African education on the necessary wide scale."¹³⁰ Similarly, those British who had sought to profit in the colonies by "exploiting native labour," he professed, "did great evil."¹³¹ In addressing the misdeeds of British colonialism directly in his African novels, Cary extends these criticisms and builds upon them to suggest the dangerous affinity between British colonial practice and the rising tide of fascism, an affinity with potentially dire consequences.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 122.

¹²⁹ Alan Bishop, *Gentleman Rider: A Life of Joyce Cary* (London: M. Joseph, 1988), 104-105.

¹³⁰ Joyce Cary, *The Case for African Freedom and Other Writings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), 11.

¹³¹ Ibid., 16.

If Cary's concern about fascism found increased cause for urgency during the 1930s, so did his concern over the misdeeds of British colonialism. In Northern Nigeria, where his African novels take place, Britain conducted aggressive revenue drives to transfer wealth to Britain that resulted in food shortages and even famines during this period.¹³² As native anti-colonialism gradually increased, colonial administrators monitored, harassed and persecuted those who took part in any sort of anti-colonial movement.¹³³ The government both ran anti-colonial propaganda and shut down the Northern Nigerian newspaper for voicing criticism of the British.¹³⁴ As Moses Ochonu describes, "The economic turmoil of the 1930s and the additional anxieties of control and extraction that it placed on Northern Nigerian colonial authorities led to a stripping away of some of the civil pretensions of colonial power. British colonialism in Northern Nigeria became even more colonial, and indirect rule—the British policy of ruling Africans through their own institutions and symbols of authority—more direct and coercive."¹³⁵ The escalation of British power in the colony during the 1930s challenged the very principles Cary held so dearly: democracy, freedom of the press and poverty relief. As fascist governments intensified their own authoritarian agendas during the 1930s, so too did the British overseas.

In *Mister Johnson*, fascism finds echo in the novel's namesake protagonist, a Nigerian native who works in British colonial administration and continually aspires to

¹³² Moses E. Ochonu, *Colonial Meltdown: Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 16.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

becoming Anglicized. Johnson evokes German fascism directly when he goose-steps around the colony, which draws admiration from the British colonialists.¹³⁶ Similarly, when Johnson attempts to steal money from the local treasury he grabs Maria Theresa dollars, recalling a Germanic imperialism over which Maria Theresa presided and whose decidedly Austrian character resonates with Hitler's own.¹³⁷ In his enthusiasm for road building, Johnson also echoes Hitler and Mussolini, who made massive road building projects central to their domestic programs. If Mister Johnson's apparent affinities to the Reich offer a critical vantage point onto fascism, it is one that is most concerned with the economic and racial ideologies of fascism.

Mister Johnson tells the story of the road-building project of Mister Johnson, the Nigerian administrative clerk, and Rudbeck, the British administrator with whom he works to build extensive roads throughout the colonies. Their road building is financed by unscrupulous accounting that amounts to theft from the British treasuries, a plan first devised by Johnson and later adopted by Rudbeck. In pooling vast sums of public money to finance ambitious state projects, Johnson and Rudbeck evoke the economic policy of fascism both overseas and within Britain. Like Hitler, to whom they often looked when shaping their own policies, the British Union of Fascists advocated for extensive public spending on domestic projects as a way to spur demand and growth within the British economy.¹³⁸ Mosley's economic program, "economic radicalism," entailed, writes Thomas Linehan, "[rejecting] the policy of imposing strict ceilings on public spending,

¹³⁶ Cary, *Mister Johnson*, 109.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹³⁸ Linehan, *British Fascism*, 85, 89.

wages and the level of borrowing, in favour of an expansive credit policy based on a strategy of deficit financings. This implied negotiating loans, making credit more readily available, and running up a deliberate budgetary deficit if deemed necessary, which would all serve the purpose of rekindling production and trade.”¹³⁹ Such extensive borrowing is echoed throughout *Mister Johnson*, where a heavily-indebted Johnson continually devotes himself to seeking out more personal loans at the same time as he seeks more ways to wrest funds from the treasury for state projects.

If *Mister Johnson* engages with fascist economic thought, it does so in a decidedly critical fashion. The great road building project of Johnson and Rudbeck fails miserably: just as Mussolini’s and Hitler’s roads never spurred the economic growth or use that the two dictators had hoped for, so Johnson and Rudbeck’s roads do little to spur economic growth in Nigeria, instead bringing crime and trouble to the region. Similarly, their methods of financing the road are met with harsh criticism by their superiors and compromise the functioning of other administrative units. The British Union of Fascist’s policy of using debt financing to extend credit to society’s underprivileged in an attempt to spur demand is also challenged by the novel, where the extensive loans made to the poor Johnson only lead to greater debt and greater hardship, until he eventually resorts to murder to pull himself out of his extensive debt.¹⁴⁰

While Johnson evokes fascist economics through his role as a British administrative assistant, as an African native, he calls to mind the suffering of those at the mercy of fascist racial ideology. Published just one year after *Kristallnacht*, *Mister Johnson* lays

¹³⁹ Ibid., 85.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 89.

bare the British persecution of an ethnic other that recalls Germany's own persecution of the Jews. In so doing, it builds on the long-held European and colonial tradition of blurring the lines between African and Jewish identity. When Johnson is asked by a friend if he fears Gollup, a British colonist who regularly beats and slanders natives, Johnson replies with a song: "*What fool chile stand in de way of Johnson?...De whole sea go dry for him all same dat King Moses from Egypt. De whole sky make light for him, all same de fire for Moses.*"¹⁴¹ Cary's novel thus aligns British persecution of Africans with the persecution of the Jews, a move that Cary himself makes in his political tracts. Discussing British racism in the colonies, for instance, Cary immediately makes a connection with fascism. Such racism, he writes, "has no moral ground...it has produced enormous evils [and] is the favorite weapon of the Nazi and the Fascist."¹⁴² Similarly, he recounts his own power when he was a colonist in terms of German fascism: "In practice I was a dictator, more absolute than Hitler, who must reckon, at least, with public opinion, and the heads of great departments."¹⁴³

If Cary himself did not partake in the racism that Hitler espoused, his characters often do. Such racism ranges from a marked neglect of African problems to outright brutality. Rudbeck, for example, never takes care to fix Johnson's quarters, a building housing only African clerks, despite often declaring that they "were condemned three years ago. It's quite time that they were pulled down."¹⁴⁴ While such neglect alludes to a

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 147.

¹⁴² Cary, *The Case for African Freedom*, 23.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 54.

¹⁴⁴ Cary, *Mister Johnosn*, 92.

subtle racism, elsewhere in the novel the British manifest a drastically more pronounced racism toward Johnson and his peers. Gollup, the British store clerk, for instance, exhibits a much more explicit racism. Just as Nazi Germany limited the businesses in which Jews could participate, so Gollup finds it fitting that Johnson serve as a counter clerk, a task he believes “beneath the dignity of a white man.”¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Gollup refers to Johnson and his fellow natives as “niggers” and “baboons,” declaring them to be “feelingless.”¹⁴⁶ He often assaults Johnson and brutalizes natives. Ajali at one point explains to Johnson what happened to Gollup’s last clerk: “Sargy [Gollup] come out with wooden hammer break his head, kick his ribs, break four teeth down his throat, trow him in de river, and every time he come up he shoot at him with a gun.”¹⁴⁷ In framing Johnson as a Jewish Moses, poised to lead his people to freedom from an oppressive slavery at the hands of Gollup and his racist peers, Cary’s novel evokes the contemporary persecution of the Jewish peoples in Europe. In so doing, he points to the dangers of what might otherwise be simply perceived as an innocuous, homegrown prejudice operating in the colonies. Given that the British used Nazi cruelty toward the Jews as an argument for not returning any colonies to Germany in the 1930s, Cary’s suggestion of an affinity between Jewish persecution and British treatment of colonial natives appears especially timely.¹⁴⁸

Not only was anti-Semitism a prevalent feature of German and British fascism, but it was also an established institution among much of the British populace. Although anti-

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 130.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 133, 135, 142.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 130.

¹⁴⁸ Griffiths, *Fellow Travelers of the Right*, 257.

Semitism “of a political and active kind” remained a “minority interest” in Britain, writes Richard Griffiths, “parlour and verbal” anti-Semitism were widespread.¹⁴⁹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the common response to the German persecution of the Jews among most British in the 1930s was that Britain had no right or business interfering in Germany’s internal affairs.¹⁵⁰ Cary’s attacks on racism in *The Case for African Freedom*, echoed in *Mister Johnson*, thus bore a relevance and urgency that clearly extended beyond the confines of British colonial life.

Mister Johnson, *The African Witch* and *Castle Corner* extend this alarm about the interrelated threats of racism and fascism in two important ways: firstly, they betray an anxiety about the rise of fascism in British society, and secondly, they point to the dangerous possibility of British policy directly encouraging and fostering fascism’s rise. In *Mister Johnson*, this anxiety about the rise of fascism in British society finds its voice in the affinities the narrative establishes between fascist economic and racial policy and Britain’s own administrative practices. The very coins that Johnson attempts to steal, Maria Theresa dollars, provide an explicit link between the British Empire and Austro-Germanic imperialism. Printed by the British Empire, the coins bear the mark of Austro-Germanic imperialism, suggesting a metaphoric reproduction by the British of Germanic, and specifically Hitlerian, practice. That the Maria Theresa dollar was also printed in large quantities by Italy to finance their brutal conquest of Ethiopia in 1935 provides another important connection to fascism, again implicating the British in reproducing the misdeeds of others they condemned.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 78.

Cary's narration puts Britain's colonial problems on a direct continuum with those problems troubling Europe at home: "Roads upset things, brought confusion, revolution. And wasn't there confusion enough? Wasn't everybody complaining that the world was getting into such confusion that civilization itself would disappear?"¹⁵¹ Although B.R. Smith has argued that *Mister Johnson* is more concerned with a drama of the personal rather than the political, the novel attests to this pressing connection between its characters and the larger political stakes facing Britain in the late 1930s. Thus the narrator mocks Rudbeck and the "thousands of Englishmen" who, Cary writes, "every year, from some accidental source, get the idea to make a garden or build a summer house, and labor night and day in it, neglect their business and their friends for it, risk double pneumonia for it, and when you say, 'There's going to be a war,' answer, 'Impossible,' because they have just planted tulips or ramblers."¹⁵² In carefully detailing the uncomfortable affinities between British colonial policy and fascism, Cary's writings avoid this sort of naïveté, turning headfirst toward the rising specter of fascism in Europe. In so doing they manifest the unsettling anxiety that, far away in Africa, the British are already reproducing the policies and practices of fascism.

An anxiety that the British were drifting too close to fascism again finds voice in *Castle Corner*. The novel was published in 1938, the same year that Hitler occupied the Sudetenland, annexed Austria, carried out *Kristallnacht*, one year after the German bombing of Guernica, and only two years after his occupation of the Rhineland. Felix, a British colonist and businessman, is described as a "Napoleon of commerce," an epithet

¹⁵¹ Cary, *Mister Johnson*, 184.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 87.

suggesting a connection between British overseas imperialism and European continental conquest.¹⁵³ Similarly, Hatto, another colonist, orders his weapons for the colonies directly from Nazi Germany. Such transactions, “needless to say,” writes Cary, “would not appear in his reports,” pointing to the ethical dilemmas created by such British trading.¹⁵⁴ If Hatto’s secret trade with the Nazis attests to a lack of moral scruples and promises a degree of economic backing to the German state, it also carries metaphorical significance. Hatto trades not food or material supplies with the Germans but weaponry, suggesting the importation of violence from Nazi Germany into the British colonies. Stella, lover of the British sergeant Harry, echoes this anxiety when she protests the Boer War for which Harry must fight. “Anybody can see that it’s a mean war,” she declares, “what would you say if the Germans said they wanted our coal mines and therefore they had the right to conquer us?”¹⁵⁵ British territorial conquest is the subject of the novel again when Jarvis, a British officer, attempts to secure the African region of Dai before the French can occupy it. Despite the protests of a British government “not wanting any more incidents like Fashoda,” once Jarvis succeeds, he is immediately applauded by the British administration.¹⁵⁶ The Dai episode speaks to the fickleness of British moral and political codes, suggesting a closer affinity to territorial ambitions of fascism than the British might themselves wish to concede.

Coupled in Cary’s African novels with an anxiety about sliding into fascist practice

¹⁵³ Joyce Cary, *Castle Corner* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 53.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 397.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 319, 344-345.

is a fear of inadvertently fostering fascism. Such fear finds precedent in the political climate in which Cary wrote, where the British policy of appeasement and turning a blind eye toward the abuses of fascism often facilitated their very proliferation. A member of the Liberal Party, which opposed appeasement, Cary himself wrote against its dangers in his 1939 *Power in Men*: “Pacifism rests, of course, on belief in a god or law controlling all men’s acts. It denies liberty. It issues in anarchy or absolutism...It denies also the reality of evil. But evil is real. A cancer which kills the young mother of a family is real evil. A brute who cripples a child for life does real and irreparable evil.”¹⁵⁷ Officially, the British state did little to stand in the way of Hitler’s territorial advances in Europe and his racial persecution of the Jews at home. When Germany invaded the Sudetenland in 1938 the British refused to come to Czechoslovakia’s defense.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, when fascist Italy conquered Ethiopia in a brutal 1935 war, the British foreign secretary Samuel Hoare proposed, along with French Prime Minister Pierre Laval, a treaty to end the war by effectively surrendering Ethiopia to Italy.¹⁵⁹ In response, the Abyssinian Emperor ominously responded to Britain and France at the League of Nations that “It is us today. It will be you tomorrow.”¹⁶⁰ Britain even offered to hand some of its own colonies over to Germany, never consulting the wishes of its own colonial inhabitants and natives in so

¹⁵⁷ Joyce Cary, *Power in Men* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), 155.

¹⁵⁸ Daniel Hucker, *Public Opinion and the End of Appeasement in Britain and France* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 37.

¹⁵⁹ Peijian Shen, *The Age of Appeasement: The Evolution of British Foreign Policy in the 1930s* (Sutton: Stroud, 1999), 157.

¹⁶⁰ Hucker, *Public Opinion and the End of Appeasement in Britain and France*, 34.

doing.¹⁶¹ As Peijian Shen argues, it was precisely because of the British affinities with fascism, which Cary's works illuminate, that official British policy often turned a blind eye to and thus facilitated fascist actions. "British policy-makers had no sympathy with victim nations," he writes, "Hoare took the Abyssinians to be 'bad neighbours'.

Henderson called the Czechs 'a pig-headed race', who, Chamberlain thought, 'were, in fact, themselves responsible for most of the trouble' during the Munich period. It is apparent that due to her similar aggressive experience, Britain had an inherently intimate relationship with the aggressive powers, which made it impossible for her sincerely to take the victims' side, and help them in their struggle against invasion."¹⁶² It is this unsettling intimacy that Cary's writings probe so tenaciously, confronting that which Britain itself so often refused to.

If the official British state policy during the 1930s was one of appeasement, British public opinion was no less inclined to turn a blind eye toward fascism. State appeasement was, in fact, largely based on public support. Britain's reluctance to commit to a firm policy of support on behalf of Czechoslovakia was at least partly due to a concern over an adverse public response were they to come to the aid of the state.¹⁶³ At nearly every stage of escalating fascist aggression, the public sought to look the other way. Just as Britain had abandoned Ethiopia to Italy, so too did the public seek appeasement after Hitler's

¹⁶¹ Andrew Crozier, *Appeasement and Germany's Last Bid for Colonies* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 3-4.

¹⁶² Shen, *The Age of Appeasement*, xiii.

¹⁶³ Hucker, *Public Opinion and the End of Appeasement in Britain and France*, 36.

occupation of the Rhineland.¹⁶⁴ As late as September 1938, the British public was antagonistic toward the prospect of fighting another war and mistrusting of commitments made to continental Europe.¹⁶⁵ The British press echoed this hesitation, as Franklin Gannon describes: “the popular papers, except the *Daily Mail*...were similarly reluctant to exacerbate international affairs by adopting a hard line toward [Germany]. Both financially and intellectually it was unwise or impossible for the British Press to adopt a strongly critical line towards Nazi Germany: the readers did not want to read it, and the intellectuals did not want to write it.”¹⁶⁶

Not only did the British refuse to directly confront fascist aggression, but at times they even looked favorably upon fascist states. Throughout most of the 1930s, for instance, the British press was both reluctant to criticize Nazi Germany and even laudatory of its newfound government. According to Gannon, rather than confront fascism’s misdeeds they “painted it in extreme and fantastic colours. The menace of the great military parades was lost in the breathless reports of their scale and excitement. The stage-management of the Nuremberg *Parteitag* seemed more interesting than the speeches made at it.”¹⁶⁷ Just as the British take great pleasure in Mister Johnson’s goose-stepping about the colony, so did the contemporary British public lavish the fascist spectacle. Even fascist ideology was lent support during this period: “in 1936 and 1937 every British newspaper extended at least some credence to Hitler’s sincerity in believing

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 34.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 23.

¹⁶⁶ Franklin Reid Gannon, *The British Press and Germany* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 2.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

in the basic tenets of Nazism: the grievances against Versailles, the anti-Bolshevism, and the Aryan principle,” writes Gannon.¹⁶⁸ German leaders appealed to many in the British military especially, as well as to aviationists, who admired and felt camaraderie with the German *Luftwaffe*.¹⁶⁹ When Germany occupied the Rhineland in violation of the Treaty of Versailles in 1936, British public opinion largely sided with Germany, considering France’s outraged response unreasonable. The event spurred a sizable shift in moderate public support away from France and to Germany from then on.¹⁷⁰

One of Britain’s largest papers, the *Daily Mail*, went so far as to adopt anti-Semitic rhetoric in their praise of Hitler’s regime. “From the very outset, the *Daily Mail*’s attitude toward the Nazi regime was one of admiration for its internal accomplishments, both spiritual and material... The *Daily Mail* had no patience with ‘the old women of both sexes’ who filled British newspapers with hysterical reports about Nazi ‘excesses’. Hitler had retrieved Germany from the hands of its alien elements, ‘Israelites of international attachments’.”¹⁷¹ Given such surprising rhetoric and enthusiasm for fascist Germany among the British public at large, it comes as no surprise that Cary’s writings would manifest an anxiety toward a national slippage toward fascist ideology and values. Coupled with state policy that effectively enabled fascism to continue its march of aggression across Europe, the fear of inadvertently encouraging and even fostering fascism was a legitimate one.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶⁹ Griffiths, *Fellow Travelers of the Right*, 127.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 208.

¹⁷¹ Gannon, *The British Press and Germany*, 32.

Both *Mister Johnson* and *The African Witch* speak to this fear of inadvertently fostering fascism through the neglect, admiration and appeasement of fascist movements. In *Mister Johnson*, this fear is most strongly illustrated by the story of Johnson, the character most closely aligned with German fascism. Johnson's misguided habits, excessive debt, and use of violence and thievery, the novel suggests, have their origin in a British administration run afoul. Johnson considers himself to be filling the shoes of the English, a metaphor that the novel itself suggests when Aliu, an African native, asks for Johnson's shoes. "Shoes—how dare you?" he retorts, "My shoes are English shoes—the very best shoes—they're not for savage people—bad thievish people like you."¹⁷² The declaration is implicitly ironic: Johnson is in fact a thief, and so are the English whose shoes he, both literally and metaphorically, walks in.

The English for whom Johnson works provide him with a model, the novel makes clear, that he can follow. Johnson's thievery and fraudulent accounting recall that of the British sergeant Gollup, for example, who repeatedly dips into the cash register for money that he fails to account for. When Johnson later commits fraud in Gollup's store through a hide trading scheme, Gollup permits Johnson to carry on as long as he can skim a healthy profit off the top for himself. Rudbeck turns out to be no less morally scrupulous, enthusiastically embracing Johnson's scheme for stealing funds from the treasury for their massive road building projects. Similarly, the extreme violence and brutality of Gollup, who, the novel suggests, has killed or nearly killed multiple natives, provides a model for Johnson to follow when he eventually murders Gollup. Having been himself beaten and humiliated by the murderous Gollup, in taking vengeance on Gollup

¹⁷² Cary, *Mister Johnson*, 23.

Johnson replicates the cycle of violence that he has learned at Gollup's hands. Even when Johnson appears to act independently, such as when he initially proposes to Rudbeck his plans for fraud, he is encouraged in his misdeeds by the British.

The policy of appeasement, of turning a blind eye and hoping for the best, is echoed often throughout *Mister Johnson*. When Johnson scams his fellow natives out of money, Rudbeck and his fellow British administrators turn a blind eye to the complaints lodged against him. Similarly, when Rudbeck and Johnson's graft is finally discovered, the British administrator Bulteel suggests that the authorities forgo any substantial criticism of Rudbeck, effectively turning a blind eye. Both Johnson and Rudbeck's misdeeds are thus encouraged and even permitted, leading Johnson deeper and deeper into debt and troubles until, in an act of desperation, he kills Gollup while attempting to rob him. In guiding Johnson, whom the novel aligns with German fascism, toward his violent and fraudulent misdeeds, the British characters in the novel echo the dangers of both appeasement and a slackening of ethical values.

The African Witch echoes *Mister Johnson*'s anxiety over an inadvertent British contribution to the rise of fascism. In his preface to the novel, Cary links the African space to the political and cultural drama of Europe. "The attraction of Africa," he writes, "is that it shows these wars of belief, and the powerful often subconscious motives which underlie them, in the greatest variety and also in very simple forms. Basic obsessions, which in Europe hide themselves under all sorts of decorous scientific or theological or political uniforms, are there seen naked in bold and dramatic action."¹⁷³ The "bold and dramatic action" of Cary's African novel does indeed refract the "political uniforms" of

¹⁷³ Joyce Cary, *The African Witch* (London: M. Joseph, 1951), 10.

Europe, processing the traumatic rise of fascism through its own African characters. In so doing, it upholds its own declaration that “real things—the lives, happiness, destinies of living people—depended quite as much on the literary skill as on the political ability of an officer,” suggesting an ethical role for literature in confronting the challenges of the political.¹⁷⁴

Just as the figure of Johnson evokes German fascism in *Mister Johnson*, so in *The African Witch* the protagonist, Louis Aladai, and his supporters are repeatedly aligned with German fascism. Aladai, a Nigerian native, is gradually radicalized throughout the course of the novel until he ultimately leads an armed rebellion against the British. Like Hitler, he is framed as a fanatical and nationalistic leader. When he raises an army of supporters and refuses the British request to disband them, declaring “a general who dismisses his army is not in a good position for a peace conference,” his actions recall the German occupation of the Rhineland and subsequent refusal to de-militarize.¹⁷⁵ By inciting street violence in the colony, Aladai and his supporters echo the paramilitary violence brought by fascists across Europe to its city streets. Aladai’s promises of economic salvation for his home of Rimi also echoes the economic promises of Hitler and Mussolini, as does his idolization as a heroic savior of his nation. An “ordinary Socialist type,” as the British declare him, Aladai promises a syndicalist fusion of state and businesses to reinvigorate Rimi.¹⁷⁶

Aladai’s rhetoric and that of his followers is also evocative of fascism: his

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 184.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 204.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 197.

supporter Coker, for instance, preaches an ideology that sounds startlingly similar to Hitler's own *Blut und Boden* ethos. "His key word was blood," describes the narrator, "the geyser, as it burst out of him, uttered...the brotherhood of the pack and herd, expressed in fraternal love for the like, hatred of the unlike, sealed in the magical properties of blood."¹⁷⁷ Coker was, describes the narrator, "a preacher of natural or primitive religion—herd communism, herd fear and herd love, blood ties and race hatreds."¹⁷⁸ Similarly, the language Aladai uses to speak of his people recalls Hitler's own. Downplaying his ability to sway the crowds of his native Rimi, he declares that his speech "was nothing" given that his people "are sheep," echoing Hitler's own language in *Mein Kampf*: "Will not the task of a leading statesman be seen, not in the birth of a creative idea or plan as such, but rather in the art of making the brilliance of his projects intelligible to a herd of sheep?"¹⁷⁹ This connection to Hitler is reinforced by Aladai's seemingly infinite love for all things German. He sings Schubert's "Ständchen" at Oxford and "Heidenröslein" in Africa, a musical composition based on the Goethe poem. In an attempt to keep Aladai from leaving a meeting with him, Makurdi orders German sausages believing that they will lure Aladai into remaining. He "called for sausages," notes the narrator, "not, of course Oxford...but German sausages."¹⁸⁰

If Aladai and his followers evoke Hitlerian dictatorship and its ensuing characteristics—street violence, syndicalism, *Blut und Boden* rhetoric and warfare—like

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 209.

¹⁷⁹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 79-80.

¹⁸⁰ Cary, *The African Witch*, 27.

Mister Johnson, *The African Witch* suggests that it is the British who must share some responsibility for the proliferation of these fascist tendencies. While Sharon Stockton argues that the novel's conclusion, in which Aladai is radicalized, suggests his fundamental incompatibility with and difference from the British, upholding the view that "synthesis is in fact not possible between peoples," her reading of the novel fails to take into account the ways in which Aladai's actions are themselves shaped by those of the British.¹⁸¹ Aladai is a product of a British education, having attended Oxford, where he was schooled by the British in "modern political history."¹⁸² As the British colonist Judy declares, Coker, one of Aladai's followers, and the like are "just bad copies of English agitators on the make."¹⁸³ Aladai's political rhetoric, she suggests, owes something to "the way he's learnt to think" as a British subject.¹⁸⁴ When Aladai finally launches an armed insurrection against the British, Judy instructs Rackham that "we're all to blame" for Aladai's radicalization.¹⁸⁵

As in *Mister Johnson*, the British characters in *The African Witch* provide a clear model for the actions of Aladai and his followers. Coker's *Blut und Boden* racism, for example, echoes the blunt racism of British administrative officials. The novel opens with a scene detailing the racial marginalization of Aladai, who is detested by the British for being so bold as to wear European clothes in public. "Mind you," declares Rackham in

¹⁸¹ Stockton, "Vertigo and the Sovereign Individual," 188.

¹⁸² Cary, *The African Witch*, 20.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 267.

response, “I’m not against the nigger in his proper place. But what I say is, what’s the good of making him think he’s equal to a white man when he isn’t?”¹⁸⁶ Similarly, Aladai’s turn to violence, much like Mister Johnson’s, is precipitated by a violent assault upon him by the British. While at one point Aladai promised a progressive agenda of economic development and education for Rimi, at the hands of British racism and violence he and his followers are gradually turned toward radical violence, racism and extreme nationalism, until they are ultimately killed in an uprising against the British, leaving their native Rimi in shambles.

If *The African Witch* suggests that the British bear some responsibility for fostering Aladai’s Hitlerian turn through their own discrimination and violence, it also suggests that their negligence in colonial affairs, their frequent turning of a blind eye, also has something to do with the novel’s tragic outcome. The British fail to support Aladai’s claims to power early on when he promotes his progressive agenda, just as they fail to halt the brutal witch trials he had pledged to stop if brought to power. Similarly, once Aladai’s war is on the verge of breaking out, the British refuse actions that would help prevent it. When Doctor Schlemm insists upon the need for the British military to confront Aladai’s insurrection early on in order to prevent its spread, declaring “I do not like force...but sometimes it is necessary to avoid worse things. Firmness at the proper moment is of great value,” a British administrator foolishly replies that “I would hesitate very much before carrying out your suggestions. In these cases, it is of the first importance to avoid any great provocation.”¹⁸⁷ Doctor Schlemm and the administrator’s

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 46.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 217-218.

argument voices the competing political voices in British society at the time: those in power who sought to avoid any militaristic confrontation with fascism and the vocal minority of those who, like Winston Churchill, argued the necessity of taking a more aggressive line with fascists. In pointing to the disastrous consequences of failing to take action and respond to Aladai's threat, as well as to the underlying British practices that fuel it, *The African Witch* points a damning finger at both appeasement and the overt racism and violence of the British in the colonies. Not only does it attest to an anxiety about the rise of fascism and Britain's own potential contribution thereto, but it poses an ethical dilemma: how can Britain hope to achieve the necessary moral high ground to tackle fascism and fanaticism when it itself participates in and turns a blind eye toward such abuses? "If anyone mentioned...Abyssinian slaves," writes the narrator of *The African Witch*, "[Judy] would add modestly, 'But, of course, we can't talk! Look at London!'"¹⁸⁸

For both Cary and Céline, then, the specter of fascism forces the project of empire to be read in a new context. The rise of fascism and its uncomfortable affinities with French and British colonialism make any naïveté about colonial abuses increasingly difficult to sustain. If the rise of fascism forces an increasingly critical eye to be cast onto the project of empire, however, empire provides Cary and Céline with the raw material for a criticism of fascism itself. Fraught with anxiety over fascism's rapid growth and the dangers inherent in addressing it, the works of both writers nevertheless provide a voice of opposition and warning in an era of crisis.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 123.

Chapter 2. Africa Comes Home: Gerhart Hauptmann

Despite Gerhart Hauptmann's colossal standing within German letters and criticism, his colonial novella *Der Schuß im Park* has collected significantly more dust than academic attention since its initial publication in 1939.¹⁸⁹ The novella tells the story of the Baron Degenhart, who fathers a child in the African colonies with a woman, his "Kleine Kätschen," whom he later abandons. When the African woman returns with the child to his estate in Germany, where he leads a married life, Degenhart shoots the woman and flees on horseback. Degenhart's wife takes in the African woman and child, promising to take good care of them and to see to it that the child is educated. On the rare occasion the work is alluded to in Hauptmann scholarship, critics are quick to note its potentially critical attitude toward the National Socialists, who were instrumental in preventing a second edition of the work from being published.¹⁹⁰ Thus Roy C. Cowen situates its accounts of racial mixing within the context of Nazi racial doctrine, and Eberhard Hilscher similarly reads such racial mixing as "verhüllte zeitkritische Bemerkungen."¹⁹¹ Both authors, however, fail to provide further insights or more specific details regarding the novella's relationship to fascism. That Hauptmann would write a

¹⁸⁹ Again, credit is due to Judith Ryan for unearthing this text, which she brought to my attention during her graduate seminar at Harvard entitled *Colonial Theory and German Colonial Literature*. In an unpublished talk given at Dartmouth in 2005, Ryan both argued that Hauptmann's novella presents a counter-narrative to dominant colonial fantasies and suggested that the novella can be read as a commentary on the violence of the Nazi era, a violence that it has displaced onto the African scene.

¹⁹⁰ Roy C. Cowen, *Hauptmann-Kommentar: Zum Nichtdramatischen Werk* (München: Winkler Verlag, 1981), 156.

¹⁹¹ Eberhard Hilscher, *Gerhart Hauptmann: Leben und Werk* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1988), 430.

veiled criticism of the Third Reich, despite his choice to remain in Nazi Germany and his explicitly public support for the regime, is logical in view of his earlier pacifism and his many privately voiced discontents over Hitler's rule. In opposition to fascist ideology, *Der Schuß im Park* utilizes the colonial space to posit not only a world of racial mixing in which Germans couple with ideologically inferior races, but one of cultural hybridity in which German and Western *Hochkultur* engages with cultural forms outside the privileged Germanic-Aryan circle. Written only a few months after Germany's annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland, the novella's evocation of German colonialism and territorialization cannot be read completely apart from this context. In his critical representation of the relationship between German colonizer and colonized, Hauptmann provides the raw material for a criticism of Germany's territorial conquests at the time in Europe. Offering a critique of both fascism and colonialism, *Der Schuß im Park* suggests a dangerous connection between the two that is akin to later arguments by Hannah Arendt, Aimé Césaire and others who would see the violence of fascism as a logical outgrowth of European colonial practice.

Hauptmann's critical attitudes toward the Third Reich, including the militarization which it both championed and used against Czechoslovakia some months prior to *Der Schuß im Park*, find their precedent in his pacifism before the First World War and in his criticisms, both in his private writings and literary works, of that war. In his early twenties Hauptmann and his brother Carl planned a utopian pacifist society in America, the *Gesellschaft Pazifik*, and even sent a representative to the United States to scout out

conditions in America.¹⁹² The plans were eventually abandoned when it was decided that America was no longer suitable for a pacifist utopia, and Hauptmann was required to testify in court when the group went on trial.¹⁹³ True to his own pacifism, when Bismarck was ousted from power by Kaiser Wilhelm II, whose plans for Germany's rapid and extensive colonial expansion Bismarck had up to that point resisted, Hauptmann was deeply disturbed. "Blutgeruch lag über der Welt," [The smell of blood rested over the world] wrote Hauptmann in an apocalyptic vision of what was to come under Wilhelm, delivered by an apostle in his 1890 work *Der Apostel*. "Das fließende Blut war das Zeichen des Kampfes. Diesen Kampf hörte er toben, unaufhörlich, im Wachen und Schlafen. Es waren Brüder und Brüder, Schwestern und Schwestern, die sich erschlugen. Er liebte sie alle, er sah ihr Wüten und rang die Hände in Schmerz und Verzweiflung."¹⁹⁴ [The flowing blood was the sign of the struggle. The struggle he heard raging, incessant, both awake and asleep. It was brother and brother, sister and sister, who killed one another. He loved them all, he saw their rage and threw his hands up in pain and despair.] Germany's colonial project, whose violent extension was made possible by Wilhelm II's complete seizure of power, returns explicitly as an object of Hauptmann's criticism in *Der Schuß im Park*.

One of the most succinct expressions of Hauptmann's political *Weltanschauung* came in his play *Festspiel in deutschen Reimen*, which appeared just before the war in 1913. The play ends with a procession of Germania, whose people cry out against

¹⁹² Warren R. Maurer, *Understanding Gerhart Hauptmann* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1992), 10-11.

¹⁹³ Warren R. Maurer, *Gerhart Hauptmann* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 11.

¹⁹⁴ Hilscher, *Gerhart Hauptmann*, 93.

“Massenschlächter” [mass butchery] and demand “Wir wollen den Frieden! den Frieden! den Frieden!” [We want peace! Peace! Peace!] The scene was accompanied by Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and entailed a “Demonstrationszug des Weltfriedens,” [Protest march for world peace] in which famous German figures such as Goethe, Kant, Herder and Lessing appeared on stage as war protesters. Hauptmann met with fierce criticism from the monarchist press, who declared his piece a “Verhöhnung der heiligsten Erinnerung des deutschen Volkes,” [mockery of the most holy memory of the German people] and the play was terminated prematurely due to pressure from the German Crown Prince.¹⁹⁵ Such public condemnation may have contributed to Hauptmann’s surprising decision the following year to publicly support the German war effort.

Despite his public support of the war, Hauptmann’s earlier pacifism and discontent over the war find voice often in his private writings. In his diary he describes his “schmerzliche, bange Befürchtungen” [painful, uneasy misgivings] and writes in August of 1914, “Wieder um einen Tag dem Frieden näher.” [Again one day nearer to peace.] Similar comments are to be found throughout the diary: “Nur die Idee des Friedens, nicht die des Krieges ist steigerungsfähig” [Only the idea of peace, not that of war, is capable of being increased] and “Krieg: absoluter Gegensatz zur Civilisation...Feind der Menschheit.” [War: absolute contrast to civilization...enemy of mankind.] After the war he again became critical of militarism, describing it as a “Gespenst, das durch das Licht der Vernunft in seine Abgrundhöhle gescheucht” [ghost that frightens the light of reason into its cave] and writing of the “dükelhafte,

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 297-299.

herausfordernde, ganz und gar schwachköpfige, säbelrasselnde Militärdiktatur.” [Dark, provocative, completely weak-headed, saber-rattling military dictatorship.] Apart from his public endorsement of the First World War, as Hilscher convincingly argues, Hauptmann “verhielt sich in der Frage Militarismus, Krieg, Inhumanität sonst immer konsequent ablehnend...hat er sich immer wieder den schnauzbärtigen Krakeelern und den Kriegskräften entgegengeworfen, vor einem ‘Weltbrand’ gewarnt und die ‘Idee des Friedens’ verherrlicht, die allein ‘steigerungsfähig sei.’ ‘Jeder Schwertstreich entehrt und verwundet irgendwie die ganze Menschheit, jeder Spatenstich bereichert sie,” erklärte er, und mit gewaltiger Geste fügte er hinzu: ‘Will Gott den Frieden nicht – ich will ihn!’” [Always reacted to the problem of militarism, war, and inhumanity with uncompromising disapproval...he always cast himself again and again against the mustachioed racket and the forces of war, he always warned of a “world set on fire” and glorified the “idea of peace,” which alone was ‘capable of increase.’ ‘Every sword stroke somehow dishonors and wounds the whole of humanity, every cut of the spade is at its expense,’ he explained, and with forceful gestures he added: ‘If God does not desire peace – I desire it!’] It is thus not surprising that Hauptmann’s 1915 work *Der General* has been described as a severe critique of Prussian militaristic culture, one that responds covertly to the ongoing war with which Hauptmann made an overt peace.¹⁹⁶ The work thus provides a logical precedent to *Der Schuß im Park*, as an earlier veiled critique of an ideology to which Hauptmann also gave his public support. In Hauptmann’s broader fight against militarism and inhumanity during this period, the critical attitudes of *Der Schuß im Park* also find their logical precedent.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 308-309, 340.

As many have noted, Gerhart Hauptmann's decision to remain in Germany after Hitler seized power, although not excusable, was informed by a number of mitigating circumstances. Hauptmann was over seventy years old when Hitler assumed his chancellorship, and exile would have been further complicated by the fact that Hauptmann hardly spoke any foreign languages. Hauptmann's firmly entrenched identity as a national German writer also probably contributed to his decision. "Hauptmann hatte den Nationalsozialismus nicht gewünscht," explains Rüdiger Bernhardt. [Hauptmann had not wished for National Socialism.] "Nach der Machtübernahme geriet Gerhart Hauptmann in eine schwierige Situation. Er war einer von Deutschlands repräsentativsten Dichtern, Nobelpreisträger und deutscher Patriot."¹⁹⁷ [After the power transfer Gerhart Hauptmann found himself in a difficult situation. He was one of Germany's most impressive poets, a Nobel Prize winner and a German patriot.] The prestige Hauptmann enjoyed in Germany was nearly unprecedented for a living author, as his work was read in public schools and his birthdays were nationally celebrated events in Germany.¹⁹⁸ Because of this strong identification with Germany, Hauptmann feared that leaving the country would have negative effects upon his work. He also wished to be buried in Germany, a reality that would be unlikely were he to leave.¹⁹⁹

Although Hauptmann both publicly and privately chose to support much of Hitler's agenda, moments of overt criticism and disappointment with the regime occasionally surface in his private writings. Hauptmann viewed the Reichstag burning

¹⁹⁷ Rüdiger Bernhardt, *Gerhart Hauptmann: Eine Biografie* (Bremen: Verlag Atelier im Bauernhaus, 2007), 161-162.

¹⁹⁸ Maurer, *Gerhart Hauptmann*, 2

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

with reservation, writing in his diary in February of 1933 that “Ich gebe mir Mühe, sie (die unbegreiflichen Erscheinungen heut, R.B.) zu verstehen, ihnen herzlich und voll zuzustimmen, im Interesse meines Vaterlandes. – aber. Aber... aber...?”²⁰⁰ [I go to great trouble to understand it (the incomprehensible occurrence today, R.B.), to heartily and fully approve, in the interests of my fatherland. – but. But...but...?] Hauptmann’s reservation over the Reichstag burning echoes clearly in a later statement he made in July of 1933, in which he declared that “My epoch begins in 1870 and ends with the burning of the Reichstag.”²⁰¹ More explicit reservations and criticisms of the Nazi regime were also recounted by friends to whom Hauptmann expressed such sentiments.²⁰² Hauptmann also expressed reservations publicly about Hitler before his assumption of power. When asked in an interview who he thought should be chosen as ruler of Germany in an upcoming election, Hindenburg or Hitler, he responded: “Sollte Hitler jemals an seinen [Hindenburgs] Platz treten, würde Deutschland einen Rückschlag erleiden.”²⁰³ [If Hitler should ever take Hindeburg’s place, Germany would suffer a setback.] Furthermore, Nazi-prescribed anti-Semitism was at times, although hardly consistently, lamented by Hauptmann. In 1938 he declared himself “voller Sorge und Abscheu” [full of concern and horror] over the Synagogue burnings in Germany, a logical response given his long

²⁰⁰ Bernhardt, *Gerhart Hauptmann*, 159.

²⁰¹ Maurer, *Gerhart Hauptmann*, 118.

²⁰² Bernhardt, *Gerhart Hauptmann*, 159.

²⁰³ Gerhart Hauptmann, *Gespräche und Interviews mit Gerhart Hauptmann (1894-1946)*, ed. Heinz Tschörtner (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1994), 139.

support for the Jewish community.²⁰⁴ Throughout the 1930s Hauptmann often expressed his distaste for the master-race ideology of the National Socialists, remaining close to his Jewish friends. “Deutsche Juden sind Deutsche im besten Sinne des Wortes,” [German Jews are Germans in the best sense of the word] he declared in a speech praising Jewish achievements in art, literature and culture, “Im Dienste am Vaterland und am deutschen Geist stehen sie uns Ariern in keiner Weise nach.”²⁰⁵ [In service to the fatherland and to the German spirit they are in no way second to us Aryans.] When his friend Max Liebermann, the established German-Jewish painter, left the Prussian Academy of Arts upon their decision to no longer accept paintings by Jewish artists, Hauptmann wrote to him: “Sie sind aus der Akademie ausgeschieden. Länger als fünf Jahrzehnte waren Sie ein Stolz der deutschen Kunst und werden es bleiben als einer ihrer Unsterbliche. Daß ich so denken muß, wissen Sie von mir, aber man kann so etwas nicht oft genug aussprechen.” [You have been excluded from the academy. For more than five decades you were a pride of German art and you will remain as one of its immortals. You know that I must think this of you, but one cannot say it often enough.] Similarly, upon seeing a Jewish man forced to wear the yellow star in 1941, Hauptmann protested in his diary “Sind wir Deutschen wirklich so weit gekommen, das ohne Scham anzusehen?”²⁰⁶ [Have we Germans truly gone so far as to witness that without any shame?]

Hauptmann’s private criticism of the Third Reich did not end with the regime’s internal policies of racial segregation, but extended to the German war machine and the

²⁰⁴ Cowen, *Hauptmann-Kommentar*, 156.

²⁰⁵ Hauptmann, *Gespräche*, 139.

²⁰⁶ Hilscher, *Gerhart Hauptmann*, 414.

nation's territorial conquests. The conquest of Poland was met with horror by Hauptmann, who wrote at the end of 1939 that "Nach dem Aufwachen drücken die Schrecken des Krieges auf meine Brust. Polen. Wieviel Haß hat er dort entfesselt. Wie ungeheuer wird der Deutsche dort gehaßt? ... Wo ist ein echtes humanes Ziel, das sich nicht als Teufelsfalle entpuppt?" [After I woke up I felt the terror of war pressing down against my chest. Poland. How much hate had he let loose there. How immense was the hating of the Germans there... Where is there a proper human goal, that does not turn out to be a devil's snare?] Similarly, around the time Hauptmann was writing *Der Schuß im Park* at the end of 1938, only a few months after the Austrian *Anschluß* and annexation of the Sudetenland, he declared that "Leider aber trage ich eine Zentnerlast, Schmerzen und Sorgenlast um mein Vaterland und mein Volk."²⁰⁷ [Unfortunately however I only bear a heavy sense of burden, pain and load of worry toward my fatherland and my people.] If Hauptmann often publicly expressed views to the contrary, perhaps because of the fact that, as he informed Liebermann of his critical views, "man kann so etwas nicht oft genug aussprechen," [one cannot express such a thing often enough] it is notable that he did not explicitly incorporate such views into his works from the period. As Hilscher points out, few wartime writers produced literature free from the trace of Nazi ideology, and consequently very few literary works today passed down from those years are still considered of merit. For most, writes Hilscher, "war die inhumane Verherrlichung von Nationalismus, Militarismus und Blut-und-Boden-Mythos bezeichnend."²⁰⁸ [the inhumane glorifying of nationalism, militarism and the *Blut-und-Boden* myth was

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 422.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 423.

telling.] In conjunction with this notable omission, Hilscher reads covert signs of protest against Nazi inhumanity in many of Hauptmann's works throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

The violence, turmoil and militarism of the era in which Hauptmann wrote *Der Schuß im Park*, right on the brink of the Second World War, finds voice in the novella. Hitler's rise to power, both publicly and clandestinely violent, his policy of militarism and his apparent willingness to use the German war machine to suit his ever-growing demands, and the violence of *Kristallnacht*, which occurred only a few weeks before Hauptmann began writing, are never explicitly mentioned in the work. That Hauptmann would be loath to do so, given the pressure exerted on him by the regime and its merciless persecution of whoever stood in its way, is hardly surprising. Describing the fascists' rigid process of cultural control, Karl-Heinz Schoeps writes that "[Nazi] controls applied not only to the publishing industry but also to all areas of culture and literature...the attempt was made to control not only book production but also book distribution, authors, and readers. In this process, the current cultural material was screened critically, and the past was 'cleansed' of 'undesirable elements.'"²⁰⁹ Writers and other artists were forced into professional collectives, or *Berufsgemeinschaften*, from which they could be expelled for displaying any characteristics "of being non-Aryan."²¹⁰ Despite National Socialist attempts to restrict literary production to ideologically pure

²⁰⁹ Karl-Heinz Schoeps, *Literature and Film in the Third Reich* (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), 42-43.

²¹⁰ Volker Dahm, "The Limits on Literary Life in the Third Reich," in *Flight of Fantasy: New Perspectives on Inner Emigration in German Literature, 1933-1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 170-171.

elements, however, the vast mechanism they harnessed to do so often allowed ideologically impure elements to slip through their reach. Lacking an orthodox, uniform censorship code and a central authority to impose it, the National Socialists created space for works critical of the regime, albeit secretly so, to occasionally be published.²¹¹ It is thus not surprising that as suggestively transgressive a work as *Der Schuß im Park* made it to publication during these years.

Prevented by such constraints from directly criticizing fascist policy, *Der Schuß im Park* provides much material that speaks indirectly to the years in which it was written. Its choice of the overseas colonial scene recalls imperial Germany's practice of "*innere Kolonisation*" along its eastern provinces, a process that Hitler would later attempt to subsume into his own eastward expansion. The novella underscores this connection to internal colonization through the its setting along the German-Polish border, in which the narrator Adolf dwells and from where he tells his tale. It was in this region that Germany had attempted to Germanize and colonize many of the historically Polish territories it administered, to which end Bismarck established the Royal Prussian Settlement Commission in 1886. The Commission, granted a one hundred million Mark fund, was intended to help Germans purchase property in and ultimately relocate to Posen and West Prussia.²¹² Just as Germany had moved its citizens to new African colonies, so too were 200,000 Germans moved into Prussia's eastern borderlands as part of this *innere Kolonisation*. This sort of "*kolonisation*" was connected to overseas colonialism in the German imaginary: German practitioners of inner colonization believed, explains Nelson,

²¹¹ Scheops, *Literature and Film in the Third Reich*, 45-46.

²¹² Nelson, "From Manitoba to the Memel," 446-447.

that “very definitely...there was some ‘thing’ called inner colonization...and for them there was simply a continuum from inner to overseas colonialism.”²¹³ It was precisely this legacy of internal colonization that the Third Reich would capitalize on, argues Nelson, in its own eventual colonial expansion into Eastern Europe. By telling the tale of overseas colonialism along Germany’s own “colonized” regions, then, Hauptmann’s novella points to the political realities of territorial expansion and attempts at cultural supremacy within and along Germany’s own continental borders.

One of the most prominent allusions to the *Nazizeit* in *Der Schuß im Park* is the figure of death, which recurs repeatedly in the novella. Heliadora accuses van der Diemen of having “wohl aus Afrika den Todeskeim mitgebracht,” [brought the death germ out of Africa with him] and Adolf tells Konrad that “am Tage wirkt ein Kronleuchter, der nicht brennt, wie ein toter Fremdkörper.”²¹⁴ [during the day a chandelier that was not lit gave off the appearance of a dead foreign body.] Konrad, the protagonist and narrator, listens to his uncle Adolf’s tales of adventure as Adolf stands “mitten auf dem Kirchhof und dicht an dem frischen Grabhügel.”²¹⁵ [in the middle of the churchyard and close to the fresh burial mound.] Adolf’s storytelling evokes Hauptmann’s own, and the “frischen Grabhügel” alongside which the speaker tells his tale, seemingly oblivious to its presence, conjures up associations of the recent death and violence so characteristic of the Germany from which Hauptmann speaks. The narrator repeats himself to emphasize the presence of the “frischen Grabhügel” on two separate

²¹³ Ibid., 450-451.

²¹⁴ Gerhart Hauptmann, *Der Schuß im Park* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1962), 28, 41.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 11.

occasions, framing both the tale's ending and beginning. On the other occasion, with which the tale begins, Konrad ponders what people passing by might think of Adolf, telling his tale "zwei Schritt von den Kränzen und Schleifen des frischen Grabhügels."²¹⁶ [two steps from the crown and trail of the fresh burial mound.] Konrad continues this line of thought shortly after the second description of the "frischen Grabhügel," declaring that "Es war nicht möglich, über den Kontrast zwischen seinem körperlichen Zustand und seiner feurigen Erzählung sowie zwischen ihrem, ganz dem vollen Leben gehörenden Inhalt und der todgeweihten Stätte des Friedhofs hinwegzusehen."²¹⁷ [It was impossible to ignore the contrast between his corporal state and that of his impassioned story, much like the contrast between the contents of the story, full of life, and the doomed state of the cemetery.] Both of Konrad's observations draw attention to this paradoxical position, making it difficult to "hinwegsehen" the contrast between Hauptmann's literary "Inhalt" and the "todgeweihten Stätte" in which he found himself increasingly surrounded.

The ability of storytelling to transport Adolf away from the traces of death, only "zwei Schritt" [two steps] before him, finds its parallel in Adolf's description of Degenhart's estate. "Dieser Herrschafts- und Herrensitz mutet fast wie ein Märchen an," he describes, "Aber Schlesien hat dieser Märchen viele, dieser Wunder aus Tausendundeiner Nacht."²¹⁸ [This manor quickly appeared like something almost out of a fairy tale. But Schlesien has many of these fairy tales, these wonders out of the *1,001 Nights*.] The legacy of *1,001 Nights*, in which Scheherazade must each night tell a new

²¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 11.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 24.

story to the Persian King Shahryar in order to distract him from his plans to execute her, echoes Adolf's own predicament as he tells his tale standing before the grave. Adolf's storytelling is repeatedly described by the narrator as a bombastic expression of life, even though while telling it Adolf often "am Sprechen merklich behindert war und wieder und wieder nach Atem ringen mußte."²¹⁹ [appeared noticeably hindered and had to gasp for breath over and over.] Both these examples call attention to Hauptmann's own positionality, storytelling with his back turned, at least explicitly, to the atmosphere of death and destruction mounting before him. Insofar as storytelling in the novella evokes the *1,001 Nights*, however, Hauptmann's work suggests hope in the power of art to avert or mitigate danger in times of crisis like those in which he wrote.

Beyond Hauptmann's juxtapositions of storytelling and death, the sheer ability of narrative to transport one outside of their immediate environs in the novella reinforces the sense of disjunct between *Der Schuß im Park*'s seemingly innocuous narrative and the extremity of Hauptmann's own times. The novella emphasizes this ability in Degenhart's tales of Russia: "mitten in Afrika wurden wir durch seine Erzählungen nach Rußland versetzt... Wirklich, wir klapperten fast vor Frost, während die afrikanische Hitze um uns brodelte."²²⁰ [In the middle of Africa we were, through his story, transported to Russia... Truly, we nearly shivered from frost, while the African heat around us boiled.] *Der Schuß im Park* itself operates along a similar narrative principle: as the reader, along with Konrad, becomes completely engrossed in Adolf's story, the details of Konrad's own circumstances vanish. Konrad appears to leave his life completely behind him in the

²¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

²²⁰ Ibid., 15.

Riesengebirge, a life of which we learn very little other than that, as Adolf reminds him, he has a wife and is a hunter himself. Konrad's engrossment in Adolf's story, like that of the companions who listened to Degenhart's Russian stories, becomes complete at the end of the novella when he actually hallucinates Adolf's deceased characters into existence in his own reality. "Deutlich, so daß ich diese Erscheinung noch heute, wäre ich ein Maler, malen könnte, blickte über ihre linke Schulter der Baron, die Afrikanerin über die rechte," he writes in the novella's closing sentence.²²¹ [So clearly, that I could still paint this scene today, were I a painter, did the Baron glance over her left shoulder, the African woman over her right shoulder.] In effectively assuming the role of the *Maler* and reproducing Adolf's story, Konrad's own reality is overtaken by that of the tale. This deliberate marginalization of Konrad's reality in the face of literary narrative recalls that of Hauptmann's own, pointing as much to what is missing from the narrative as to what it presents. Konrad's name is also an allusion to fictional narrative, recalling Joseph Conrad, author of the British colonial novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899). The allusion is not surprising, given that Conrad's novel shares with Hauptmann's own a critical attitude toward the colonial project.

If Hauptmann's text often points to what is missing or omitted in the act of storytelling, there are various other elements in the novella that might be read as alluding directly to the growth of German fascism. Perhaps the most prominent of these is the figure of the uncle Adolf, whose name clearly alludes to Hitler's own. Hauptmann draws particular attention to this name, which unsurprisingly grew in popularity during the Nazi

²²¹ Ibid., 59.

era, when he declares that the uncle was “im Familienkreis Adolf genannt.”²²² [called Adolf within family circles.] The passage stands out by virtue of the fact that Adolf is *not* a nickname, and thus the suggestion that it would be used as such draws curious attention to itself. Hauptmann reinforces the dictatorial ramifications of the name when he refers to Adolf as “Der alte Barbarossa,” the German leader whose militarism led Germany into multiple wars against Italy and, like Hitler’s own aggression in Eastern Europe shortly before the publication of the novella, on the Third Crusade through Eastern Europe.²²³ This image of Adolf as the legendary militaristic ruler is frequently reinforced when the narrator refers to his “immer noch rötlichen, gewaltigen Vollbart” [always redder, immense full beard]: the mighty red beard recalls Barbarossa’s own, to which his name alludes in Italian (*barba rossa*).²²⁴ If *Der Schuß im Park* thus alludes to the context of Hitler’s National Socialism in which it appeared, it does so in an innocuous manner that avoids any sort of explicit connections with it: Adolf may evoke that other Adolf, but his character in no way behaves in a manner like to Hitler’s own.

More insidious, and more veiled, potential references to the Third Reich may be found throughout the novella. “Es war die Zeit des Zweirads,” the narrator alerts us in the first paragraph, “Automobile machten die Straßen noch nicht unsicher.”²²⁵ [It was the time of bicycles. Automobiles had not yet made the streets unsafe.] The legacy of street violence that defined the Nazi seizure of power and the *Kristallnacht* finds voice in the

²²² Ibid., 4.

²²³ Ibid., 12.

²²⁴ Ibid., 3.

²²⁵ Ibid.

“Straßen noch nicht unsicher,” and if Hauptmann implicates modern technology as complicit in this dangerous turn than it is little reassuring that at the end of the novella Konrad abandons his bicycle to travel to his uncle’s funeral via train. Other potential allusions to the tumultuous times include the fact that the story begins on a “Herbstmorgens” [fall morning] and ends on a funeral in late November, with the descent of winter approaching.²²⁶ That Adolf was unable to keep his distance of “zwei Schritt” from the grave is also ominous: as in the case of Scheherazade, the abandonment of storytelling implies the consequent reality of death—one which the novella confronts head-on as it abandons its own storytelling to end at the site of a funeral. In this play between narrative and the reality waiting outside it, the question of what Hauptmann must himself confront in turning back from the novella to the outside world is provocatively posed.

Adolf’s illness that brings about his death is also presented in a potentially allusive light by Hauptmann: Konrad learns that he has received “eine schlimme Prognose, die eine Autorität gestellt hatte.”²²⁷ [a bad prognosis, which an authority had given.] Like the qualification regarding Adolf’s name, Hauptmann draws attention to Adolf’s prognosis that strangely comes not from an *Arzt* but from an *Autorität*. Another possible allusion to the ubiquitous presence of Nazi bureaucracy and authority at this period may be found in Hauptmann’s description of the seemingly endless series of officials who further the process of aiding and removing the injured woman’s body from Degenhart’s property: “Zufällig hatte mein Assistent den Wächter selbst soeben im Park

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid., 5.

gesprächen. Er hatte ihn noch sehr erregt gefunden und von ihm erfahren, wie er einen Kollegen zum Polizeiwachtmeister geschickt habe, wie dieser dann gekommen war, nachdem er den Amtsvorsteher verständigt hatte, wie am Ende auch dieser mit einigen Leuten kam, worunter sich der Kreisarzt befand.”²²⁸ [As chance would have it my assistant had himself just spoken to the guard in the park. He had found him still very excited and found out from him how he had sent a colleague to the police constable, and how this one had then arrived, and after he had informed the official, how finally this official came with some others, to go to where the local doctor might be found.] That such bureaucracy is not only inefficient, but largely unconcerned with the health of the wounded African woman, for whom it provides a doctor only *after* having taken the time to alert various authority figures, comes uncomfortably close to National Socialism’s own institutionalized and authoritarian attitudes and policies toward “inferior” races, policies and attitudes against which Hauptmann’s novella can be read.

Der Schuß im Park was viewed unfavorably by the National Socialists and its second printing halted by Goebbels precisely when it was charged with being a “rassenschänderische” [racially desecratory] work.²²⁹ In its accounts of racial mixing—a German noble, Degenhart, marries an African woman, Kätchen, with whom he fathers a child before returning to his life in Germany—the novella is decidedly transgressive. Appearing at a time when “[gerade um diese Zeit] wurde man von allen Seiten mit der Rassendoktrin der nationalsozialistischen Machthaber bombardiert,” [man was bombarded from all sides with the racial doctrine of the National Socialist power holders]

²²⁸ Ibid., 37.

²²⁹ Cowen, *Hauptmann-Kommentar*, 156.

to isolate the novella's accounts of racial mixing from this context would be irresponsible reading.²³⁰ Such racial mixing transgressed not only the fascist concept of a pure racial German community, or *Volksgemeinschaft*, but was also explicitly outlawed within the German colonies as early as 1905. As many scholars have argued, the Nazi's subsequent racial doctrines and laws thus reproduced and extended Imperial Germany's earlier policies regarding race in the colonies.²³¹ Pascal Grosse, for example, identifies the fascist concept of racialized citizenship as a direct descendant of German colonial ideas of citizenship. Just as racial mixing was proscribed in German colonialism, so too was all sexual intercourse proscribed between Ayrans and non-Ayrans by the Nuremberg Laws.²³² Hauptmann's account of racial mixing, then, offers a challenge to both colonial and fascist ideology and practice, transgressing the two interwoven systems in the same moment.

If Degenhart's illicit love affair with Kätchen challenges the accepted National Socialist ideology at the time Hauptmann wrote, however, the violence that Degenhart displays toward her is not. Repeatedly portrayed in a negative light, the violent Degenhart, whose name means "sword-hard," evokes Hitler in his acts of violence, racism and duplicity. Just as Hitler repeatedly deceived Germans at home and policy leaders abroad with regard to his true intentions, so does the moustached and "narcissistic" Degenhart

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Hugh Ridley, *Images of Imperial Rule* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 138-139.

²³² Pascal Grosse, "What Does German Colonialism Have to do with National Socialism? A Conceptual Framework," in *Germany's Colonial Pasts*, ed. Marcia Klotz (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 124.

continually deceive those around him with his “role playing” and “*Künstelei*.”²³³ [feigned conduct.] His longing for an “*Urheimat*” and his travels throughout Russia echo Hitler’s own ethos of *Heimat* and desire for German expansion eastward at Russia’s expense, professed as early as 1925 in *Mein Kampf*.²³⁴ In its negative portrayal of Degenhart, *Der Schuß im Park* offers an indirect critique of the very violence, deception and racism that Hitler brought to Germany. By ultimately exiling Degenhart from Germany and the German colonies, argues Charlotte Szilagyi, the novella mounts a resounding critique of all that he stands for: “By banning Degenhart from its privileged spaces within the colonial agenda (i.e. both the European mainland and the African locations eked out for German interests), the novella voices a critique of the German colonial ideology while concurrently ascribing to the African continent a power of attraction that does not become harnessed, subjugated, or reinscribed into hegemonic structures.”²³⁵ In exiling Degenhart from greater Germany, Hauptmann’s novella offers an alternative vision of German Empire than the one provided by both Hitler and Germany’s own history, wishfully banishing the ideology Degenhart evokes from Germany’s borders. In his place remains the benevolent Heliodora who cares for Kätchen and her child Scipio, thereby providing an alternative model of tolerance toward racial difference within Germany’s borders.

Racial mixing in *Der Schuß im Park* is not simply confined to the account of Degenhart and the African Kätchen. Hauptmann’s novella explicitly links Degenhart’s

²³³ Hauptmann, *Der Schuß im Park*, 24-26.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 21, 15.

²³⁵ Charlotte Szilagyi, *FRAMED!: Encountering Otherness in Frame Narratives* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2010), 117.

transgressive relationship with an African racial other—a relationship both sexually transgressive and brutally violent—with the exploitation of and transgressive coupling with one of fascist Germany’s most condemned racial others: gypsies. In so doing, the novella posits a direct link between colonialism’s misdeeds abroad and those of fascism on the continent. Kätchen is not only cared for by a group of traveling gypsies when she attempts to travel to Germany, but she is taken for a gypsy when she is first discovered after having been shot by Degenhart. Described as a “Weib, das wahrscheinlich eine Zigeunerin sei,” [unladylike woman, who was probably a gypsy] her narrative role directly echoes that of the exploited gypsies who appear earlier in the novella.²³⁶ This narrative doubling speaks to the doubled nature of the novella’s critique, which targets both colonial and fascist misdeeds in the same movement while underscoring their mutually reinforcing relationship.

Gypsies make their most central appearance in *Der Schuß im Park* in a Hungarian episode recounted by Adolf. Adolf raves to Konrad about his sexual adventures at a Hungarian estate he visited with van der Diemen, declaring that he “war wie in Mohammeds Paradiesen.”²³⁷ [was nearly in Mohammed’s paradise.] As in the case of *1,001 Nights*, Hauptmann again superimposes Arabic culture over what is here an already Eastern European other, figuratively doubling both its exoticism and its racial inferiority in the eyes of National Socialist ideology. Hauptmann in no way attempts to play down the praise of Hungarian culture provided by Adolf, who joyously exclaims to Konrad the

²³⁶ Hauptmann, *Der Schuß im Park*, 37.

²³⁷ Cowen, *Hauptmann-Kommentar*, 10.

food he found there: “Tokaier, Gulyas, Paprika!”²³⁸ *Der Schuß im Park* goes much further, however, against Nazi racial ideology when Adolf and his peers become enamored with a group of Gypsy women. “Die schönsten Mädchen,” he declares to Konrad, “und du kannst nicht denken, welche geradezu brennende Schönheit ihnen mitunter eigen ist, saßen auf den Knien der Kavaliere. Dukaten wurden dem Primas zugeworfen und den Mädels in den Busen gesteckt. Es ging manchmal recht weit—aber wer könnte sich da, wenn er ein Mann ist, zurückhalten? Meist wurde bei den Zigeunern bis zum lichten Morgen durchgetobt.”²³⁹ [The prettiest girls, and you cannot even imagine, what burning beauty was among them, sat at the knees of the gentlemen. Ducats were thrown at the band leader and stuck in the bosoms of the girls. It sometimes went truly too far—but who there, who was truly a man, could hold back? Mostly they had a wild time until the first morning light.] Hauptmann’s passage is transgressive in two respects. The first, that a respectable German man would be involved in a romantic liaison with Gypsy women, is immediately clear. Gypsies were already considered racial aliens by virtue of commentaries on the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, and were expressly prohibited from marrying ‘Aryans.’ Tensions throughout Germany between German and Gypsy communities abounded, leading to such legal exclusion and their racial classification as “‘born’ criminals prone to ‘social feeble-mindedness.’”²⁴⁰ Hauptmann’s

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid., 10-11.

²⁴⁰ Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 372.

text thus situates itself in opposition to Nazi doctrine and policies of racial mixing, policies that Hauptmann had already privately criticized.²⁴¹

The second, and significantly more disconcerting, implication that arises in the passage is that of the casual mistreatment—if not rape—of the Gypsy women at the hands of the anonymous group of men. In what manner the dukats were “zugeworfen” at the women—whether playfully or aggressively, remains unclear. Adolf’s description of dukats being stashed in the women’s breasts is also discomfiting, as there is no allusion to or consideration of consuality on the women’s part. Adolf’s admission that “Es ging manchmal recht weit” suggests the possibility of sexual violation and transgression, and “durchgetobt,” with which he describes the men’s behavior until daybreak, evokes a sense of violence and lack of restraint. That none of these men, including Adolf and van der Diemen, are personally accounted for is even more suspicious and disturbing: Adolf never speaks of his own role that evening, instead merely referring to the group at large. In posing the question “aber wer könnte sich da, wenn er ein Mann ist, zurückhalten?,” Adolf rescinds personal responsibility for the dubious events of the evening, shamefully masking himself behind the collective identity of the majority engaging in the wild festivities. Such insinuations of the collective violation of the Gypsies speak directly to Hauptmann’s own times, in which persecution of Gypsies extended well beyond racial laws prohibiting intermarriage. While collective action had been taken against the Gypsies before 1938—during the Berlin Olympics 600 Gypsies were placed in a closed camp at Marzahn, after which similar camps appeared in Cologne, Frankfurt am Main and Salzburg—the year in which Hauptmann wrote *Der Schuß im Park* saw a succession

²⁴¹ Hilscher, *Gerhart Hauptmann*, 414.

of massive raids across the country that sent large numbers of Gypsies to concentration camps, reserved prior to that time for political opponents and career criminals.²⁴² If the novella's connotations of sexual violence resonate with fascist persecution of the Gypsies, they also allude to Hitler's territorial ambitions. Sexual violence was the chief metaphor used by the British and the French to describe Germany's acts of territorial conquest during the First World War, referring to Germany's "rape" of occupied lands.²⁴³ The insinuation of sexual violence and transgression collectively committed against the Gypsies in Adolf's story, the "manchmal recht weit," resonates forcibly then within the immediate political context of racial persecution and territorial expansion in which the novella was written.

That Hauptmann would explicitly link the colonial space to Nazi racial ideology is hardly surprising given the frequent connections made by the Nazis and within German culture between Africans and that ultimate target of Nazi persecution, the Jews. If the Gypsies provide a more passable subject matter for Hauptmann's novella in the face of Nazi censorship, the Jews are no less suggested by his choice of an African abusee. Nazis declared that Jews contained large portions of black blood, portraying the two groups as racially akin and possessing similarly objectable characteristics. "In Germany after the Great War," describes Michael Kater, "negrophobia merged easily with preexisting anti-Semitism and actually gave it renewed impetus...Motivated by the same sexual jealousy, German men in 1919 distributed leaflets warning their women of 'Jews, Negroes'...[and] Jews also had to share the blame heaped on the French for waging a 'Negro-Jewish war'

²⁴² Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 372-375.

²⁴³ Marcia Klotz, "The Weimar Republic: A Post-Colonial State in a Still Colonial World," in *Germany's Colonial Pasts*, 137-138.

on Germans.”²⁴⁴ Such a joining of Jews and Africans in the European imaginary had a long precedence on the continent. As Christian Davis describes, “The idea that the Jewish people had interbred with both Arabs and Africans before migrating to Europe spurred discussions among European scientists as far back as the 1700s about the supposed ‘blackness’ of Jews. Pioneering racial theorists like the Scottish anatomist Robert Knox expounded upon the supposed anatomical similarities between Jews and blacks during the mid-nineteenth century; and the belief that Jewish physiognomy had an African character was consequently widespread.”²⁴⁵ Jews and Africans were considered to share a number of negative traits: laziness, nomadism, opportunism, hatred of whites, dangerousness, exclusivity and dishonesty.²⁴⁶

Within German colonial discourse itself, Africans were frequently described in the language and imagery used by antisemites to portray Jews. “Images of blacks and Jews merged not just across but also within the antisemitic and colonial movements,” writes Davis. “Antisemites increasingly linked Jews with blacks, attributing to them nearly identical characteristics and ascribing ‘Negro components’ to the Jewish bloodline, intimating the need for colonial solutions to the perceived Jewish problem. At the same time, German jurists looked to the defunct Prussian antisemitic legislation when debating the legality of discriminatory laws against black Africans, and colonialists attributed Jewish backgrounds and behavioral traits to the leaders of indigenous

²⁴⁴ Michael Kater, *Different Drummers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 20.

²⁴⁵ Christian S. Davis, *Colonialism, Antisemitism and Germans of Jewish Descent in Imperial Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 80.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 90-110.

uprisings.”²⁴⁷ Not only did colonialists link Africans with Jews, but they based the very miscegenation laws that *Der Schuß im Park* challenges on prior German persecution of the Jews. Later during the fascist era, as Hannah Arendt points out, the very reverse happened when Ernst Hasse in Germany proposed treating Jews and other nationalities like Eastern Europeans in the same manner that German overseas imperialism had treated native subjects.²⁴⁸ In both cases, the rhetoric of miscegenation was a prominently shared feature between colonialism and antisemitism.²⁴⁹ Hauptmann’s decision to write of persecution against Africans in an era of widespread German persecution against the Jews should not, given such a closely linked history, be read innocently.

Hauptmann’s novella reverberates with instances of cross-culturation that challenge fascist codes of racial purity and Aryan superiority. Adolf lives and tells his story in Jauer, for instance, a town in Silesia that had passed between Germany and Poland multiple times in the past. Similarly, Konrad lives in the Riesengebirge, a multicultural region in Silesia from which Hitler had expelled the Czechs shortly before the publication of *Der Schuß im Park*. Hauptmann makes sure to note that Konrad’s uncle Adolf peacefully operates his business “an der polnischen Grenze,” [on the Polish border] where Hitler had set his sights as early as the 1920s.²⁵⁰ Embracing a trans-national scientific community, Adolf declares himself “in Verbindung mit Botanikern

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 22.

²⁴⁸ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 223.

²⁴⁹ Davis, *Colonialism, Antisemitism and Germans of Jewish Descent in Imperial Germany*, 78.

²⁵⁰ Hauptmann, *Der Schuß im Park*, 3.

aller Welt” [in contact with botanists from all over the world] and devotes much time to describing his far-reaching international contacts who aid him in his work.²⁵¹ Such an attitude of benevolent universalism places him at sharp odds with fascist attitudes of nationalism and autarky. It is not surprising, then, that his wife Ida is not a racially pure German, her Germanness having been “irgendwo in der Fremde aufgesäugt und mit tschechischem oder ruthenischem Blut gekreuzt.”²⁵² [suckled somewhere in foreign parts and crossed with Czech or Ruthenian blood.] Similarly, the German character Heliodora evokes the Greek writer Heliodorus, whose *Aithiopika*, a tale of racial boundaries transcended and transgressed, tells of an African princess mysteriously born white and who, like Kätchen, later marries a white man.²⁵³ Konrad, likewise, evokes the British author of colonial fiction Joseph Conrad. Hauptmann’s novella is thus replete with explicit and hidden instances of cross-culturation, all of which contest official fascist ideology that would promote German racial superiority, purity and exclusivity.

If *Der Schuß im Park* is critical of National Socialist ideology through its accounts of racial mixing between men and women, it is just as critical of this ideology through its descriptions of racial mixing with respect to cultural production. The Gypsies whom Adolf describes play “wilde, betäubend schöne Musik...wovon etwas in die fünfte Rhapsodie von Liszt geraten ist.”²⁵⁴ [wild, intoxicatingly beautiful music...from which

²⁵¹ Ibid., 5.

²⁵² Ibid., 58.

²⁵³ That Heliodora’s name alludes to Heliodorus is pointed out in Szilagyi, *FRAMED!*, 89.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 10.

something in Liszt's Fifth Rhapsody is drawn.] Hauptmann thus rejects a Nazi vision of purist German *Hochkultur*, instead emphasizing the cultural hybridity that infuses German and European *Hochkultur* with the traces of cultures deemed "racially inferior" by the Third Reich, such as the Gypsies.²⁵⁵ Such a move is especially transgressive given that the Third Reich had banned Gypsy musicians from performing entirely.²⁵⁶ Later, Degenhart's estate is described as a "Wunder aus Tausendundeiner Nacht...[ein] Ausdruck der besten Kultur von Europa."²⁵⁷ [Wonder out of the *1,000 Nights*...an expression of the best of European culture.] European high culture is reframed through Arabic culture, much as *1,001 Nights* was expanded and re-framed by European writers such as Antoine Galland. Even by simply evoking the Arabic tale, Hauptmann's work challenges the Third Reich's campaign against international literature.²⁵⁸ Similarly, Degenhart names his African lover Kätchen, a character from Heinrich von Kleist's *Kätchen von Heilbronn*. Degenhart makes the allusion explicit when Adolf asks him to recount the story of Kätchen before his wife: "Kätchen von Heilbronn ist," he retorts, "soviel ich weiß, ein ziemlich läppisches Drama von Kleist."²⁵⁹ [Kätchen von Heilbronn is, as far as I know, a rather silly play by Kleist.] In Kleist's play, the protagonist Wetter

²⁵⁵ Liszt, although Hungarian, grew up in a German-speaking household: a fact which scholars during the Third Reich used to claim him as a German composer. See Michael Saffle, *Liszt in Germany: 1840-1845* (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1994), 6.

²⁵⁶ Alan Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theater, and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 126-127.

²⁵⁷ Hauptmann, *Der Schuß im Park*, 24.

²⁵⁸ Schoeps, *Literature and Film in the Third Reich*, 59.

²⁵⁹ Hauptmann, *Der Schuß im Park*, 30.

vom Stahl abandons his fiancée—much as Degenhart will abandon his German wife—for Kätchen, who turns out to be the true princess of Swabia. Hauptmann thus plays on Kleist's traditional work in order to unseat ideologies of German racial purity, offering in its place a hybridic coupling of African and German cultures.

Hauptmann's use of music in *Der Schuß im Park* to criticize National Socialist racial ideology and conceptions of German *Hochkultur* finds precedent in his private writings from the period. Critical of Nazi anti-Semitism, Hauptmann wrote that "Gustav Mahler ist und bleibt ein großer Musiker. Und so viele Juden."²⁶⁰ [Gustav Mahler is and remains a great musician. And so many Jews.] Music also served Hauptmann as a point of resistance to Nazi ideology after the German war machine had ravished Poland: "Was kann ich gegen Polen haben?," he wrote, "Die Frauen sind Geist, die Männer Feuer und Geist! – Genie der Musik unwidersprochen groß und einzig. Dazu: grundeuropäisch."²⁶¹ [What could I possibly have against Poland? The women are intellect, the men fire and intellect! – Indisputable genius of music great and unique. That is: fundamentally European.] A number of years earlier Hauptmann had also used music to advance his call for world peace in the face of the Kaiser's militaristic culture, when, in his aforementioned 1913 *Festspiel in deutschen Reimen*, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony accompanied the play's closing "Demonstrationszug des Weltfriedens."

During the fascist era, Beethoven was heavily championed by the Third Reich and promoted through frequent radio play ordered by Goebbels.²⁶² The famous composer

²⁶⁰ Hilscher, *Gerhart Hauptmann*, 413.

²⁶¹ Bernhardt, *Gerhart Hauptmann*, 191.

²⁶² Kater, *Different Drummers*, 24, 47.

returns in *Der Schuß im Park*, surfacing near the center of the novella. Adolf finds a piano in one of the rooms of Degenhart's estate, that "Insel feinsten Kultur" [island of fine culture] as the narrator describes it, where he also discovers the autographs of composers Bach, Haydn, Gluck, Mozart and Beethoven—all composers of German origin, and thus subject to promotion by the Reich.²⁶³ The room opens out onto the park, where Degenhart obsessively patrols the property recently infested by "klein[es] Raubzeug." [small vermin.] Asked to explain his penchant for these patrols, Adolf's companion informs him that "gehe die nächtliche Parkjagd auf eine afrikanische Gewohnheit des Hausherrn zurück: wo er vielleicht seinen Kral bewachen mußte," [the nightly hunts in the park go back to an old African habit of the housemaster: where he may have had to guard his kraal] even though there is no need for such a patrol given the seven armed night-watchmen already protecting Degenhart's property. Inside the room with the piano, moths circle around the lamps as if in concert with the recent vermin infestation, creating an impression more akin to the African wilderness than to that of a stately German mansion. "Saß ich denn plötzlich am Klavier," states Adolf, "und spielte die Mondschein-Sonate mit schmelzender Hingabe. Das war die Lage, in der eine Detonation, ein Schuß im Park, uns aufstörte."²⁶⁴ [I suddenly sat down at the piano and played the Moonlight Sonata with melting surrender. That was when a detonation, a shot in the park, shook us.] "Der Schuß im Park," an extension of Degenhart's days defending his property in the African wilderness, is thus reframed by Hauptmann through the context of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. This reframing of the best of German

²⁶³ Hauptmann, *Der Schuß im Park*, 24.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

Hochkultur, so forcefully and exclusively claimed by the Nazis during this period, through African colonial experience challenges fascist notions of culture. It is further reinforced through the integration of inner- and outer space, as the interior room of the Schloß—that “Insel feinsten Kultur” replete with the best of German culture—opens onto the nighttime vermin-infested park that Degenhart patrols. The Beethoven performance is later echoed when Adolf ends his story by pronouncing “Plaudite, amici, comoedia finita est”—Beethoven’s supposed last words—thus further linking Hauptmann’s narrative to the Beethoven performance.²⁶⁵ As novella, *Der Schuß im Park* situates itself, like “Der Schuß im Park” from which it takes its name, somewhere between these two spaces of united German *Hochkultur* and African colonial experience.

Hauptmann imagines Africa as a site of storytelling, where figures like Degenhart would enrapture their comrades with astonishing tales. His novella is itself a *mise en abyme* of storytelling and storytellers, as Konrad recounts the story of Adolf, who himself recounts stories of Degenhart and others. Szilagyí reads into this narrative layering a “male narrative complicity,” wherein “the gesture of passing on the word, and with it, the right to speak and tell a particular story, simultaneously means a preservation of the discursive position of the storyteller, a self-consolidation of the white, European, male discursive position.”²⁶⁶ Szilagyí’s argument, however, ignores the degree to which these stories draw not from a “white, European” discursive position, but from what is in fact an African discursive position. Adolf recounts having experienced this art of oral storytelling twice in his life, the first time from Degenhart and the second from “niemand

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 56.

²⁶⁶ Szilagyí, *FRAMED!*, 89.

Geringerem als Alfred Brehm,” the famous German zoologist and travel writer who spent an extensive period of time in Africa and recorded its oral stories. That Hauptmann would associate Africa with the art of oral storytelling finds precedent in the African literary tradition, largely founded on oral storytelling. African oral storytelling was often recorded by European writers and brought back to the continent, such as in the case of Brehm and Leo Frobenius.

Hauptmann read and commented on much on Frobenius’ work in his lifetime, and the two met in person on various occasions. Frobenius repeatedly extolled African civilization and culture in his writings, criticizing European disdain and racism toward Africa and its inhabitants.²⁶⁷ In “Überlegungen zur Differenzqualität mündlicher und schriftlicher Überlieferung,” Frobenius distinguishes between *written* European plots and *oral* stories of the Luba tribe in Africa, the former of which exhibit a certain singularity of existence, and thus proximity to death, while the latter exhibit a perpetual repetition through time, and thus proximity to eternity. “Das ist ein sehr feiner Unterschied,” wrote Hauptmann of Frobenius’ distinction, “in einem modernen Kunstwerk müssen beide Formen vereinigt sein.”²⁶⁸ [That is a very fine distinction, and in a modern work of art both forms must be conjoined.] In *Der Schuß im Park*, with its dual emphasis on the art of oral storytelling and on the written word, Hauptmann fulfills this fusion he champions of European textuality with African orality, thereby breaking the dominance of a “white, European” discursive position sanctioned by the National Socialists. It is a fusion that

²⁶⁷ See, for example, Leo Frobenius, *Leo Frobenius On African History, Art and Culture* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007).

²⁶⁸ Peter Sprengel, *Die Wirklichkeit der Mythen: Untersuchungen zum Werk Gerhart Hauptmanns aufgrund des handschriftlichen Nachlasses* (Berlin: E. Schmidt Verlag, 1982), 168-171.

stands in stark distinction to the Nazis' racialist conception of culture, challenging the Nazis' rejection of black art and refusing their attempts to "expurge alien tendencies" from "racially pure" German art.²⁶⁹

The continual navigation between the textuality of *Hochkultur* and a more primitive orality makes itself felt throughout *Der Schuß im Park*. Konrad, enamored of Adolf's tales, praises his ability and asks why he does not put them down into writing. "Mündlich, Konrad, schriftlich nicht," [orally, Konrad, not written] replies Adolf regarding his talent, reaffirming his identity as an oral storyteller at the same time as the novella ironically points toward its own implicit textuality. "Wir machen uns ja gegenseitig manchmal bis zum Morgen ganz blöd und dumm mit Jagdgeschichten," [We made ourselves both stupid and thick until morning with hunting stories] he declares, distancing orality from the privileged sphere of enlightened *Hochkultur*. *Der Schuß im Park* asserts this orality through Adolf's frequent interjections and interruptions of the narrative, reminding us of its identity as spoken tale. At the same time, however, lengthy passages also appear without interruption or the presence of quotation marks (which heavily mark others), thus reinforcing the novella's textuality. Adolf affirms this hybridity when at one point he declares to Konrad "Aber weiter im Text. Jetzt höre gut zu!" [But back to the text again. Now listen well!] positioning his story somewhere between the two spaces he concomitantly alludes to.²⁷⁰ Hauptmann, faithful to his reading of Frobenius, thus moves consistently between the predominantly African and European modes of literary discourse which he describes. In challenging German pretensions to

²⁶⁹ Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany*, 21-23, 103.

²⁷⁰ Gerhart Hauptmann, *Der Schuß im Park*, 40.

cultural superiority, Hauptmann's novella challenges the very premises upon which Germany based their entire colonial project. Given that the acquisition of German colonies was considered "proof of the masculinity and maturity of a nation...the 'natural' right of the stronger over the weaker, of the more advanced over the less advanced, of the *Kulturvolk* over the *Naturvolk*," the novella's challenge to the supremacy and exclusivity of German *Hochkultur* poses a fundamental challenge to the colonial project itself.²⁷¹

Der Schuß im Park's provocative portrayal of racial coupling between Ayrán and African and its emphasis on cross-culturation stand out when read in the larger context of German colonial literature to which it belongs. During the twentieth century, colonial literature produced in Germany was increasingly and primarily of a nationalistic and bigoted orientation. Unlike *Der Schuß im Park*, such literature evinced a near universal condemnation of miscegenation. Colonial works were repeatedly praised for their racism by Nazi officials.²⁷² They repeatedly demonstrated the "physical, mental and cultural superiority" of the German colonizer over the African colonized. Rather than depict a "marriage" of cultures, German colonial literature featured a "'romance'...between colonizer and land, with the indigenous peoples functioning only as a useful labor force, to be contained yet hardly desired."²⁷³ They also served the important function of futhering the Nazi ideology of *Lebensraum*, a concept popularized through Hans Grimm's famous colonial novel *Volk ohne Raum* from 1928. Hauptmann's decision to

²⁷¹ Susanne Zantop, *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and its Legacy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 22.

²⁷² Ridley, *Images of Imperial Rule*, 52, 75, 78.

²⁷³ Zantop, *The Imperialist Imagination*, 22-23.

take up the colonial genre in the midst of National Socialism, then, should not be considered insignificant.

Another important genre to which *Der Schuß im Park* harkens is that of the fairy tale. On numerous occasions throughout the novella, Hauptmann stresses that the action taking place is like that of a fairy tale. Degenhart's estate "mutet fast wie ein Märchen an," and he appears there "als Regierender inmitten eines märchenhaften Reichturns."²⁷⁴ [as a ruler in the middle of a fairy tale kingdom.] His prized horse Bibi is described as having "märchenhaft" [fairy tale] speed, and the German fairy tale tradition is evoked explicitly when "Rotkäppchen und Dornröschen" are declared to be present in Degenhart's hunting room.²⁷⁵ In choosing to associate the German fairy tale with Degenhart's hunting legacy, a legacy of violence that ultimately leads to his shooting of Kätchen, Hauptmann builds on the close relationship between the German fairy tale and its exploitation by the National Socialists. Fascists stressed elements of Aryanism in such tales and declared them central to their "racial and political education of the young."²⁷⁶ Their interpretations of such tales emphasized "the struggle between two worlds, the pure Aryan versus the contaminated alien world," denying any possible fusion of the two.²⁷⁷ As Jack Zipes explains, "The mildew of classical fairy tales that had been challenged in the 1920s was revived as staple to legitimize racism, sexism, and authoritarianism clothed

²⁷⁴ Hauptmann, *Der Schuß im Park*, 28.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

²⁷⁶ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 139.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

in the form of the teutonic heritage.”²⁷⁸ *Der Schuß im Park* uses the colonial scene repeatedly to violate this ideologically pure image of the fairy tale. Degenhart’s “märchenhaft” European horse Bibi, for example, in fact takes her name from Degenhart’s African lover, whose physical invasion of his “fairy tale” kingdom upsets its racial and ideological integrity.

That Hauptmann would chose the fairy tale as a site to contest fascism is hardly surprising given the important ethical and political role fairy tales played in German society. Even before their extreme politicization by the Nazis, fairy tales were used during the rise of the bourgeoisie to teach children “socially acceptable roles,” and this ethical dimension saw a logical extension when Weimar liberals sought to proliferate politicized versions of fairy tales.²⁷⁹ “From the eighteenth century to the Weimar period,” writes Zipes, “German fairy-tale writers had become famous if not notorious for their subversive skills.”²⁸⁰ Hauptmann’s novella, then, can be seen as reviving this subversive tradition as it challenges the dominant fascist discourse on the genre. Merely to write of fairy tales during the fascist era was transgressive, as the Nazis actively discouraged authors from working in the genre.²⁸¹ Hauptmann’s ideologically transgressive use of the fairy tale in *Der Schuß im Park* even finds echo in another of his works from 1939, *Das Märchen*, which used the complexity of the fairy tale to mask its antifascist features. “A dramatist who had continually used fairy-tale motifs in his early works of the twentieth

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 166.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 134-135, 137-138.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 141.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 139.

century to comment on social and political conditions,” as Zipes describes him, Hauptmann’s transgressive use of the fairy tale in *Der Schuß im Park* extends this cultural and personal tradition of subversive commentary to the colonial scene.²⁸²

Another important way in which *Der Schuß im Park* challenges National Socialist ideology is through its allusions to fascist violence. Germany, as it did in the colonial period, once again expanded its borders only a few months before Hauptmann wrote *Der Schuß im Park* by annexing Austria and the Czech Sudetenland. As a result Austria’s unwilling Chancellor Schuschnigg was thrown into a German concentration camp, SS death squads patrolled Wien searching for political opponents of Hitler, and Austria’s Jewish community suffered an unprecedented outbreak of violence.²⁸³ Hauptmann, given his legacy of pacifism and support for the Jewish community, must have privately experienced such events with at least some horror, and his decision to write a novel that resuscitates Germany’s legacy of territorialization must be read with a view to this context.

Hauptmann’s portrayal of the relationship between German colonizers and colonial subjects is anything but flattering. As Adolf reports, in Africa Degenhart calls Kätchen, the only colonial subject represented in the novella, his “kleines Spielzeug.” [small plaything.] Similarly, Degenhart speaks of Kätchen before his companions “in einem brutalen und leichtfertigen Ton, der uns aufs äußerste mißfiel.”²⁸⁴ [a brutal and careless tone of voice, which displeased us to the extreme.] Degenhart repeats this

²⁸² Ibid., 144, 165.

²⁸³ Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 276.

²⁸⁴ Hauptmann, *Der Schuß im Park*, 16.

humiliation when he calls his horse Bibi by the name Kätchen, and shows no sympathy for Kätchen when he abandons both her and their child. Kätchen follows Degenhart to continental Germany, however, traveling from Dar-es-Salaam, the capital of German *Ostafrika*. Her voyage from Africa and the subsequent violence she incites in Degenhart echos Heliadora's earlier accusation against van der Diemen, whom she blames for having "wohl aus Afrika den Todeskeim mitgebracht."²⁸⁵ When Degenhart finally shoots Kätchen, we learn that she is not the only victim of his expansive, albeit "überflüssig," [unnecessary] arming of his estate: Degenhart has already killed an innocent farmer and postman—"fremd am Ort" [foreign to the place]—by mistake.²⁸⁶ In Degenhart's excessive arming of his estate with six armed guards and his own deadly patrols—an outgrowth of his colonial days in Africa—something of Germany's own militarization and its potential dangers can be glimpsed. By specifically targeting his violence toward an African, as well as one "fremd am Ort," Degenhart also evokes the recent German violence against Jews, so often compared to and equated with Africans. Even the language used by Hauptmann to describe the infiltrators of Degenhart's estate—by "Raubzeug" that he must hunt down, as Degengardt later does Kätchen—recalls the language commonly used by the Nationalist Socialists to identify the Jewish "infiltration" of the German homeland. Far from "sanctioning the colonial endeavour" while "[exempting] the storyteller and the audience from Western temporalities...with the corollary of affording the suspension of the question of an ethical responsibility," as Szilagyi puts it, *Der Schuß im Park* actively engages with its historical moment in order

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 28.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 35.

to subvert the fascist ideologies of violence and racism that are echoed in its colonial landscape.²⁸⁷

Hauptmann's critical model of the colonial scene, as a fragment of German imperialism and territorialization, also lends itself to a critique of the Third Empire's own unrestrained use of force and its degrading attitudes toward "inferior" races. Insofar as this legacy of violence and racism follows Degenhart from German *Ostafrika* back to continental Europe, the novella suggests an implicit connection between German colonialism and German fascism. Colonialism is thus rendered in a new, increasingly unflattering light, just as fascism is recontextualized within a larger historical tradition. First perceived as "eine Detonation," Degenhart's *Schuß* against Kätchen reverberates with the broadly mounting violence shaking the heart of Europe in 1938. Extremist racial ideology and its practice, growing militarism, and the ready use of violence to accommodate territorial ambitions and to target the "undesirables" of society all contribute to the explosive detonation at the center of *Der Schuß im Park*.

²⁸⁷ Szilagy, *FRAMED!*, 92, 111.

Chapter 3. Rehabilitating Empire: Hermann Broch and Marguerite Yourcenar

The work of Hermann Broch and Marguerite Yourcenar re-imagines ancient imperial Rome in order to offer a critique of modern-day fascism and colonialism, while at the same time pondering ambivalently over the possibility of good or benevolent empire as an alternative to fascism's abuses in the modern world. Written during the apex of fascism between 1938 and 1945, Hermann Broch's *Der Tod des Vergil* (1945) tells a tale at once worlds away and immediately near to the fascist experience. The novel recounts Virgil's final day upon earth, detailing his fraught relationship with Augustus, his distaste for the Roman populace and his determination to burn his epic the *Aeneid*. In its complex and multidimensional evocation of the Roman Empire, Broch's work indirectly confronts the specter of fascism, contesting many of the features it shares in part or whole with his image of ancient empire: territorialism, authoritarianism, racial intolerance, oppressive aesthetic ideologies and the valorization of the masses over the individual. If *Der Tod des Vergil* uses the theater of ancient empire to confront contemporary fascism, however, it also uses this same theater to challenge the legacy of overseas European colonialism. In its joint critique of both fascism and colonialism, the novel problematizes the implicit connections and uncomfortable affinities between both movements. At the same time as Broch's work offers a challenge to fascism and colonialism that echoes the one Broch makes in his own political writings, his novel remains deeply ambivalent about the concept of empire that it so frequently contests. If *Der Tod des Vergil* contests the sort of empire building enacted by the fascists and European powers of its day, it also holds out the possibility of a more "benevolent"

empire unencumbered by their injustices. Thus confronted with the contemporary specter of self-interested, aggressive territorialism and hyper-nationalism on the part of European powers, of fascism's "evil" empires, Broch rehabilitates the possibility of morally righteous and "good" empire. Continually wavering in its critical vision of the imperial project, torn between an image explicitly evocative of fascism's misdeeds and one inspiring hope in the possible justness of empire, *Der Tod des Vergil* plays out a deep ambivalence about the potential of empire in the modern era.

Hermann Broch's writings have witnessed a steady torrent of criticism since they first drew the attention of scholars many years ago. *Der Tod des Vergil* is no exception to this phenomenon, being itself the subject of many articles, books and dissertations. Critics have devoted themselves to many facets of the multilayered work, exploring its metaphysical and mystical dimensions, especially its Christian and Jewish theological underpinnings, its enigmatic ending, its use of laughter, its intertextuality with Virgil's writings, its relationship to the Virgilian tradition at large, and its relationship to literary modernism, specifically to James Joyce and Thomas Mann.²⁸⁸ Despite this outpouring of

²⁸⁸ For the connection between *Der Tod des Vergil* and Jewish Messianism, see Glenn Sandberg, "Hermann Broch and Hermann Cohen: Jewish Messianism and the Golden Age," *Modern Austrian Literature* 31 (2) (1998): 71-80. For the novel's enigmatic ending, see Kathleen L. Komar, "The Death of Virgil: Broch's Reading of Vergil's Aeneid," *Comparative Literature Studies* 21 (3) (1984): 255-269, Komar, "The Politics of Subject Matter: History as Subject in Hermann Broch's *Der Tod des Vergil*," *Modern Austrian Literature* 18 (1) (1985): 51-61 and Robert Halsall, "Vergil's Change of Mind: On Broch's *Der Tod des Vergil*," *New German Studies* 18 (3) (1996): 145-169. For the novel's use of laughter, see Dorrit Cohn, "Laughter at the Nadir: On a Theme in Broch's Novels," *Monatshefte: Fur Deutschen Unterricht, Deutsche Sprache und Literatur* 61 (2) (1969): 113-121. For Broch's relationship to Virgil, see Theodore Ziolkowski, "Broch's Image of Vergil and its Context," *The Classical Heritage: Vergil*, ed. Craig Kallendorf (New York: Garland, 1993), 87-111 and Richard F. Thomas, *Virgil and the Augustan Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For Broch's relationship to Joyce and Mann, see Nelly Stéphane, "Le Basset et le crocodile," *Europe*:

criticism, however, few scholars have explored the novel's historical connections to the *Nazi-Zeit* in which it was composed. Such connections, acknowledged by Broch himself, are often taken for granted by critics, who generally recognize them without exploring them in any detail.²⁸⁹ One notable exception is the work of Patrick Eiden, who reads *Der Tod des Vergil* alongside Broch's political writings in order to gauge its response to fascism as well as its broader political implications.²⁹⁰ Similarly, Richard Thomas's *Virgil and the Augustan Reception* argues that Broch usurps the Virgilian tradition to his own political ends, de-legitimizing National Socialist ideology in the process. No scholars, however, have probed the colonial implications of *Der Tod des Vergil*, although Judith Ryan has pointed to Broch's preoccupation with colonialism in his earlier writings.²⁹¹ While exploring this overlooked aspect of the novel, this chapter will also broaden and complicate a historicist understanding of Broch's novel as an outgrowth of the fascist era in which it was composed by exploring how the novel both looks favorably upon the project of empire and re-frames fascism within a colonial discourse.

Revue Litteraire Mensuelle 69 (741-742 (1991): 106-111 and Lothar Bornscheuer, "Die Apokalyptische 'Endschaft der Kunstperiode' in Hermann Broch's *Der Tod des Vergil* und Thomas Manns *Doktor Faustus*," *Literatur für Leser* (1) (1996): 17-31.

²⁸⁹ See, for instance, Fritz Wefelmeyer, "Geschichte als Verinnerlichung: Hermann Broch's *Der Tod des Vergil*," *Travelers in Time and Space: The German Historical Novel*, ed. Durrari (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001): 243-261.

²⁹⁰ See Patrick Eiden, "Translatio Imperii Ad Americam: Working through the Poetics and Politics of Empire in Hermann Broch's *The Death of Virgil*," *Literary Imagination: The Review of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics* 8 (3) (2006): 441-466.

²⁹¹ See Judith Ryan, "The German Colonial Aftermath: Broch's 1903. *Esch oder die Anarchie*," *Hermann Broch, Visionary in Exile: The 2001 Yale Symposium* (Rochester: Camden House, 2003), 125-135.

Given the circumstances under which it was composed, it comes as no surprise that *Der Tod des Vergil* resounds with allusions to fascism. Broch, an Austrian Jew who had converted to Roman Catholicism, began writing the novel only shortly after the *Anschluss*. Interned as a political subversive in the Alt-Aussee prison at the time, Broch faced the constant threat of deportation to the concentration camps or execution. Upon his release from Alt-Aussee, he spent several months in Vienna awaiting an exit visa. Here he witnessed the growing brutality of the Gestapo, who at the time were gathering Jews to be sent to Dachau. Broch successfully escaped from Austria to England and eventually to the United States, where he continued working on the Virgil novel he had begun while imprisoned in Alt-Aussee.²⁹²

Describing the composition of *Der Tod des Vergil*, Broch would repeatedly link his decision to write the novel to the rising specter of fascism. In a 1943 letter to Hermann Ullstein, for instance, he claimed that he began the novel as a direct response to the growing threat Hitler posed in Austria. Broch abandoned work on another novel at the time, *Verzauberung*, in order to confront the problem of death that Hitler raised for Europe. It was for this reason that he deliberately chose as his subject a poet living under similar conditions to his own, he claimed in the letter.²⁹³ “Vergil hat in einer Zeit gelebt, die vielfach mit der unseren verglichen werden kann, in einer Zeit, die erfüllt war von Blut und Grauen und Sterben,” [Virgil lived in a time that can be very much compared to

²⁹² Peter Yoonsuk Paik, “Poetry as Perjury: The End of Art in Broch’s *Der Tod des Vergil* and Celan’s *Atemwende*,” *Hermann Broch, Visionary in Exile: The 2001 Yale Symposium* (Rochester: Camden House, 2003), 202.

²⁹³ Hermann Broch, *Materialien zu Hermann Broch “Der Tod des Vergil”*, ed. Paul Michael Lützeler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976), 211.

our own, a time filled with blood, horror and death] he wrote the same year in another letter to Kurt Wolff.²⁹⁴ It was this *Stimmung* of “Blut und Grauen und Sterben” in which he lived that led him to confront Virgil’s death as a meditation on the prospect of own, he declared in a 1945 letter to Aldous Huxley: “Der *Vergil* ist aus Zufallsanfängen gewachsen; ich bin damit in eine Zeit echter Todesbedrohung (durch die Nazi) geraten, und ich habe ihn daher ausschließlich für mich – teilweise sogar im Gefängnis – gewissermaßen als private Todesvorbereitung, sicherlich also nicht für Publikationszwecke geschrieben.”²⁹⁵ [The *Virgil* grew out of a chance beginning; I had fallen into a time of the true threat of death (through the Nazis), and I written had this book exclusively for myself – partly even in prison – certainly as a private preparation for death, and certainly not for the goal of publication.] To accept *Der Tod des Vergil* as a strictly “private Todesvorbereitung,” however, would be to ignore both Broch’s ultimate decision to publish the novel and his own passionate political engagement at the time of its composition. However pessimistic both the novel and Broch might often be toward the prospect of an ethical and political role for literature, Broch’s own political engagement unsurprisingly echoes throughout the novel.

Broch’s opposition to fascism was not strictly a literary affair: he devoted much of his time during the war years to combating its dangers through political writing and activism. Working as an exile in the United States, he called on Western democracies to wage a total war against fascism by out-propagandizing it and using any force necessary

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 216.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 222.

to combat the threat it posed to human life.²⁹⁶ The setting of his epic novel, the Roman Empire, would reappear often throughout these political writings as a site that he himself traced to German imperialism. It was from Rome that the concept of empire spread to Germany in the form of the Holy Roman Empire, he wrote, which in turn both Bismarck and the Nazis sought to resurrect.²⁹⁷ That the imperial subject matter of Broch's urgent political discourse reappears throughout his literary writings of the same period suggests a shared posture of political engagement in both works, lending support to Hannah Arendt's contention that despite Broch's failing faith in the political weight of literature, he always managed to preserve an ethical role for his writing.²⁹⁸

The fact that Broch should see in the Roman Empire's "Blut und Grauen und Sterben" an echo of his own time is not surprising giving the historical reception of the Roman Empire within Germany and other fascist states. Many German writers of the time linked the glory of ancient Rome to the German present, perhaps most notably Oswald Spengler. Spengler's popular *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918), a work with which Broch was intimately familiar, traced a genealogy of Western civilization that found its roots in imperial Rome. "Das Römertum," he wrote in the work, "von strengstem Tatsachensinn, ungenial, barbarisch, diszipliniert, praktisch, protestantisch, *preußisch* (italics mine), wird uns, die wir auf Vergleiche angewiesen sind, immer den

²⁹⁶ Donald Wallace, "The Death of Civilization: Ethics and Politics in the Work of Hermann Broch, 1886-1951" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 2006), 21.

²⁹⁷ Hermann Broch, *Politische Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), 116-117, 340, 343.

²⁹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 116-117.

Schlüssel zum Verständnis der eigenen Zukunft bieten.”²⁹⁹ [The era of Rome, marked by the strictest factuality, ingenious, barbaric, disciplined, practical, protestant, *Prussian*, will offer we, who rely on this comparison, the key to the understanding of our own future.] Throughout this work Spengler, who ironically became a critic of National Socialism and German anti-Semitism, argues for a return to German glory through territorial expansion and world domination that would revive the legacy and splendor of ancient Rome. It was exactly this sort of thinking that Broch would criticize, lamenting of Spengler that his “halbphilosophisches Denken,” [half-philosophical thinking] as he derogatorily labels it, “den unheilvollsten Einfluß auf die Weltgestaltung ausgeübt hat.”³⁰⁰ [had exercised the most unholy influence on the world’s development.] Hitler himself championed this legend of a Roman-German affinity for imperial greatness, declaring that “The population of Rome had ended by acquiring a great esteem for the Germanic peoples. It is clear that there was a great preference in Rome for fair-haired women, to such a point that many Roman women dyed their hair. Thus Germanic blood constantly regenerated Roman society. The Jew, on the other hand, was despised in Rome.”³⁰¹ It is within the context of this contemporary vision of the Roman Empire that Broch’s novel must be read.

If the Roman Empire became a privileged vehicle for conjuring up visions of German fascism in the 1930s and 1940s, it was Virgil and Augustus in particular who served the National Socialists’ purpose. Broch was introduced to Virgil largely through

²⁹⁹ Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (München: Beck, 1934), 35.

³⁰⁰ Broch, *Politische Schriften*, 417-418.

³⁰¹ Quoted in Thomas, *Virgil and the Augustan Reception*, 247.

the German writer Theodor Haecker, whose *Vergil: Vater des Abendlandes* (1931) called for a German return to the study of Virgil, whom Haecker reads as a champion of Rome's imperial project. Germany, he argues, should take up the task of empire where Rome left off, thereby envisioning Germany's own *Reich* as a direct continuation of Rome's. Later in 1935, W. Eberhardt would argue, based on Haecker's book, that Rome itself was the true center of National Socialism.³⁰² Broch's Virgil, often disappointed with his own laudatory vision of Rome in the *Aeneid*, echoes Broch's own disillusionment with Haecker's ideology upon attending one of his speeches.³⁰³

Haecker was not alone in his "optimistic" reading of Virgil as a staunch proponent of the imperial project. Famed critic Ernst Robert Curtius saw Virgil as playing a central role in Augustus' project of empire building.³⁰⁴ As Richard Thomas argues, the 1930s and 1940s saw the (extremely) optimistic reading create an easy link between Virgil and the fascist leader-cult. "Love for his country and love for his countrymen: the two great loves of Virgil are the bases of that spiritual movement that we have called *Fascismo*. It is for this reason that Virgil lives and will live – through the millennia – in the soul of the Italian people," declared Mussolini of the poet.³⁰⁵ Even during Virgil's earlier period of unpopularity and neglect in Germany, a young Goebbels would devote his studies to him

³⁰² Ibid., 240.

³⁰³ Eiden, "Translatio Imperii ad Americam," 441.

³⁰⁴ Patrick Eiden, "'Grenzenlos wird das Reich sein': Imperiale Formgebung in Hermann Brochs *Der Tod des Vergil*," *Die Souveränität der Literatur: Zum Totalitären der Klassischen Moderne 1900-1933*, ed. Wilhelm Fink (Munich: Fink, 2008), 261.

³⁰⁵ Quoted in Thomas, *Virgil and the Augustan Reception*, 236.

as a doctoral student in literature.³⁰⁶ Scholars like Goebbels and Curtius exploited Virgil in their attempts to shore up support for National Socialism. Classicist Hans Oppermann, who embraced an optimistic reading of Virgil, posited Rome as a paradigm for the fascist state in his writing on the *Aeneid* and attempted to use the classical canon to prove the superiority of the German and Nordic races.³⁰⁷ Not only did numerous German scholars link Virgil's Rome to the modern German state, but they produced increasingly bellicose translations of his work.³⁰⁸ Broch's own departure from such an orthodox and optimistic reading, as Richard Thomas acknowledges, presents a strong counter image of Virgil that de-legitimizes this work of his National Socialist contemporaries.

Alongside Virgil, Augustus was championed by contemporary fascists as a model leader for their imperial aspirations. In Italy, Augustus' Roman Revolution and consolidation of power was viewed as a model for the fascist revolution.³⁰⁹ Writers expounded upon Augustus' virtues, mythologizing him as one who embodied the eternal virtues of Romanness, or *romanità*, which had now passed down to the Italian fascists. Broch began *Der Tod des Vergil* shortly after the widely popular bimillennial celebration of Augustus' birth in 1937, which was marked by numerous publications, festivities and exhibits, including the famed "mostra augustea" in Italy. As Romke Visser describes, the *mostra augustea* was "an enormous exhibition of archaeological replicas and scale

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 228-229.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 242.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 246.

³⁰⁹ Romke Visser, "Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of the Romanità" *Journal of Contemporary History* 27 (1): 5 (1992), 14.

models of Roman monuments, presented as ‘evidence’ of Rome’s greatness and the eternal values of its civilization...in this exhibition, visited by over a million Italians and foreigners, the cult of law, justice and order prevailed, together with the more visual items of Roman practical genius.”³¹⁰ Hitler himself visited the *mostra augustea* on two separate occasions, a fact not surprising given Germany’s own aspirations to Augustinian greatness.³¹¹ Theodore Ziolkowski details the broad significance of the bimillennial for fascism in both Germany and across Europe: “The analogy between Vergil’s Rome and modern Europe was the principal topos that emerged from the festivities surrounding the bimillennial of Vergil’s birth celebrated all over Europe in 1930—and nowhere more enthusiastically than in Germany...the experience of World War I and its aftermath had awakened German readers to the realization that [Virgil’s] *Bucolics*, notwithstanding their familiar title, were the work of a poet who, some two thousands years earlier, had undergone startlingly similar experiences—civil war, the social turmoil of returning veterans, dispossession of property, the collapse of traditional rural values in the face of modernization, and the longing for the peace and tranquility that characterized the Golden Age which Vergil called the *Saturnia regna*. Then the bimillennial celebration of 1930 produced several books on Vergil addressed to the general public as well as a number of excellent essays in leading cultural journals by such highly regarded writers as Ernst Robert Curtius...Many thoughtful readers believed that they detected in Vergil’s works a classical paradigm of the modern socio-political situation—a society torn in the

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

³¹¹ Friedemann Scriba, “The Sacralization of the Roman Past in Mussolini’s Italy: Erudition, Aesthetics, and Religion in the Exhibition of Augustus’ Bimillenary in 1937-1938,” *Storia Della Storiografia* (30) (1996), 27.

tensions between a republic wracked by civil war and an empire foreshadowing the modern totalitarian state.”³¹² It is precisely this turbulent transition from democratic republic to authoritarian empire that Broch’s *Virgil* often reflects upon. Broch’s portrayal of Augustus, Virgil and the Roman Empire, far from being developed in a vacuum, grow out of and respond to these pervasive readings of Roman culture that the fascist era generated.

Der Tod des Vergil gestures toward the fascist present not only through its choice of ancient subject matter, but by key allusions dispersed throughout the text. The “Fahnenrot” of the imperial flags that greet Virgil upon his arrival in Brundisium, for instance, evokes the characteristic red of the Nazi flag.³¹³ Similarly, Augustus, worshipped in the novel by sweeping crowds that recall the fascist cult of the masses, is repeatedly saluted with the fascist “Heil.”³¹⁴ Augustus’ imperial conquests over “die finsternen Kräfte des Ostens” recalls Hitler’s own campaign *im Osten* against its purportedly inferior peoples.³¹⁵ Even the setting of *Der Tod des Vergil*, Brundisium, or modern day Italian Brindisi, suggests a point of resistance to modern fascism: it was in Brindisi that the Allied Italian capital was initially established after the fascist loss of southern Italy. Less explicit but no less suggestive are the many striking similarities between Augustus’ Rome, as portrayed by Broch, and Hitler’s Reich. Broch describes the world’s cities as “alle brennend” [all burning] beneath Roman rule, writing of “die

³¹² Ziolkowski, “Broch’s Image of Vergil,” 94-96.

³¹³ Hermann Broch, *Der Tod des Vergil* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976), 17.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 287.

Städte Ägyptens und Assyriens und Palästinas und Indiens, die Städte der entthronten, ohnmächtig gewordenen Götter, gestürzt die Säulen ihrer Tempel.”³¹⁶ [the cities of Egypt, Syria, Palestine and India, the cities of the de-throned gods made powerless, the columns of their temples destroyed.] Rome’s rule over Palestine and her destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 AD, alluded to here, point ominously to Hitler’s own campaign against the Jewish people. Similarly, the brutal and dehumanizing Roman abuse of slaves that the narrator recounts with horror, slaves marked by their race—a “vielfarbenes Volk” [multicolored people] perceived and made “menschlich noch und doch nicht mehr menschlich” [still human and yet not more human]—gestures toward Hitler’s own dehumanizing and racially motivated agenda against the Jews and other non-Aryan races.³¹⁷ At one point a slave refers to his kind as “erkoren,” [chosen] again establishing a link between the slaves in the novel and the Jews.³¹⁸ Broch further solidifies the allusion when he employs the National Socialists’ own vocabulary in describing the slaves as “untermenschlich.”³¹⁹ [subhuman.]

Given Augustus’ position as a figurehead for fascist leadership, both during the period in which Broch wrote and explicitly within his novel, it is no surprise that Broch uses him to mount a critique of fascism. Not only does Broch’s narrator decry the horrors of imperial slavery, a veiled reference to National Socialist racial ideology and violence, leading Virgil to ultimately demand freedom for his slaves, but he repeatedly contests

³¹⁶ Ibid., 159.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 26.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 252.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

both Augustus' reign and the nationalistic fervor of his sycophantic masses. Augustus is often viewed by Virgil as an evil and malicious force, whose "etwas Böses und Grausames" [somewhat evil and cruel] expression deeply disturbs him.³²⁰ "Dünstrichig gleich einer lieblichen Verlockung war das Böse in die Dinge eingezeichnet," continues Broch later in the passage, "selbst in den Farben der Blumenkränze ließ es sich entdecken, und dünstrichig stand es in einer Falte zwischen den Augen des Augustus."³²¹ [The evil was thinly marked in it like a sweet temptation, it even let itself show in the colors of the garland, and it appeared finely in a crease between Augustus' eyes.] This image of an evil Augustus, sheltered in his "unterweltlich" imperial palace, permeates the novel.³²² Similarly, Virgil finds disgust with the great crowds of Romans who flock to Augustus in much the same way that the German people flocked *en masse* to Hitler. "Dies also war die Masse," he declares, "für die der Cäsar lebte, für die das Imperium geschaffen worden war...das römische Volk, dessen Geist und dessen Ehre er, Publius Vergilius Maro...zwar nicht geschildert, wohl aber zu verherrlichen versucht hatte!...das war der Fehler gewesen...Unheil, ein Schwall von Unheil, ein ungeheurer Schwall unsäglichen, unaussprechbaren, unerfaßlichen Unheils brodelte in dem Behälter des Platzes."³²³ [This was the mass for whom the Caesar lived, for whom the Empire had been erected...the Roman people, whose spirit and whose honor he, Publius Vergilius Maro...had admittedly not quite portrayed, but had fully attempted to glorify!...that had

³²⁰ Ibid., 288.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid., 47.

³²³ Ibid., 22.

been the mistake... Unholy, a torrent of the unholy, an immense torrent of unspeakable, inexpressible, ungraspable unholiness boiled in the square.] In his rejection of the “Unheil” image posed by the masses, Broch’s Virgil echoes Broch’s own fear of the dangers posed by the mass, explored most acutely in fascist Europe in his psychological work *Massenwahntheorie*. By turning Virgil into a critic of Augustus and of his own nationalist sentiment, Broch attacks fascist ideology twice in one stroke: by directly challenging fascism’s obsession with nationalism and the masses, and by challenging its orthodox and ideologically-motivated reading of one of the West’s greatest writers.

If Broch adopts the Augustus-Hitler paradigm of the fascist era only to invert it, that is to use it critically against the fascist leader-cult, as well as the academic and cultural establishment that had sanctioned it, he also uses it to challenge fascist conceptions of art and literature. Throughout *Der Tod des Vergil*, Virgil stages a battle with Augustus over not only his own work, but over the status of art in the state. Just as Broch argued that his novel began strictly as a “private Todesvorbereitung, sicherlich also nicht für Publikationszwecke geschrieben,” so too does Virgil repeatedly insist on the primacy of his right as an individual to exclusive jurisdiction over his own work in his quest to burn the *Aeneid*. Augustus and his followers spend much of the novel attempting to convince Virgil otherwise: that his work is the property of the state, that, in the words of Plotius to Virgil, “die Äneis ist schon längst nicht mehr deine eigene Angelegenheit; das schlag dir also aus dem Kopf.”³²⁴ [the Aeneid has for a long time now no longer been your own affair, so knock that thought out of your mind.] Virgil’s championing of the literary rights of the individual over those of the state undermines fascism’s own

³²⁴ Ibid., 225.

conceptions of art as a collective institution.

Just as National Socialists attempted to co-opt art to their own ends, a practice famously labeled by Walter Benjamin as the “aestheticization of politics” and echoed by Augustus when he declares that “darf ich in meinem Staate nicht auf die Kunst verzichten; der Friede, den ich bringe, bedarf der Kunst,” [I cannot do without art in my state; the peace which I bring requires it] so too did they seek to collectivize and de-individualize literary experience.³²⁵ In their attempt to re-position literature from the private to the public realm, fascists attacked *Lesewut*, or “reading rage,” as antisocial. In its place they sought to make reading a “socially significant activity,” turning readers into members of reading communities or *lesende Volksgemeinschaft*. “Caring for books in school and youth camp libraries,” writes Frank Trommler, “became part of everyday duties. Reading often was a euphemism for listening to and practicing speech-making for purposes of political indoctrination.”³²⁶ To further their ends of making literature a collective activity intended to serve the interests of the state, rather than a private hobby of the individual, fascists invested a “tremendous effort in building numerous...public libraries, [creating] literary prizes, and [organizing] reading and lecture organizations.” The National Socialists provided public funding for numerous local libraries and reading related activities, resulting in “a tax-supported building program of large proportions, projecting a public library in every village of five hundred or more, supplying funds for filling their shelves, and encouraging reading and library use among broad segments of

³²⁵ Ibid., 318.

³²⁶ Frank Trommler, “Targeting the Reader, Entering History: A New Epitaph for the Inner Emigration,” *Flight of Fantasy: New Perspectives on Inner Emigration in German Literature 1933-1945*, ed. Neil H. Donahue (NY: Berghahn, 2003), 123.

the population.”³²⁷ This extensive commitment to public libraries, driven by ideological ends, is echoed by Augustus when he declares to Virgil that “ich habe...die apollinische und die octavianische Bibliothek angelegt, und ich habe nicht unterlassen, die bereits bestehenden Bibliotheken durch Zuwendungen zu fördern.”³²⁸ [I have...erected the Apollonian and Octavian libraries, and I have not refrained from supporting the already existing libraries through donations.] Augustus’ threat to turn Virgil into a criminal for keeping his work private further echoes the threats of state censorship and persecution facing those writers deemed antagonistic to its interests.³²⁹ In arguing for the primacy of the individual over collective literary experience and over the interests of the state that such collectivism intends to further, Broch’s Virgil takes an oppositional stance to the aesthetic conceptions and practices of National Socialism.

While critics have, on some level, acknowledged *Der Tod des Vergil*’s relationship to Hitler’s fascist *Reich*, they have overlooked its complicated relationship with that other side of empire: colonialism. While not a conventionally “colonial” author, Broch’s writing nevertheless engages the colonial scene in a subtle and nuanced manner. Judith Ryan has pointed to this tendency in his earlier novel *Esch; oder, Die Anarchie – 1903*, the second in his *Die Schlafwandler* trilogy (1931-1932). Although seeming to have little to do with colonialism as a narrative concern, Broch’s novel, Ryan demonstrates, can be partially read as a reflection on German colonialism, furnishing “a very specific diagnosis of the historical, social, and economic factors that gave rise to the German Empire’s

³²⁷ Ibid., 122.

³²⁸ Broch, *Der Tod des Vergil*, 356.

³²⁹ Ibid., 311.

understanding of the colonial question.” At the same time, argues Ryan, the novel’s allusions to colonialism “[glance] forward to the rise of German nationalism and National Socialism,” as, in one instance, Broch links the exploitation of African dancers with that of Eastern European women, tying together the legacy of German colonialism with Hitler’s eastwardly ambitions.³³⁰

That Broch would be preoccupied with colonialism even when writing of radically other literary settings is not surprising if one examines his political writings. Broch often wrote against what he saw as a destructive colonialism. “Kein aufmerksamer Beobachter,” he condemningly pronounced, “...konnte oder kann sich durch die scheinbar humaneren Ziele dieser Unternehmungen auch nur im geringsten über ihre wahre Natur hinwegtäuschen lassen: sie waren Raubkriege.”³³¹ [No attentive observer could have or can be misled away from the true nature of these enterprises despite their alleged humanitarian goals: they were wars of robbery.] Broch’s ambitious *Völkerbund-Resolution* (1936), a political document proposing a new standard of international human rights, was begun, he said, as a direct response to Italy’s brutal colonial warfare the year before in Ethiopia.³³² In his writings on colonialism, however, it was Rome, not present-day Italy, that often held the center of his attention. “Der europäische Imperialismus,” he declared, “im engsten Sinne hat vom Römischen Imperium seinen Ausgang genommen.”³³³ [European imperialism took its starting point in the strictest sense from

³³⁰ Ryan, “The German Colonial Aftermath,” 125, 131.

³³¹ Broch, *Politische Schriften*, 310.

³³² *Ibid.*, 309.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 116.

Roman Imperialism.] Throughout his political writings, he traces a historical trajectory that runs from imperial Rome to European colonialism and eventually culminates in the fascist *Reich*: it is precisely the spirit of Roman imperialism, he argues, that gave birth to the Germanic Holy Roman Empire, British colonialism and, eventually, German colonialism under Bismarck, and it is this very legacy that Hitler himself sought to resurrect. “Die römische Kolonialisierung,” he states, “war nichts als eine Kette von Raubkriegen, die vornehmlich zu strategischen Zwecken geführt worden sind, und der Beginn des modernen Kolonialismus war im großen und ganzen nichts als Seeräuberei... Noch Hitler, ein letzter Nachzügler der Expansionsromantik, wollte seinen Krieg gegen Rußland als eine Art Kolonialunternehmen (der Zivilisation) aufzäumen, um ihn dem Westen moralisch schmackhafter zu machen.”³³⁴ [Roman colonialism was nothing other than a chain of wars of robbery, which were first and foremost carried out toward strategic ends, and the beginning of modern colonialism was more or less nothing other than piracy... Even Hitler, a recent latecomer to the romanticism of expansion, wanted his war against Russia to be bridled as a sort of colonial endeavor (of civilization), in order to make himself appear morally appealing to the West.] Not only does Broch identify the imperial project of Rome with the language of modern colonialism (“Die römische Kolonialisierung”), but he ultimately identifies Hitler’s expansionistic *Reich* as itself partaking in “eine Art Kolonialunternehmen.” For Broch, Rome, colonialism and fascism all exist in an interrelated network, the boundaries between them often artificial and porous.

Broch’s compounding of Rome, colonialism and fascism is amplified by other

³³⁴ Ibid., 309.

intellectual voices of the fascist era. Oswald Spengler, the renowned historian whose famed *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* Broch so detested, also connected the affairs of imperial Rome to those of European colonialism: “Die Eroberung Galliens durch Cäsar war ein ausgesprochener Kolonialkrieg, d.h. von einseitiger Aktivität.”³³⁵ [The conquest of Gaul by Caesar was a truly colonial war, in other words a one-sided activity.] In Rome’s “Kolonialkrieg” against outside nations, Spengler saw a model for the future glory of Germany. Germany, he argued, should learn from the likes of the great empires, including Rome and Britain, in order to achieve its own imperial greatness. Writing of Cecil Rhodes, the ardent British colonialist, Spengler declared that “[Ich] sehe in Cecil Rhodes den ersten Mann einer neuen Zeit. Er repräsentiert den politischen Stil einer ferneren, abendländischen, germanischen, insbesondere deutschen Zukunft. Sein Wort ‘Ausdehnung ist alles’ enthält in dieser napoleonischen Fassung die eigentlichste Tendenz einer jeden ausgereiften Zivilisation...Rhodes erscheint als der erste Vorläufer eines abendländischen Cäsarentypus, für den die Zeit noch lange nicht gekommen ist.”³³⁶ [I see in Cecil Rhodes the first man of a new time. He represents the political style of a distant, Western, German, particularly German future. His phrase “expansion is everything” assumes in this Napoleon way the actual trend of each fully ripe civilization...Rhodes appears as the first forerunner of a Western Caesar type, whose time is has still not come.] If Spengler projects an imperial future for Germany, one that Hitler would attempt to realize only twenty years after his book appeared, the British colonialism from which it is to take its direction is itself only a model of Roman

³³⁵ Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 48.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

greatness, as Spengler casts Cecil Rhodes as a “Cäsarentypus.”

Mussolini, whose war in Ethiopia triggered Broch’s *Völkerbund-Resolution*, also saw colonialism as an outgrowth of Roman imperialism. Italy’s colonial holdings in Ethiopia and Libya, as well as its territorial aggressiveness within continental Europe, were part of an attempt on Mussolini’s part to resurrect the imperial Roman *Mare Nostrum*. Striving after the greatness of the Roman Empire was not merely a theatrical ploy for the fascists, but rather a serious endeavor that called for the realization of concrete historical aims: a colonial empire. This fascist revival of Rome, which also occurred in Germany, was meant to appeal not only to the general public but also to attract intellectuals and academics to the regime.³³⁷ Just as Spengler had linked Roman greatness to European colonialism as early as 1918, so too did those Italians who preceded the Italian fascists. “Fascism did not invent the cultic approach of the Roman past,” explains Visser. “It flourished already in the context of the ardent colonialism of the Italian bourgeoisie from the late nineteenth century onward.”³³⁸ While fascists capitalized on the connection between the Roman Empire and European colonialism, it was the early colonists themselves who championed the analogy. “During the pre-fascist period,” Visser writes, “the metaphorical use of Roman history concerned mostly the legitimation of Italian colonial policy in the Mediterranean. This ‘Roman’ type of colonialism was closely linked with an ideological concept of Italian culture as the vanguard in the defence of European culture threatened by ‘oriental’ decadence.”³³⁹

³³⁷ Visser, “Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of the Romanità,” 6.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

Mussolini's adoption of the Roman cause, then, was itself an outgrowth of the colonialists' own vision for Italy.

The conjoining of European colonialism with visions of ancient Rome was not only limited to Italy or the writings of Spengler. The threat of "oriental decadence" that Italian colonialists preached was taken up within Germany, where Rome's African war against Carthage became a topos for German anti-orientalism and anti-Semitism.³⁴⁰ In France, as in Italy, the nation's colonial empire was idealized as a rebirth of Roman civilization, as the French declared they had created "une paix française" in the mold of the "pax romana."³⁴¹ Even the British often framed their imperial project as a successor to Rome's, striving for the high degree of administrative efficiency and legal justness they found therein.³⁴² Proponents of the British Empire used the greatness of imperial Rome as justification for their arguments against anti-imperialists.³⁴³ Across Europe, then, imperial Rome and modern colonialism were never far from one another in the socio-political imaginary. That Broch should also connect ancient Rome to modern day fascism and colonialism throughout his writings, then, comes as no surprise.

Just as Broch frequently links his discussions of Rome to European colonialism in his political writings, so too does his portrait of the Roman Empire in *Der Tod des Vergil* allude to the European colonialism of his day. Perhaps nowhere in the novel is this

³⁴⁰ Thomas, *Virgil and the Augustan Reception*, 255.

³⁴¹ Hugh Ridley, *Images of Imperial Rule* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 103.

³⁴² Eric M. Reisenauer, "Between the Eternal City and the Holy City: Rome, Jerusalem, and the Imperial Ideal in Britain," *Canadian Journal of History* 44 (2) (2009), 237.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 239.

clearer than in his description of Roman slaves, whom Virgil, horrified by their abuse, promises to have freed. Broch identifies one of the slaves as “ein kleiner schwarzer Syrer,” [a small black Syrian] a figure Broch will use to allude to modern colonialism.³⁴⁴ At the time he was writing *Der Tod des Vergil*, Syria had been divided up into a French and British colonial mandate. During the war, when most of the novel was written, Syria was occupied by British troops. British occupation of Syria was part of a larger British policy of upholding the beleaguered French empire once France had fallen to Germany. “Throughout the war,” explains A.B. Gaunson, “Britain respected the framework of the French empire, entrusting to de Gaulle the administration of captured French colonies and assisting him to maintain the authority of France. On the whole, it is beyond dispute that Britain made an immense logistical and diplomatic contribution to the restoration of the French empire.”³⁴⁵ *Der Tod des Vergil* gestures toward the Syrian colony when Broch’s slave, in the midst of a brutal beating that horrifies Virgil, defiantly yells to his oppressor “Komm mal runter, großer König, komm runter, kannst auch mal versuchen, wie’s unsereinem schmeckt!”³⁴⁶ Broch’s use of the anachronistic “König” points toward Syria’s administration by the British Empire, as well as the colonial legacy of oppression that reigned there under the French. The slave’s defiant cry echoes Broch’s own against the ills of colonialism, which he, as well as the British and French empires ruling Syria, saw as a continuation of the Roman imperial legacy.

That Broch should isolate French and British rule in the Middle East in order to

³⁴⁴ Broch, *Der Tod des Vergil*, 27.

³⁴⁵ A.B. Gaunson, *The Anglo-French Clash in Lebanon and Syria, 1940-1945* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1987), 4.

³⁴⁶ Broch, *Der Tod des Vergils*, 27.

protest colonialism is no surprise, given the characteristic self-interest with which those regimes operated there. Despite ruling under the legal auspices of a “mandate,” in which “an ‘advanced’ state was to tutor a less advanced state in the complexities of democratic self-government until it was ready to rule itself,” France and Britain used their colonial stake in the Middle East to further their own ends. “The Mandate,” writes Peter Shambrook, “was a liberal-sounding concept which covered and ‘legitimised’ outright imperial control.”³⁴⁷ In place of benevolent charity, Britain sought colonial control in the Middle East for the purposes of “safeguarding [her] route to India, securing cheap and accessible oil for her navy, maintaining the balance of power in the Mediterranean to her advantage, and guarding her commercial and financial concerns,” while France hoped to there “gain a strategic and economic base in the eastern Mediterranean, ensure a cheap supply of cotton and silk, and prevent Arab nationalism from infecting her North African empire.”³⁴⁸ Such vested self-interest echoes of the “Seeräuberei” that Broch detested in modern colonialism.

If the colonial “mandates” of Britain and France in the Middle East were built on veiled self-interest, or the “Seeräuberei” that Broch often saw modern colonialism to be, they were also administered ruthlessly. France prevented Syria from politically uniting by putting it through multiple legal and provincial changes, quashing rebellions and exiling nationalist leaders. In 1926, the French deployed no less than 50,000 troops to suppress a nation-wide rebellion. As Shambrook describes the brutal affair, “whole villages in the

³⁴⁷ Peter A. Shambrook, *French Imperialism in Syria, 1927-1936* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1998), 2.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

Jabal Druze had been blown up, Damascus was encircled by barbed wire, some 6,000 rebels and 2,00 French troops...had been killed and 100,000 people were homeless. France was not getting a very good press worldwide.”³⁴⁹ During the 1930s, especially in the years leading up to the war, Syria, along with much of the colonial world, saw a great anti-imperial nationalist movement.³⁵⁰ The cries of protest from Broch’s Syrian at the hands of his imperial oppressors thus echo not only Broch’s own protest of a “Roman” colonialism in the modern world, but also the growing cries of Syrian nationalists at the time he was writing. Such cries are later echoed when a slave triumphantly champions the cause of freedom, at one point declaring before Augustus that “wir werden auferstehen im Geiste. Denn jede Einkerkierung ist uns neue Befreiung.”³⁵¹ [we will rise up in spirit. For each imprisonment is for us a new liberation.] Similarly, toward the end of the novel a Syrian slave appears, “eine zerbrochene Kette an seinem Halsring,” [a broken chain at his neck] declaring the arrival of a new order.³⁵² Virgil, with whom Broch himself identified, ultimately takes up this cause himself when he orders the freeing of his slaves.

Broch’s invocation of colonialism in a text that critically reflects on fascism effectively collapses the distance between the two systems. The Roman system of oppression to which Broch’s Syrian slave is a victim of is both colonial and fascist, just as the border between the two blurs in his political writings. The brutal beatings and slave

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 2-3.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 3.

³⁵¹ Broch, *Der Tod des Vergil*, 354.

³⁵² Ibid., 396-397.

labor forced upon the slaves are as applicable to a portrait of colonial exploitation as they are to one of the National Socialist labor camps. This collapsing of the two systems into one has concrete historical underpinnings. The choice of a distinctively “schwarzer” slave, a detail that Broch notes on more than one occasion, for instance, suggests the common German vision of Jews, the great victims of Hitler’s camps, as African (a view discussed in detail in chapter two). Within Germany, furthermore, colonialism and anti-Semitism often historically merged. As Christian Davis describes, “Nationalist and colonial presses increasingly portrayed blacks in ways that paralleled the most outrageous depictions of Jews by racial antisemites...images of blacks and Jews merged not just across but also within the antisemitic and colonial movements. Antisemites increasingly linked Jews with blacks, attributing to them nearly identical characteristics and ascribing ‘Negro components’ to the Jewish bloodline, intimating the need for colonial solutions to the perceived Jewish problem. At the same time, German jurists looked to the defunct Prussian antisemitic legislation when debating the legality of discriminatory laws against black Africans, and colonialists attributed Jewish backgrounds and behavioral traits to the leaders of indigenous uprisings.”³⁵³ In linking colonial persecution of blacks with fascist persecution, most largely targeted against the Jews, Broch’s novel thus builds on a long-standing tradition within German colonial and cultural history while inviting further reflection on the underlying continuities between colonialism and fascism.

Der Tod des Vergil again suggests a collapsing of the distinction between fascist and colonial persecution in an aforementioned passage surveying the state of the Roman

³⁵³ Christian S. Davis, *Colonialism, Antisemitism and Germans of Jewish Descent in Imperial Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 80.

Empire. Describing the cities of the world as “alle brennend,” Broch writes of “die Städte Ägyptens und Assyriens und Palästinas und Indiens, die Städte der entthronten, ohnmächtig gewordenen Götter, gestürzt die Säulen ihrer Tempel.”³⁵⁴ Not only do the “gestürzt[e] Säulen ihrer Tempel” and “ohnmächtig gewordenen Götter” nod to the Roman destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 AD, aligning with Hitler’s own persecution of the Jews, but the choice of nations, all sites of present day imperial rule, points toward the repressive colonial administration of Broch’s day. Alongside Palestine, Egypt, Syria and India all formed British colonial interests and holdings. Syria, home of Broch’s slave who challenges his “König,” had been partially partitioned into British Palestine and later partially administered by Britain during the war, while Egypt, Palestine and India were all colonies or “mandates” of the British Empire. Rome’s destruction of the Jewish temple, reframed among “die Städte Ägyptens und Assyriens und Palästinas und Indiens,” or those of the present-day British Empire, who ruled over the once Jewish land, once again collapses the distance between ancient and modern-day imperialism, be it fascist or colonial. Imperial aggression toward the Jews, crystallized in the “gestürzt[e] Säulen ihrer Tempel,” finds echo in King George VI’s own domination of the Jewish land and his forceful use of the military to crush native resistance, including the extensive 1936-1938 Arab revolt against the British that occurred in Palestine just as Broch was beginning to write *Der Tod des Vergil*.³⁵⁵ Broch uses his imperial setting not only to protest contemporary fascism, then, but, as he so often does in his political writings, to confront the abuses and dangers of colonialism as well.

³⁵⁴ Broch, *Der Tod des Vergil*, 159.

³⁵⁵ Naomi Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand: British Rule in Palestine, 1917-1948* (London: John Murray, 1999), 179.

Broch's decision to frame his critique of fascism within the context of colonialism responds to the political discourse at the time he wrote, which itself linked fascism and colonialism in numerous ways. As discussed, a mutual symbiosis existed between the development of early German colonialism and domestic anti-Semitism, fascists in neighboring Italy saw the growth of their colonial holdings as an integral part of their ideological agenda, and the colonial movement often provided ardent support to National Socialism during its early rise.³⁵⁶ Within Europe, as discussed in chapter one, Hitler sought to form an alliance with Britain before the outbreak of the war. Admiring what he saw as Britain's ruthless use of force to achieve her imperial ends, Hitler sought to emulate this ruthlessness in his own war against Eastern Europe. It was British colonialism which Hitler time and again used not only as a model for his own imperial ambitions but as a defense against his critics, arguing that he was only following in the footsteps of the colonialists. Even Hitler's occupation of Czechoslovakia was modeled after British colonialism, explicitly replicating the British "mandate" or "protectorate" model.

Although Germany had lost her colonial holdings as a result of the First World War, Hitler continued to claim sovereignty over all former colonial subjects.³⁵⁷ Just as colonialists had supported National Socialism in its early days, so too did the National Socialists attempt to accommodate colonial agendas. "The absorption of right-wing colonialist positions into National Socialism was made easier by the fact that a number of

³⁵⁶ Pascal Grosse, "What Does German Colonialism Have to Do With National Socialism?: A Conceptual Framework," *Germany's Colonial Pasts*, ed. Marcia Klotz and Eric Ames (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 130-131.

³⁵⁷ Michael Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 30.

eminent members of the colonial movement joined the Nazi party in the 1920s,” write Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox and Susanne Zantop in their introduction to *The Imperialist Imagination*. “After the Nazi takeover and *Gleichschaltung*,” they continue, “the Colonial Society was reorganized according to Nazi principles, and its second in command was made head of the Colonial Policy Department (*Kolonialpolitisches Amt*) of the Nazi government.”³⁵⁸ Although he waged his war of imperial aggression on the European continent, Hitler sought to eventually reclaim and grow German overseas territorial possessions. “The Nazis were convinced that Germany would eventually need an extensive overseas empire to guarantee its access to raw materials, markets and investment areas,” write Friedrichsmeyer, Lennox and Zantop, “and they renewed the call for a *Mittelafrika* that would transcend the bounds of the prewar colonies.” By the 1940s, the achievement of a worldwide empire was a broadly accepted goal of German fascism.³⁵⁹

In addition to these more explicit connections between fascism and colonialism, myriad structural similarities existed between the two movements that historians are only now starting to explore seriously. “There is an extraordinary similarity between [narratives] about overseas colonialism and those thematizing the struggle for cultural supremacy in Germany’s own eastern regions,” writes Marcia Klotz in the introduction to

³⁵⁸ Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox and Susanne Zantop, *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and its Legacy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 16.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 17.

a recent work devoted to such a study.³⁶⁰ Pascal Grosse, for instance, arguing that there was little significant difference between the experiences of German, French and British colonialism, notes the common intellectual foundation they all shared with fascism: eugenicist ideas of racial selection, reproduction, and territorial expansion.³⁶¹ Such ideas were imported to fascism largely from the colonial legacy, argues Grosse.³⁶² Similarly, Woodruff Smith argues that the fascist concept of *Lebensraum*, the core principle behind Hitler's imperial expansion, was "developed and enunciated" by procolonial groups.³⁶³ Given the extensiveness of both explicit and implicit connections between colonialism and fascism, particularly German fascism, it comes as no surprise that Broch would suggest a coupling of the two movements within his own political and literary writings.

While Broch's critique of fascism suggests a link between it and colonialism, it does more than simply mirror or reproduce pre-existing affinities between the two movements. In evoking fascism and colonialism within the same imperial context, both in *Der Tod des Vergil* and in his political writings, Broch raises a host of provocative ethical dilemmas. Not only is fascism further undermined by virtue of its affinities with oppressive colonial regimes, but the moral high ground of those nations waging a war against fascism, such as Britain and France, is called into question by Broch's attention to these affinities. By collapsing the British "König," resolutely administering his empire in

³⁶⁰ Marcia Klotz, "Introduction," *Germany's Colonial Pasts*, ed. Marcia Klotz and Eric Ames (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), xv.

³⁶¹ Pascal Grosse, "What Does German Colonialism Have to Do With National Socialism?: A Conceptual Framework," *Germany's Colonial Pasts*, 118.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 124.

³⁶³ Quoted in Christian S. Davis, *Colonialism, Antisemitism and Germans of Jewish Descent in Imperial Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 17.

the Middle East, with the fascist slave drivers of a Hitlerian Augustus, Broch's novel implicates British colonialism, championed as a model for Germany by both Spengler and Hitler, as contributing to fascist Germany's own destructive practices. Given the conspicuous failure of the Allied powers, including Britain and France, to halt Hitler's conquest of his colonial "protectorate" to the east in the notorious Munich Agreement, as well as Britain's long-standing policy of appeasement, and even occasional admiration for fascist Germany, as discussed in chapter one, Broch's readiness to consider British imperialism alongside fascism in both his literary and political writings reflects the possibility of a deeper culpability in fascism's rise on the part of Europe's colonial powers. Broch's constellation of colonialism and fascism, then, provokes a series of challenging and persistent questions: What degree of culpability do imperialists bear for the horrors fascism unleashed upon the world? How does fascism reshape the experience of colonialism? Can colonialism remain ethically viable once so many of its key tenets have been realized *in extremis* by fascist regimes? While avoiding any easy answers, Broch's literary and political writings raise such challenging questions for his readers.

If Broch's writings elusively problematize the relationship between fascism and colonialism without providing any clear answers to the ethical dilemmas they raise, his novel *Der Tod des Vergil* is equally elusive in its critique of empire. While Broch offers a condemning portrait of an evil Augustus, a Hitler figure *par excellence* of the 1930s and 1940s, he often appears reticent in his critique. Broch's text often slides between condemnation and praise of Augustus and his imperial project. After berating Augustus' followers, for instance, the narrator declares that "Dabei waren es keineswegs nur Schmarotzer, die da um ihn herumfaulenzten und schmatzten, mochte auch der Augustus

so manche dieser Art in seiner Umgebung dulden müssen, nein, viele von ihnen hatten schon allerlei Verdienstliches und Ersprößliches geleistet.”³⁶⁴ [They were by no means only parasites there, those who lazed around him and ate nosily, wanted Augustus to have to tolerate so many of these types around him, no, many of them had accomplished all types of things useful and fruitful.] Broch’s text stresses the forceful ambivalence of its narration, reassuring itself of the worth of Augustus’ followers before frustratedly reminding itself that of those shameful sycophants “mochte auch der Augustus *so manche dieser Art* (italics mine) in seiner Umgebung dulden müssen,” before having to correct his own course of thought with a self-directed “nein.” Broch betrays this confusion time and again, such as when Virgil questions his own bitterness against Augustus: “war [die Bitterkeit] nicht von Anfang an vorhanden gewesen? Wahrlich, alles war dem Augustus zu verdanken.”³⁶⁵ [Had not the bitterness not existed from the beginning? Truly, we had Augustus to thank for everything.] This indecision recalls the hermeneutic multivalency of Virgil’s own text, which over the years has generated a wide range of readings among scholars as to its political message ranging from the “optimistic” to “pessimistic” readings and everything in between.

In those instances in which *Der Tod des Vergil* relents in its critique of Augustus, it often lavishes him with great praise. Broch’s epigraph from Dante’s *Inferno* frames his praise of Augustus: the epigraph is drawn from the final canto of Dante’s work, in which Dante and Virgil witness Caesar’s executioners, Brutus and Cassius, condemned alongside Judas to the lowest level of hell. The epigraph alludes to the possibility that

³⁶⁴ Broch, *Der Tod des Vergil*, 15.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

moral righteousness lies not with, but against, those who would challenge authoritarian rule. In the novel, Broch notes, it is the will of the masses on whom Augustus must democratically rely, not the other way around: “ohne die keine Politik betrieben werden konnte und auf die auch der Augustus sich stützen mußte, soferne er sich zu behaupten wünscht.”³⁶⁶ [without them no politics would be carried out and Augustus had to use them for support, as long as he wished to assert power.] Augustus, Virgil further declares, has freed his people from the darkness and chaos that came before him. “Hinter uns, oh Augustus,” he states, “liegt der Absturz ins Ungestaltete, der Absturz ins Nichts; du bist der Brückenbauer, du hast die Zeit aus ihrer tiefsten Verrottung gehoben.”³⁶⁷ [Behind us, oh Augustus, lays the precipice of the unformed, the precipice into nothing; you are the bridge builder, you have lifted us out of the time of our deepest decay.] It is thanks to Augustus that, according to Virgil, “Frieden und Ordnung und die eigene Sicherheit” [freedom and order and one’s own safety] exist in Rome.³⁶⁸ Augustus’ own insistence on freedom in *Der Tod des Vergil* is uncharacteristically authoritarian. “Soweit sie Teil des staatlichen Gemeinwohles ist, muß selbst die Freiheit als Wirklichkeit und darf nicht als Scheinwirklichkeit angesprochen werden, denn auch die Freiheit hat mehr zu sein als ein bloßes Gleichnis,” he proclaims, lamenting that “nur allzuoft ist sie zu einem solchen herabgewürdigt worden.”³⁶⁹ [Insofar as freedom is a part of the common good of the state, freedom must itself be a true freedom and should not be a mere appearance,

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 22.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 316.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 55.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 342-343.

because even freedom must be more than a mere image...only all too often is freedom degraded into such a state.]

Broch's image of Augustus as an often benevolent and peace-loving emperor has led some critics, like Kathleen Komar, to argue that *Der Tod des Vergil* has no political valency. "[Broch]'s characters refuse to take on the allegorical shape that would be necessary to make them the compelling political commentary that Broch had originally foreseen," argues Komar. "His Augustus is too appealing to be a useful Hitler figure; his Vergil is too preoccupied with his own death to serve as a model for the ethical poet. The center of gravity of Broch's *Tod des Vergil* shifts in the shaping of the historical material away from the political commentary and towards the metaphysical and personal," she continues, suggesting that Broch forfeits an interest in the political in favor of the ultimate subjectivity of his characters. The novel's historical specificity also overwhelms its claims to contemporary political relevance, she argues, declaring that "Broch has chosen an historical moment which is too highly determined to serve as a useful parallel to his own historical situation," thus leading to a novel that can only be described as "a magnificent political failure."³⁷⁰ Although Broch's portrayal of Augustus and Virgil is at times both flattering and historically determined, it is not therefore devoid of political valency. Broch uses Augustus' unique position as a figurehead of imperial domination and concomitant freedom, rather, to subvert fascism while at the same time pointing to its alternative potentialities.

Although Broch's image of Augustus challenges Hitler's own brand of imperial brutality, his reluctance to unconditionally condemn Augustus suggests a hope in the

³⁷⁰ Komar, "The Politics of Subject Matter," 56-59.

possibility of a “good” or benevolent empire, one that, although retaining an authoritarian leader exercising power over an extensive territory, embraces ends that are ultimately democratic and peaceful. Such an image of empire is found in Theodor Haecker’s work on Virgil, *Vergil, Vater des Abendlandes*, which formed Broch’s primary source on Virgil’s life. Although Haeker, like so many other German intellectuals, used Virgil’s epic of empire as a call to Germany’s own future imperial greatness, and despite Broch’s dissatisfactions with Haecker, his writings betray a disdain for the kind of unjustness and brutality that Hitler would later bring to Germany. “Diese Mission [the Roman Empire],” he writes in his work on Virgil, “und das ist das oft Übersehene und rasch Vergessene: diese Mission gründet nicht in einer brutalen Gewalt; wo nur sie ist, ist das Urteil Vergils unbestechlich hart...Diese Mission gründet ihrem Wesen nach nicht in brutaler Gewalt, sondern ist Macht innerhalb großer einfacher Tugenden, deren höchste die pietas ist, die pflichterfüllende Liebe, deren politischeste, in jener schon beschlossene, die Gerechtigkeit ist.”³⁷¹ [This mission, and that is the thing often overlooked and quickly forgotten: this mission is not founded upon a brutal power; where it is, of Virgil’s condemnation is unerringly harsh...This mission is founded not upon brutal power, but rather upon a power partaking in a large and simple virtue, for which piety and dutiful love are most high, and for which the political is everywhere already determined to be that which is justice.] Similarly, Broch’s Augustus, while he remains inextricably bound with the figure of Hitler, offers a similar sort of *Gegenbild* to fascist conceptions of empire and power. In choosing to retain such an optimistic vision of empire alongside the Hitler-Augustus paradigm, *Der Tod des Vergil* mounts a subversive critique of fascism

³⁷¹ Theodor Haecker, *Vergil, Vater des Abendlandes* (München: Kösel, 1931), 97.

while at the same time hesitating before “throwing the baby out with the bathwater,” to quote a familiar saying. Instead, the novel entertains and rehabilitates the possibility of empire as a benevolent force in the world.

Broch’s Augustus is in many ways Hitler’s very *Gegenbild*. In *Der Tod des Vergil*’s opening passage, for example, Broch takes care to note that Augustus’ extensive train of ships contains only two, “bloß das erste und das letzte,” [merely the first and the last] that are military vessels.³⁷² Augustus’ militarism is also downplayed when his war against “der Osten” is framed in terms of a moral battle against “die finsternen Kräfte des Ostens,” [the dark forces of the East] rather than a war of blind territorial aggression, racial prejudice and self-interest, as was Hitler’s.³⁷³ Similarly, Broch portrays Augustus’ territorial ambitions as finite. “Das Reich braucht nicht weiter zu wachsen,” [The Reich does not need to grow further] declares Augustus to Virgil, his imperial aspirations standing in stark contrast to the unbounded territorial appetite of fascist Germany.³⁷⁴ When Augustus argues against Virgil that the empire’s future does not lie with its peasantry and farmers, declaring that “noch weniger aber dürfen wir die Massen zum Bauerntum zurückerziehen wollen,” [even less however should we want to lead the masses back to farming] his arguments clash forcefully with those of Hitler, whose anti-urban *Blut und Boden* philosophy emphasized the very sort of return to the land that Augustus here protests.³⁷⁵ Time and again throughout *Der Tod des Vergil*, Augustus

³⁷² Broch, *Der Tod des Vergil*, 11.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 287.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 338.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 342.

appears as both Hitler and the anti-Hitler, suggesting the concomitant dangers and possibilities of empire.

While much of Broch's political writings reinforce his critique of empire and colonialism, such as his claim that the foundations of modern colonialism were "im großen und ganzen nichts als Seeräuberei," they also betray an openness toward the possibility of empire. This is evident in *The City of Man* (1940), a political tract he wrote along with Thomas Mann and a series of other authors. While Broch and his peers look eagerly forward to a future order "without...the untamable violence of the giants in our present disorder of satellites and empires," they also seem to acknowledge a role for empire as a just force legitimately directed toward the interests of others.³⁷⁶ "Leadership, to be sure, implies some sort of imperium," they write, "but there is a difference between imperialism and imperium, between those whom their own lust for power chooses for a self-appointed primacy which is the right of might and those who are chosen by the objective circumstances of history for a privilege which is a service, for a right which is a duty."³⁷⁷ In attempting to isolate this sort of ethically valid "imperium," Broch and his peers point to none other than the setting of *Der Tod des Vergil*: "We have been reminded recently of Bacon's saying: 'Rome did not spread upon the world; the world spread upon the Romans.' This was the destiny of other nations and cultures, in ancient and in modern ages as well."³⁷⁸ Whereas elsewhere in his political writings Broch unconditionally attacks Roman imperialism, going so far as to call "die römische Kolonialisierung...nichts

³⁷⁶ Committee of Fifteen, *The City of Man: A Declaration of World Democracy* (New York: The Viking Press, 1940), 26.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

als eine Kette von Raubkriegen,” in *The City of Man* it is precisely Rome that signals the way toward a more humane imperialism. “Rulership by the strongest and wisest is the prescribed path to the equality of all,” declares Broch and his peers, “if the strong can learn wisdom and if rulership is accepted in the spirit of reluctance and devotion that Plato suggests to all rulers. There are in the family of nations children who must grow up, sick who must be cured, maniacs who must be confined, criminals who must be apprehended, before maturity and redemption become the common lot. The healing of the world requires a firm hand.”³⁷⁹ Surprisingly, Broch’s treatise goes so far as to embrace, with the utmost sincerity, those very arguments that colonialists disingenuously employed to their own ends time and again. While it can be argued that Broch’s support for these claims might be mitigated by the fact that he was not the exclusive author of the treatise, this openness toward the possibility of empire, so uncharacteristic of his other political writings, unquestioningly finds its complement in *Der Tod des Vergil*.

Just as Broch’s critique of fascism in *Der Tod des Vergil* ambivalently retains the possibility of good empire, so too does his critique of colonialism signal a possible alternative to authoritarian and unjust imperial rule. Broch’s allusions to the Jews are especially important in this respect, as his text aligns the ancient Roman administration of Palestine with its modern British counterpart. At the time of writing the novel, Palestine, invoked by Broch directly in the passage that places the Roman destruction of the Jewish temple within the frame of modern British imperial holdings, formed part of the British colonial empire. That one of the slaves in the novel, aligned with the Jews by virtue of the slaves’ status as “erkoren,” anachronistically address the Romans with the term

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

“König,” further suggests the connection between ancient Roman administration in Israel and modern British administration in Palestine. Through both of these models, *Der Tod des Vergil* suggests an alternative relationship between an empire and its minorities than the kind found in fascist states.

In contrast to Hitler, both Augustus and colonial Britain expressed a substantial degree of tolerance toward and support for the Jewish community. The British Empire to which *Der Tod des Vergil* alludes sought to promote Jewish welfare in Palestine, attempting to create a Jewish homeland there by encouraging demographic shifts and through extensive economic support.³⁸⁰ Similarly, Augustus, whose rule preceded the Roman destruction of the temple, was well known for his tolerance for the Jews and other religious minorities within the Roman Empire. Augustus reaffirmed a charter of Jewish religious liberty under his reign, for example, granting the Jews positive protection.³⁸¹ Jewish rights even expanded under Augustus, as anti-Semitic actions were ruled illegal, Jews were permanently exempted from military service and freed from the obligation of emperor worship.³⁸² Augustus also sought to accommodate Jewish religious restrictions. When the monthly Roman distributions of free food or money fell on the Sabbath, for instance, he would ensure that the Jews were given their share separately on another day.³⁸³ Similarly, he issued an edict that exempted Jews from having to appear in court

³⁸⁰ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 7.

³⁸¹ E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian: A Study in Political Relations* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 124.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 139, 137.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 136.

“on Friday afternoon after the ninth hour,” a practice which also would have infringed on the Sabbath.³⁸⁴ In another edict from 12 BC, Augustus explicitly permitted the Jewish temple tax to be collected as well as the export of such taxes to Jerusalem, and provided an additional layer of protection for the Jews by imposing “stiff penalties” on anyone who stole this money or disregarded the edict.³⁸⁵ Such a high degree of tolerance and protection was not lost on the Jews, who in gratitude named a number of their synagogues after Augustus and other Roman figures.³⁸⁶ For an empire that Broch explicitly and implicitly compared to Hitler’s own throughout his writings, the religious toleration of Augustus’ Rome stands in stark contrast to the racial intolerance of fascist Germany.

Broch highlights Augustus’ noted religious tolerance in *Der Tod des Vergil*. “Der Staat...hat ihnen [the masses] einen dauerhaften Frieden zu gewährleisten, er hat ihre Götter zu schützen,” [The state must guarantee the masses a lasting peace, it must protect their gods] proclaims Broch’s Augustus to Virgil.³⁸⁷ While Augustus retains a focus on “die Massen” that is characteristic of Hitlerian fascism, he emphasizes their own freedom rather than their collective subordination to the state. This freedom entails the well-being and liberty of the individual: Augustus’ nod to “ihre Götter” suggests the possibility of a religious plurality, one that his empire increasingly confronted as it grew. If Augustus’

³⁸⁴ Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 70.

³⁸⁵ Dabian E. Udoh, *To Caesar What’s Caesar: Tribute, Taxes and Imperial Administration in Early Roman Palestine 63 BCE – 70 CE* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2005), 93.

³⁸⁶ Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roma Rule*, 138.

³⁸⁷ Broch, *Der Tod des Vergil*, 344.

religious toleration frames him as a *Gegenbild* to the Hitler he elsewhere so strongly resembles, this counter image finds voice in his argument with Virgil over moneylenders. Whereas Virgil, advocating a Hitlerian return to the life of the peasant and of the land, declares that Rome must not be a city of “Geldverleihern,” [moneylenders] that most principle role of the Jews throughout European history and object of great derision among Hitler and his anti-Semitic peers, Augustus defends the place of the Geldverleihern in Roman society. “Du bist ungerecht,” he reproves Virgil, “der Kaufmann ist der römische Friedenssoldat, und wenn ich ihn bestehen lassen will, muß ich auch das Bankwesen bestehen lassen...dies alles gehört zur Wohlfahrt des Staates.”³⁸⁸ [You’re being unfair, the businessman is the Roman soldier of peace, and if I want to let him survive, I must all let the banking world survive...these all belong to the wellbeing of the state.] In linking the reign of Augustus, here posited as the very antithesis of Hitler with respect to religious tolerance, with the modern British administration of Palestine, which largely intended to protect and foster the interests of worldwide Jewry, *Der Tod des Vergil* suggests a twofold rehabilitation of imperial rule. Colonialism thus retains, as it does in *The City of Man*, the possibility for humane and just action that stands in stark contrast to the destruction waged by Hitler upon Europe and Jewry at the time Broch composed *Der Tod des Vergil*.

Der Tod des Vergil ends on a famously perplexing twist of plot. After pondering his newfound disillusionment with Rome, its leader and its peoples and after arguing tirelessly for hundreds of pages with Augustus and his peers as to why he must, and will, destroy the *Aeneid*, Virgil hands over the *Aeneid* to Augustus. It is a move that for

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 341.

decades has baffled scholars, who have variously argued that Virgil's decision attests to the supreme power of friendship and love (for Augustus)³⁸⁹, to the constraints of historical realism³⁹⁰, to Virgil's recognition of the work as "incongruent" and thus rightly heralding an "incongruent" empire³⁹¹, and to Virgil's surrender to death which renders art and politics irrelevant.³⁹² Given the strong current of support for Augustus and his imperial project that *Der Tod des Vergil* evinces, however, Virgil's belabored decision to hand over his work to the services of empire suggests a faith, however fleeting and indecisive, in the possibility of just and tolerant empire. It also a testament to the political potential of art, despite Broch's fear that his work of fiction served no purpose in a world driven by urgent political exigencies. "I feel, in these times you have no right to dwell for ever on a work which – in spite of the truth it may contain – is much too far away from the actual misery of this world. It would be immoral, or at least not far from immoral," he frustratedly wrote in this vein in a 1940 letter to Willa Muir, concluding that "I do not overestimate the importance of literature, and today less than ever."³⁹³ Broch's ultimate decision to complete and publish *Der Tod des Vergil*, clearly analogous to Virgil's decision to hand his work over to Augustus, however, does suggest a belief in literature's political valency. Such a belief is born out by the political weight of *Der Tod des Vergil*, a novel that challenges the specter of fascism from which its author escaped while

³⁸⁹ Stephen Dowden, *Literature, Philosophy, Politics and the Challenge of Hermann Broch* (Columbia: Camden House, 1988), 12, and Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 116.

³⁹⁰ Komar, "The Politics of Subject Matter," 57.

³⁹¹ Eiden, "Translatio Imperii ad Americam," 462.

³⁹² Komar, "The Death of Vergil," 262.

³⁹³ Broch, *Materialien*, 207.

preserving an optimism, however ambivalent, about the possibilities of alternative empire.

Empire, fascism and modern colonialism come together once again in Marguerite Yourcenar's 1951 masterpiece *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, written from 1934-1937 and 1948-1951, shortly before and immediately following the Second World War. The novel closely traces the life of the Roman emperor Hadrian, from his early rise to power under Trajan to his passionate love affair with the boy Antinous and the final years before his death. Told in the first person by Hadrian as an address to the future emperor Marcus Aurelius, the narrative recounts not only Hadrian's deeds but his thoughts and reflections on life and politics. Like her contemporary Hermann Broch, Yourcenar uses the figure of the Roman Empire to challenge fascism's own imperial aspirations and claims to "Roman" greatness. Her portrait of Hadrian, the centerpiece of the novel, provides an ameliorative counter image to Hitlerian fascist leadership. In so doing, the novel rehabilitates and suggests the possibility of good or benevolent empire while at the same time critiquing the abuses of fascism. While often optimistic about the possibility of empire, however, *Mémoires d'Hadrien* betrays a deep ambivalence about its potential in the modern world. While Hadrian's imperial administration often provides a moral alternative to that of fascism, the novel suggests that it often veers dangerously close to the policies and practices of fascist Europe. Coupled with this ambivalence toward empire in the wake of fascism is an ambivalence toward modern colonial empire, specifically the empires of France and Britain. While Yourcenar's novel seems to suggest that French and British visions of empire pose an ethically viable alternative to those of fascism, it also problematizes a clear distinction between the two systems. *Mémoires*

d'Hadrien, like *Der Tod des Vergil*, does not simply use empire as a critical counter image to fascism, then, but at the same time suggests the dangerous affinities between fascism and other forms of imperial rule often taken to be more enlightened or humanitarian.

Although Yourcenar scholarship has witnessed a contemporary decline in recent years, in part fueled by the supposed incongruity of much of her work with recent feminist criticism, rather than as a result of any perceived lack of literary, historical or political relevance, a substantial amount has been written about *Mémoires d'Hadrien*.³⁹⁴ Critics have explored various aspects of the novel, such as its historical veracity³⁹⁵, its use of historical sources³⁹⁶, the ways in which it undermines its own portrait of Hadrian³⁹⁷, the role of religion and mysticism in the work³⁹⁸, the question of the work's genre³⁹⁹, the

³⁹⁴ George Rousseau, *Yourcenar* (London: Haus, 2003), 4.

³⁹⁵ See Keith Bradley, "Hadrian, Yourcenar, Syme," *Mouseion: Journal of the Classical Association of Canada* 8 (1) (2008): 39-53, Charlotte Hogsett, "Scholarship and Vision in Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien*," *Classical and Modern Literature: A Quarterly* 13 (3) (1993):203-215.

³⁹⁶ See Nigel Saint, "L'écrivain et sa source: L'essai sur l'histoire auguste," *Bulletin De La Societe Internationale d'Etudes Yourcenariennes* 13 (1994): 71-84.

³⁹⁷ See Jeanine S. Alesch, "Le cours de devises in Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien*," *French Review* 72 (5) (1999): 877-885.

³⁹⁸ See Agnès Fayet, "Marguerite Yourcenar et 'Les voies secrètes du mysticisme'," *Bulleitn De La Societe Internationale d'Etudes Yourcenariennes* 29 (2008): 25-34, Colette Gaudia, "Hadrien 'Rêveur des dieux'," *Bulletin De La Societe Internationale d'Etudes Yourcenariennes* 17 (1996): 111-123.

³⁹⁹ See Ksenya Kiebusinski, "Questions of Genre: History and the Self in Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien*," in *Subversive Subjects: Reading Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. Judith Holland et. al (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004): 148-165, Vittorio Fortunati, "'Mon Cher Marc': Epistolarità dei *Mémoires d'Hadrien*," *Confronto Lettarario: Quaderni Del Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature*

role of gender in the work⁴⁰⁰, its central theme of the voyage⁴⁰¹, the work's stylistics and use of language⁴⁰² and the influence of Nietzsche on the work.⁴⁰³ Few critics, however, have explored the novel's relationship to its historical era, and of those who have, few have done so with serious depth.⁴⁰⁴ As Erin Carlston notes, many critics have treated Yourcenar as simply "an Academician lost in ancient Rome or the Renaissance and divorced from the concerns of the twentieth century."⁴⁰⁵ Of those who have explored the novel's historical implications, Elena Real notes that Hadrian is presented as a sort of anti-Hitler in the novel, an observation that Yourcenar herself promoted, but fails to

Sraniere Moderne Dell'Università di Paviae del Dipartimento di Linguistics e Letterature Compare Dell'Università di Bergamo 17 (34) (2000): 405-419.

⁴⁰⁰ See Lorna Milne, "(Fe)male Impersonation and Transcendence in Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien*," *Women in French Studies* 7 (1999): 209-218.

⁴⁰¹ See Silvia E. Miranda de Torres, "Hadrien, Zénon et leurs voyages," in *Estudios argentinos de literatura francesa y francófona: Los viajes, los viajeros y el olvido*, ed. Susana G. Artal (Córdoba, Argentina: Comunicarte, 2004): 283-290.

⁴⁰² See Rémy Poignault, "L'Oratio Togata dans *Mémoires d'Hadrien*," in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Ecriture, réécriture, traduction*, ed. Poignault (Tours: Société Internationale d'Etudes Yourcenariennes, 2000), 49-63, Lucette Mouline, "L'Écriture et le pouvoir dans *Mémoires d'Hadrien*," in *Lectures transversales de Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. Poignault (Tours: Société Internationale d'Etudes Yourcenariennes, 1997), 187-200.

⁴⁰³ See Bérengère Deprez, "Surhomme hadrianique et Surhomme Nietzschéen: un pari sur l'humain," *Les Lettres Romaines* 47 (3) (1993): 177-184.

⁴⁰⁴ See, for example, M.B. Taleb-Khyar, "Poétiques de l'Histoire: Mémoires d'Hadrien de Marguerite Yourcenar," *Revue Romane* 28 (1) (1993): 110-121.

⁴⁰⁵ Erin G. Carlston, *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 89.

address the problematic ways in which at other times Hadrian evokes Hitler.⁴⁰⁶ Similarly, Odile Heynders acknowledges that *Mémoires d'Hadrien* responds to the Second World War with an optimism for mankind's future founded on its image of Hadrianic leadership, while failing to account for how what she dubs Hadrian's "Machiavellian" side reproduces many of fascism's most common tropes.⁴⁰⁷ Both critics limit their historical analysis to simply identifying Hadrian as an anti-Hitlerian figure, foregoing a more in-depth analysis of the many complicated ways in which the novel relates to its times. One notable exception to this sort of scholarship is Erin Carlston, who identifies various fascist "ideologemes" in Yourcenar's writing as well as specific moments of resistance to fascist ideology.⁴⁰⁸ *Mémoires d'Hadrien*'s relationship to modern colonialism has been ignored by critics, with the sole exception of Margit Dementi, who notes that the novel ties Hadrian's empire to contemporary European colonialism, particularly to the British Empire.⁴⁰⁹ Dementi's work does not explore the larger implications of this connection, however, such as how it might relate to the novel's political and historical stakes, especially in light of the novel's critical response to fascism. By identifying this important connection, however, Dementi's work paves the way for a fuller examination of the work's historical and political valence.

⁴⁰⁶ See Elena Real, "Les Grands Romains de Marguerite Yourcenar: de *Mémoires d'Hadrien* à *Un homme obscur*," in *Ensayos de literatura europea e hispanoamericana*, ed. Félix Menchacatorre (San Sebastián: Univ. del País Vasco, 1990), 411-420.

⁴⁰⁷ See Odile Heynders, "Great Men: Political Leadership in Literature," *Tijdschrift Voor Nederlandse Taal- En Letterkunde* 130 (1) (2013): 69-83.

⁴⁰⁸ See Carlston, *Thinking Fascism*.

⁴⁰⁹ See Margit Dementi, "Luminous Obscurity in Marguerite Yourcenar and the Academy," *Critical Matrix: The Princeton Journal of Women, Gender, and Culture* 10 (1-2) (1996): 3-30.

That Marguerite Yourcenar would write *Mémoires d'Hadrien* as a critical response to the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini comes as no surprise given her own adamant opposition to fascism. Yourcenar fled Europe during the outbreak of the Second World War, escaping fascism through a life of exile in the United States. She viewed fascism as a threat to the Western values of reason, individual rights and sexual liberalism that she so often championed.⁴¹⁰ Yourcenar condemned Nazism as a rejection of the enlightenment, fearing it would quicken the degeneration of a privileged Western civilization.⁴¹¹ In her earlier novel *Dernier du rêve* (1934), argues Carlston, Yourcenar had already made use of the literary space to criticize Mussolini's fascist state, notably Rome, as "a scene of alienation and commodification."⁴¹² It was not only fascism that the novel contested, but also Mussolini's attempt to associate his fascist regime with the legend of imperial Rome.⁴¹³ Given that the greatness of imperial Rome was a common topos for the imperial aspirations of both Italian and German fascism, Yourcenar's Roman writings can be read as an attempt, much like Hermann Broch's *Der Tod des Vergil*, to rehabilitate and reclaim this tradition in the wake of fascist misappropriation.

At the center of Yourcenar's critique of fascism is her representation of the emperor Hadrian. Yourcenar herself often acknowledged that her Hadrian was intended as a sort of anti-Hitler, offering a vision of virtuous leadership that served as a critical corrective to fascism's abuses. In an interview with Jacques Chancel, Yourcenar poses her sketch of

⁴¹⁰ Carlston, *Thinking Fascism*, 113.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 114, 94.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 110.

Hadrian as an alternative to Hitler and Mussolini. “Ces camps de concentration que vous évoquez sont précisément à l’origine d’un de vos livres. Sans Hitler, vous n’auriez pas écrit *Les Mémoires d’Hadrien*,” [Those concentration camps that you allude to are precisely at the origin of one of your books. Without Hitler, you would not have written *Mémoires d’Hadrien*] notes Chancel. Yourcenar responds: “Probablement pas comme je l’ai fait, en effet, car l’exemple d’Hitler m’a fait réfléchir sur l’importance énorme du chef d’État...Hitler, mais aussi avant lui Mussolini, m’ont évidemment beaucoup donné à méditer sur ce que représente un prince, ainsi qu’à la question, pour lui, de savoir éviter cette espèce de monomanie du prince. L’exemple d’Hadrien m’a particulièrement intéressée parce que je voulais voir jusqu’à quel point les bases que lui offrait sa culture gréco-romaine d’épicurien, de stoïcien – et de juriste – avaient influencé l’empereur. Bases qui sont tout à fait différentes aujourd’hui.”⁴¹⁴ [Probably not how I wrote it, in effect, because the example of Hitler made me reflect on the enormous importance of the chief of state...Hitler, but also Mussolini before him, evidently gave me a lot to think about concerning what represents a prince, and thus to the question, for him, to know how to avoid that type of princely monomania. The example of Hadrian interested me in particular because I wanted to see just up to what point the foundations that his Greco-Roman culture offered him, Epicurean, Stoic – and as a legal expert – had influenced the emperor. Foundations that are totally separate from those of today.] Hitler and Mussolini, Yourcenar suggests, form the point of origin from which the novel developed and to which it responds. Their own attempts to deliberately replicate Hadrian’s “culture gréco-romaine” can only be viewed as fruitless for Yourcenar, given that she believes such

⁴¹⁴ Marguerite Yourcenar, *Radioscope de Jacques Chancel* (Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1999), 74-75.

cultural grounds remain “tout à fait différentes aujourd’hui.” In their place, writes Yourcenar in a letter to Lidia Mazzolani, “le livre sur Hadrian s’accroche à l’image d’un homme de génie qui serait en quelque sorte l’idéal anti-Hitler.”⁴¹⁵ [the book about Hadrian clings to the image of a man of genius of is to some degree the ideal anti-Hitler.] Such an “anti-Hitler” might enlist the virtues of benevolent empire to salvage the modern world: “Those were the years,” explains Yourcenar, “when, searching in the past for a model that remained imitable, I imagined as still possible the existence of a man capable of ‘stabilizing the earth’, thus of a human intelligence extended to its highest point of lucidity and efficacy.”⁴¹⁶ Yourcenar’s vision at the time was for nothing less than “la possibilité d’une espèce de réorganisation du monde,”⁴¹⁷ [the possibility of a type of reorganization of the world] as she put it, brought about by “a political genius capable of restoring peace for the next forty or fifty years.”⁴¹⁸ What distinguished Hadrian as a paragon for this sort of leadership, she argued, was his “efforts et ses succès en tant que chef d’État, pacificateur et administrateur libéral.”⁴¹⁹ [efforts and succes as a chief of state, peacemaker and liberal administrator.]

In her *Carnets de notes des “Mémoires d’Hadrien,”* Yourcenar often stressed this instructive dichotomy between Hadrian’s virtuous leadership and the fascist follies of her

⁴¹⁵ Marguerite Yourcenar, *Lettres à ses amis et quelques autres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 291.

⁴¹⁶ Heynders, “Great Men,” 71n1.

⁴¹⁷ Marguerite Yourcenar, *Les yeux ouverts: Entretiens avec Matthieu Galey* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1980), 170.

⁴¹⁸ Dementi, “Luminous Obscurity,” 122.

⁴¹⁹ Marguerite Yourcenar, *D’Hadrien à Zénon: Correspondance 1951-1956* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 237.

own contemporary era. “Avoir vécu dans un monde qui se défait m’enseignait l’importance du Prince,” she writes in the *Carnets*.⁴²⁰ [Having lived in a world that came undone taught me the importance of the Prince.] Hadrian represents an era of liberalism and freedom that has come under attack in a modern world marked by the scars of fascism: “Ce IIe siècle m’intéresse parce qu’il fut, pour un temps fort long, celui des derniers hommes libres. En ce qui nous concerne, nous sommes peut-être déjà fort loin de ce temps-là.”⁴²¹ [That second century interested me because it had been, for a truly long time, one of the last free men.] In offering Hadrian as a *Gegenbild* to Hitler, Yourcenar’s work provides contemporary readers with a normative model for leadership, albeit an imperial one. “En un sens,” she affirms, “toute vie racontée est exemplaire; on écrit pour attaquer ou pour défendre un système du monde, pour définir une méthode qui nous est propre.”⁴²² [In a sense, every life told is exemplary; on writes to attack or to defend a system of the world, to define a method that is our own.] Far from being an academic meditation on antiquity “divorced from the concerns of the twentieth century,” then, Yourcenar’s *Mémoires d’Hadrien* is intimately invested in engaging with and normatively rectifying the ills of its own historical period.

The image of Hadrian that *Mémoires d’Hadrien* posits is, as Yourcenar describes it, one of a “pacificateur et administrateur libéral.” He repeatedly expresses interest in and respect for other cultures, for instance, in stark contrast to those ethnocentric ideologies of racial hatred so characteristic of fascism. Hadrian recounts that he has

⁴²⁰ Marguerite Yourcenar, *Mémoires d’Hadrien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 314.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁴²² *Ibid.*

experimented with Indian vegetarianism, and repeatedly professes his desire to travel and to learn from other cultures.⁴²³ His decision to refuse official titles early on in his career distinguishes him from the blatant megalomania of fascist leaders like Hitler and Mussolini. In addition to these images of virtuous leadership that *Mémoires d'Hadrien* offers the reader in the place of fascist rule, the novel also nods directly to its fascist counter image. Hadrian's distaste for slavery not only marks him as an "administrateur libéral" who stands in contrast to fascist brutality—he shocks Rome when he exiles a wealthy patrician from the empire for mistreating his slaves—but it also suggests the forced labor of Hitler's concentration camps.⁴²⁴ "Je doute que toute la philosophie du monde parvienne à supprimer l'esclavage: on en changera tout au plus le nom," he declares, professing that "je suis capable d'imaginer des formes de servitude pires que les nôtres."⁴²⁵ [I doubt that all the philosophy in the world could succeed in suppressing slavery: only its name might change...I am able to imagine forms of slavery worse than those of our own.] Published in 1951, Hadrian's comments eerily suggest those possibilities "pires" that the world had already discovered in the form of Hitler's concentration camps. A similar allusion that sets Hadrian apart from Yourcenar's fascist contemporaries is one that occurs earlier in the work when Trajan charges Hadrian with attacking the Citadel of Sarmizégéthuse. Upon carrying out his mission, he witnesses a scene evocative of Hitler's notorious downfall: "j'entrai à la suite de l'empereur," Hadrian states, "dans la salle souterraine où les conseillers du roi Décébale venaient de

⁴²³ Ibid., 16.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 124.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 123.

s'empoisonner.”⁴²⁶ [I entered into the emperor's suite, in the subterranean room where the advisors of the king Decebale had just poisoned themselves.] If Hadrian's description recalls that of Hitler's own suicide in his subterranean bunker at the time of his defeat, it also sets Hadrian in stark opposition to Hitler: it is Hadrian, the conquering hero, who has subdued the Hitler figure.

Unlike the war mongering of Hitler and Mussolini, Yourcenar's Hadrian remains true to her definition of him as a “pacificateur.” In a break from the policies of his predecessor Trajan, ever avaricious for the Roman conquest of new lands, Hadrian halts the acquisition of new territories upon his accession to the throne and builds frontier lines to send a symbolic message signaling the end of imperial expansion. Hadrian's evacuation of some Roman territories beyond the lower Danube reaffirmed this end to imperial growth, surrendering land in some of the very same territories that Hitler and Mussolini would set their eyes on for the spread of their own fascist powers.

As Margit Dementi has noted, Yourcenar's portrait of Hadrian does not only furnish an ameliorative vision of imperial leadership freed from the misdeeds of fascism, but serves as a corrective to fascism's own misappropriation of ancient Rome. “On a political level,” writes Dementi, “Yourcenar's portrait of a reasonable and just Roman emperor serves to contradict both the catastrophic political reality brought about by Hitler and Mussolini and their distorted employment of Roman imperial iconography. While the possibility of a political figure ‘capable of restoring peace’ clearly inspired Yourcenar, it seems the occasion also called more specifically for the rehabilitation of the image of imperial Rome. Philippe Aziz's description of Mussolini's (1937) reception in Berlin in

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 62.

his History of the Third Reich reminds one of the extensive use of Roman iconography by fascist propagandists: '[Mussolini] passes between a row of busts of Roman Emperors who appear to recognize him as their legitimate descendent.... In Berlin, the director Benno von Arent built a triumphal alley from the Brandenburg Gate to the western quarter: draperies, garlands, bouquets of flowers, and of course, in abundance, the fasces of lictors and swastikas. On the grand avenue Unter den Linden, tall columns were surmounted with golden eagles. (7)' For a scholar of ancient Rome such as Yourcenar, this imagery was disquieting, and her choice of subject provided an opportunity for the recuperation of an original context for imperial pageantry."⁴²⁷ Although architecture was only one small part of the Roman myth upon which fascism drew, it features prominently in *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, where the emperor's extensive building projects are often described. It also, as Dementi and others critics of the novel have failed to note, furnished an important link between Hitler and Hadrian: Hitler sought to construct an extensive dynastic temple for himself in Munich, containing his own mausoleum, that would be modeled after Hadrian's Pantheon.⁴²⁸

Hitler had first visited the Pantheon on May 7, 1938, although his interest in and admiration for the building can be traced back to as early as 1925. "From the time I experienced this building," proclaimed Hitler to Paul Giesler, "no description, picture or photograph did it justice—I became interested in its history...For a short while I stood in this space [the rotunda]—what majesty!—I gazed at the large open oculus, and saw the universe and sensed what had given this space the name Pantheon—God and the world

⁴²⁷ Dementi, "Luminous Obscurity," 122.

⁴²⁸ Alex Scobie, *Hitler's State Architecture: The Impact of Classical Antiquity* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 3.

are one.”⁴²⁹ Hadrian’s building did not just inspire Hitler to model his own final resting place after it, but his plans for the epic *Volkshalle* in Berlin were nearly an exact replica, albeit on a much larger scale, of Hadrian’s Pantheon. If Yourcenar’s largely historically faithful portrait of Hadrian underscores the ideological gap between him and Hitler, so too does his Pantheon with which Hitler was enraptured. Whereas Hitler saw his building projects as monuments to his own greatness, especially in the case of his mausoleum that would replicate the Pantheon, Hadrian’s own projects lacked the megalomaniac self-promotion of Hitler’s. Such was especially the situation in the case of Hadrian’s Pantheon, which was actually a re-building of a structure originally constructed by Marcus Agrippa and later destroyed. Despite the fact that the new Pantheon was built entirely by Hadrian, Hadrian did not take credit for the building. He even granted public credit for the work to Marcus Agrippa, displaying the text, still visible today, across its façade: “M AGRIPPA L F COS TERTIVM FECIT,” short for “M[arcus] Agrippa L[ucii] f[ilius] co[n]s[ul] tertium fecit,” or “Marcus Agrippa, son of Lucius, made [this building] when consul for the third time.” Hadrian’s refusal to take public credit for the building with which Hitler was so enamored, a common practice of Hadrian’s, underscores the radical distance between the historical Hadrian whom Yourcenar’s text attempts to revive and the megalomaniac romance with ancient empire that Hitler and his fellow fascists underwent. Yourcenar’s choice of Hadrian, with whose work Hitler was obsessed, as representative of ancient Rome again suggests a rebuttal to Hitler’s own misappropriation of the Roman imperial legacy.

If Yourcenar’s novel rehabilitates and reclaims Roman Empire from fascist

⁴²⁹ Scobie, *Hitler’s State Architecture*, 109.

misappropriation, it is also concerned with the rehabilitation of Greek culture. Hadrian is identified throughout the novel as a lover of Greece, repeatedly recounting his time spent there and his love for all things Greek, be they food, philosophy or people. Hadrian's enthusiasm for Greece echoes Hitler's own passion for Hellenic culture, one that had long enraptured Germany. Upon invading Greece, recounts Frederic Spotts, Hitler "commented to Goebbels how much he admired the bravery of the Greek army. 'Perhaps there is still some of the old Hellenic in them.' The Führer, Goebbels further recorded, 'forbids any bombing of Athens. . . Rome and Athens are Meccas for him. He deeply regrets having to fight the Greeks. Had the British not intervened, he would never have hastened to help the Italians.' A few weeks later, [Goebbels] returned to find Hitler 'sad that he considered it at all necessary to fight in Greece. The Greeks certainly did not deserve it. He intends to treat them as humanely as he possibly can. We watch a newsreel of our entry into Athens. The Führer can take absolutely no pleasure in it, so deeply saddened is he by Greece's fate.'"⁴³⁰ Germany and Hitler's own championing of Greece toward nationalistic, militaristic and ultimately fascist ends, however, finds its counterpoint in the peaceful respect for Hellenic culture that Hadrian espouses. In recounting Hadrian's love of Greek virtues, then, the novel participates in the preservation not only of Hadrian's Roman liberalism but also of the Greek culture from which he drew inspiration, both of which stand in contradistinction to their politicized appropriation by fascism.

Mémoires d'Hadrien often reflects on its own project of salvaging a compromised culture in the wake of fascism: "La paix s'installera de nouveau," proclaims Hadrian,

⁴³⁰ Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2002), 22.

echoing the novel's own historical context, "...nos livres ne périront pas tous; on réparera nos statues brisées...quelques hommes penseront, travailleront et sentiront comme nous : j'ose compter sur ces continuateurs placés à intervalles irréguliers le long des siècles."⁴³¹

[Peace will reign again...our books will not all perish; our broken statues will be repaired...some men with think, will work and will feel like we do: I dare to count on these continuers placed at irregular intervals throughout the length of the centuries.]

Yourcenar's text serves as one of "ces continuateurs" that, despite the ravages of war and time, might resuscitate Hadrian's own humanistic vision of government and culture. "Je me disais qu'il suffirait de quelques guerres," Hadrian earlier muses, "de la misère qui suit celles-ci, d'une période de grossièreté ou de sauvagerie sous quelques mauvais princes, pour que périssent à jamais les pensées venues jusqu'à nous à l'aide de ces frêles objets de fibres et d'encre. Chaque homme assez fortuné pour bénéficier plus ou moins de ce legs de culture me paraissait chargé d'un fidéicommiss à l'égard du genre humain."⁴³² [I told myself that a few wars, the misery which followed them, a period of coarseness or of savagery beneath some bad prince, would all suffice to perish forever the thoughts that have come to us with the aide of these fragile objects made of fiber and ink. Each man fortunate enough to more or less benefit from this legacy of culture seemed to me charge with a trusteeship over humanity.] It is precisely in light of the recent "guerre" and "sauvagerie" of that "mauvais princes" Hitler that Western civilization, its culture and virtuous values, as well as its "frêles objets de fibres et d'encre," like Yourcenar's own text, must be preserved. *Mémoires d'Hadrien* thus reclaims both Roman and Greek

⁴³¹ Yourcenar, *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, 300-301.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 225.

culture from the threat of destruction posed by the fascists, who in both their own ideology and through their misappropriation of classical traditions opposed what Yourcenar saw as the liberal values preserved in this culture.

If Hadrian's encomiastic championing of Greek culture often appears innocuous compared to Hitler's fascist fetishization of Greek militarism and cultural superiority, at other times it can take on the very sort of racially-grounded prejudice so central to fascism. When praising the virtues of the Greek language, for instance, Hadrian declares that "tout ce que les hommes ont dit de mieux a été dit en grec," [everything that man has said best has been said in Greek] implying a linguistic inferiority borne by other races.⁴³³ Hadrian goes on to denigrate other languages that are by contrast "pétrifiées," [petrified] including as Egyptian ("signes plutôt que mots" [signs more than words]), Celtic and Hebrew, which he declares a "langue de sectaires, si obsédés par leur dieu qu'ils ont négligé l'humain."⁴³⁴ [language of officials, so obsessed with their god that they have neglected the human.] Here Hadrian's Grecophilia borders dangerously on the ideologies of racial superiority promoted by Hitler and later Mussolini, especially given Hadrian's condescension toward Jewish culture. Similarly, Hadrian praises Greek meat as preserving "cette qualité presque sacramentelle" that "nous ramenait plus loin, aux origines sauvages des races."⁴³⁵ [that nearly sacramental quality that brings us further back, to the primitive origin of the races.] Once again, Hadrian's Grecophilia brings him to the borders of fascist ideology, as his ecstatic connection to the "origines sauvages des

⁴³³ Ibid., 40.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 40-41.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 15.

racés” recalls Hitler’s emphasis on racial origins and primitivism.

Hadrian’s Hellenism veers dangerously close to Hitler’s own in other important ways. When Hadrian declares that “notre art (j’entends celui des Grecs) a choisi de s’entendre à l’homme. Nous seuls avons su montrer dans un corps immobile la force et agilité latentes,” [our art (by which I mean that of the Greeks) has remained faithful to man. We alone have been able to show in an immobile body its latent force and agility] his privileging of Greek aesthetic perfection recalls that of the German Johann Joachim Winckelmann. Winckelmann, often considered the founder of art history, privileged the absolute superiority of Greek art above all other artistic production, marked as it was by its “noble simplicity and quiet grandeur”—a famed formulation that Yourcenar’s description of the “corps immobile...[revealing a] force et agilité latentes” evokes.⁴³⁶ Winckelmann’s work was characteristic of German attitudes toward Hellenic culture and marked by the sort of racial hierarchizing that would become emblematic of Hitler’s regime. It is not radical to postulate that Hitler, himself an artist, may have been familiar with Winckelmann’s ideas, ideas that he so often reproduced himself. “[Hitler’s] admiration of the Greeks,” writes Spotts, “... knew no bounds and in many respects his views bore an uncanny resemblance to those of the great Johann Joachim Winckelmann. There is no way of knowing whether Hitler, a notorious pickpocket in the market of ideas, actually took these notions from the pioneer art historian. But Winckelmann’s dictum that ‘the only way for us to become great. . . lies in the imitation of the Greeks’ is one that Hitler repeated virtually word for word on various occasions. What he saw in their culture was a peerless aesthetic ideal...the Greeks had achieved perfection in every

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 139.

field. He considered the Parthenon to be supreme and the architectural style he himself later endorsed was initially a pastiche of neo-Dorian. Greek sculpture had never been surpassed in his view and one of his most prized possessions was the best surviving copy of Myron's Discobolus, Discus Thrower. He had acquired it in 1938 and on placing it on exhibition praised it as an aesthetic model for all time. 'May you all then realize how glorious man already was back then in his physical beauty,' he told his audience. 'We can speak of progress only if we have attained like perfection or if we manage to surpass it.' He also admired the Greeks for 'the excellence of their world thought.' 'Our technology alone is all they lacked,' he maintained. Despite his own nonbelief, he even admired Greek religion and his entourage must have found it hard to trust their ears when they heard him say, 'We would not be in any danger today to pray to Zeus.' The strength and serenity of pagan iconography he contrasted to Christian imagery of suffering and pain – 'You need only look at the head of Zeus or Athena and compare it to that of a medieval crucifixion scene or of some saint.' The distinction was visible in architecture as well. 'What a difference,' he said, 'between a dark cathedral and a bright, open temple.' All in all, Greek civilization represented 'a beauty that exceeds anything that is evident today.'⁴³⁷ Hitler's Grecophilia, founded on the sort of racial thinking that Winckelmann promulgated, reinforced his belief in the relative racial inferiority of other, non-Hellenic cultures, and his faith in Germany's mission to carry on the privileged Hellenic tradition. When Hadrian expresses his desire to one day "helléniser les barbares, d'atticiser Rome, d'imposer doucement au monde la seule culture qui se soit un jour séparée du monstrueux," his exclusive valorization of Greek culture at the expense of others

⁴³⁷ Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, 22.

threatens to turn into the tyranny that characterized fascism's nationalistic claims to cultural superiority and global domination.⁴³⁸ Once again, Hadrian's Winckelmannian Hellenism, evocative of Germany's own, veers dangerously close to the racial codes and totalitarian practices of fascism that contradicted the very values of liberty and liberalism Yourcenar so often championed.

Just as Hadrian's Grecophilia threatens to align him with fascist ideology, other markers in the text likewise betray a close alignment between Hadrian and fascism. As Carlston has already noted, the disdain for urbanization in favor of an agrarian society that finds voice in Yourcenar's fiction is characteristically fascist.⁴³⁹ Hadrian often reflects nostalgically on Rome's lost agrarian origins, recalling Hitler's own philosophy of *Blut und Boden*. Similarly, Hitler's notorious dislike of Germany's modern urban center, Berlin, finds echo in the novel's repeated emphasis on Hadrian's distaste for Rome. Hadrian's accomplishment of having "rénové l'économie de l'empire," [revived the empire's economy] as Yourcenar praisingly notes, also evokes one of Hitler's most noted domestic accomplishments.⁴⁴⁰ Similarly, Hadrian's extensive building of libraries across the empire recalls Hitler's own building of community libraries across Germany, which were used toward political and propagandistic ends. While Carlston argues that Hadrian's Spanish birth and childhood outside of Rome distance him from Hitler by marking him as a multi-cultural ruler, it also suggests a parallel to Hitler himself, ruler of

⁴³⁸ Yourcenar, *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, 82.

⁴³⁹ Carlston, *Thinking Fascism*, 87.

⁴⁴⁰ Yourcenar, *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, 321.

a land from which he himself did not come.⁴⁴¹

While many of Hadrian's points of identification with Hitler do not by default mark him a failed "administrateur libéral," others suggest far more sinister possibilities. Hadrian's execution of a number of senators early in his career, for instance, recalls the politically driven purges that characterized Hitler's early rise to power. Throughout his reign, in fact, Hadrian would be blamed for numerous deaths of those who had fallen out with him.⁴⁴² Similarly, the many writers and intellectuals sent into exile by Hitler and Mussolini's regimes are called to mind when Hadrian exiles the poet Juvenal. In explaining his decision, Hadrian notes that Juvenal "osa insulter dans une de ses *Satires* le mime Pâris, qui me plaisait," [dared to insult one of the *Satires* of the mime Paris] and bore a "mépris grossier" [great contempt] for Hadrian's beloved Greece.⁴⁴³ If Hadrian's justifications for Juvenal's exile appear trifling and unjust, his banishment from Rome of the philosopher Favorinus appears no less honorable. Far away in his exile, explains Hadrian, Favorinus' "voix aigre ne pouvait m'atteindre."⁴⁴⁴ [acerbic voice could not reach me.] This "voix aigre" that Hadrian identifies suggests the possibility of an unfavorable critical position, political or otherwise, toward the emperor and his regime on the part of Favorinus that Hadrian has sought to silence.

Although Hadrian often attempts to exonerate himself from his various wrongdoings, Yourcenar's text often leaves the reader with troubling questions as to

⁴⁴¹ Carlston, *Thinking Fascism*, 89.

⁴⁴² Anthony Birley, *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3.

⁴⁴³ Yourcenar, *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, 238.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 239.

Hadrian's innocence. He never provides specific evidence that the senators he killed were in fact plotting against him, for instance, and the outcry their murders evoke stands in contrast to the professed justness of the killings. While Hadrian acknowledges that Plotina may have in fact forged Trajan's will in order to name Hadrian emperor, he does not seem troubled with the legal dubiousness of his rule. Such a potentially false showing of "legality" to legitimize his own power recalls fascism's own retroactive self-justification through enabling legislation. Similarly, when Hadrian's estranged wife dies, he informs the reader that "comme le mal auquel succomba l'impératrice, médiocrement diagnostiqué par les médecins, lui causa vers la fin d'atroces douleurs d'entrailles, on m'accusa d'avoir usé de poison, et ce bruit insensé trouva facilement créance. Il va sans dire qu'un crime si superflu ne m'avait jamais tenté."⁴⁴⁵ [as the illness to which the empress succumbed, poorly diagnosed by the doctors, caused her horrible pains of the bowels toward the end, I was accused of having used poison, and that senseless rumor easily found credence. It goes without saying that I would never had attempted such a superfluous crime.] Hadrian's description of his wife's "médiocrement diagnostiqué" illness for which he was blamed casts suspicion upon him, despite his hasty denial of committing a crime. As Yourcenar herself confesses, "A de certains moments, d'ailleurs peu nombreux, il m'est même arrivé de sentir que l'empereur mentait. Il fallait alors le laisser mentir, comme nous tous."⁴⁴⁶ [At certain moments, for that matter rather numerous, it occurred to me to think that the emperor was lying. It was thus necessary to let him lie, like we all do.] Sometimes explicit and other times implicit, Hadrian's acts of

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid, 268.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 327

violence and banishment, as well as his inclination toward racially motivated thinking and the sort of imperial domination in which it finds its fruition, all suggest a dangerous entanglement with the practices and ideologies of modern fascism.

Fascism's greatest crime, the genocide of European Jewry, also finds an uncanny echo in Yourcenar's novel. Just as Hadrian's denigration of the Hebrew language becomes problematic when read in the contemporary context of Hitler's own ardent anti-Semitism, numerous moments in the work can be seen as alluding to the holocaust. At one point Hadrian, having conquered a group of enemies, is described as setting fire to their "tas d'hommes morts."⁴⁴⁷ [pile of dead bodies.] Both the burning of the bodies and the image of the "tas" itself recalls the burning of Jewish bodies in Hitler's concentration camps and the many images from the camps that circulated around the time Yourcenar was working on the novel. At one point, Hadrian even appears to condone genocide when he describes the Roman destruction of the Dacians. "Elle dura onze mois," he writes of the conflict, "et fut atroce. Je crois encore que l'anéantissement des Daces avait été à peu près justifié: aucun chef d'État ne supporte volontiers l'existence d'un ennemi organisé installé à ses portes."⁴⁴⁸ [It lasted eleven months and was atrocious. I still believe that the wiping out of the Dacians had been nearly justified: no chief of state can willingly allow the existence of an organized enemy installed at his doors.] Even Hadrian's rhetoric of an "ennemi... installé à ses portes" recalls Hitler's descriptions of the Jewish threat to the German homeland.

The allusions to genocide and the holocaust in *Mémoires d'Hadrien* find their

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 63.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 73-74.

most troubling expression in Hadrian's actions toward the Jews. His bloody suppression of the Bar Kokhba revolt, in which, as he describes, "il avait fallu exécuter en masse les rebelles de Gaza," [it was necessary to execute en masse the Gaza rebels] recalls Hitler's own destruction and mass execution of the Jews.⁴⁴⁹ Yourcenar herself affirmed this connection between her work and its historical present in an interview with Bernard Pivot. "Mais, d'une certaine manière, avec cette guerre de la Palestine, est-ce qu'on peut dire d'Hadrien qu'il participe au tragique de notre temps – d'aujourd'hui?" [But, in a certain manner, with that Palestinian war, cannot one say of Hadrian that he participates in the tragedy of our own times – of today?] asked Pivot. "Oui, absolument," responded Yourcenar, "Et c'est à ce moment-là d'ailleurs que je l'ai montré réfléchissant à l'avenir."⁴⁵⁰ [Yes, absolutely. And it is at that moment, furthermore, that I depicted him as reflective of the future.] These echoes of "l'avenir" are visible when Hadrian finally topples the revolt, as his description of the remaining survivors again recalls contemporary images of Hitler's holocaust: "je vis sortir un à un les derniers...hâves, décharnés, hideux."⁴⁵¹ [I saw emerge one by one the last of them...gaunt, scraggy, monstrous.] As if to underscore the personal, rather than political, origin of Hadrian's sweeping violence, Yourcenar immediately precedes the chapter on the Bar Kokhba revolt with a one paragraph description of Hadrian's violent outburst toward one of his secretaries. Impatient with the secretary, a "personnage médiocre," [mediocre character]

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid, 248.

⁴⁵⁰ Marguerite Yourcenar, *Portrait d'une voix: 28 entretiens 1952-1987* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 241.

⁴⁵¹ Yourcenar, *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, 256.

as Hadrian dismissively declares, he strikes him across the face so forcefully that the secretary loses an eye.⁴⁵² In thus framing Hadrian's massacre of the Jews with this scene of uncontrollable violence and brutality, *Mémoires d'Hadrien* suggests a continuum between these two spaces of personal violence and imperial domination.

That Yourcenar would stress the brutality of Hadrian's war against the Jews, one the novel aligns with images of Hitler's own brutal campaign against them, is not surprising given the severity of Hadrian's actions. The Bar Kokhba revolt, far from a radical turn of events in Roman-Jewish relations, arose after Hadrian put into place a number of restrictive policies toward the Jewish community. Just as Yourcenar's Hadrian sought to "helléniser les barbares," [Hellenize the barbarians] so too did Hadrian attempt to Hellenize the Jewish community.⁴⁵³ To this end he began an extensive program of Jewish persecution, which included banning Jewish proselytization, circumcision (as the Third Reich did later), subjecting Jews to unusually high taxation, turning rabbinic ordination into a capital offense, and even temporarily proscribing Judaism.⁴⁵⁴ In addition, Hadrian confiscated Jewish property, a practice later taken up by Nazism.⁴⁵⁵ Under Hadrian the Roman military presence in Judaea trebled, and Hadrian planned to effectively destroy Jerusalem in order to make way for a new city called *Aelia Capitolina*, which would be "a magnificent Greco-Roman city, complete with palaces,

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 240.

⁴⁵³ Birley, *Hadrian*, 2.

⁴⁵⁴ Moshe and David Aberbach, *The Roman-Jewish Wars and Hebrew Cultural Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan/St. Martin's Press, 2000), 11, 87, 99.

⁴⁵⁵ James Bloom, *The Jewish Revolts Against Rome, AD 66-135: A Military Analysis* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co., 2010), 196.

gymnasiums, circuses, temples of Juno and Jupiter, bathhouses and monuments.”⁴⁵⁶ Once again, Hadrian’s plans to completely remake the Jewish capital as a culturally superior Roman city aligns him with Hitler, who planned to wipe many major European cities off the map and rebuild them according to his own whimsical notions, such as his partially realized attempt to destroy Warsaw and rebuild it as a new German city.

When Hadrian’s persecution of the Jews finally led to a revolt on the part of Bar Kokhba and his followers, Hadrian’s brutality only intensified. Just as Nazis had forced Jews to violate various religious ordinances, such as cutting their payots, Jews during Hadrian’s war were forced on pain of torture or death to curse and deny their God, violate their laws of purity, desecrate the Sabbath and eat forbidden food.⁴⁵⁷ Aberbach describes the extent of Hadrian’s brutality: “Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba, who lived in the third century CE, recalled the Hadrianic persecution, ‘when those who hallowed the Name were tortured with white-hot balls wedged into their armpits and with sharpened reeds pushed in under their nails.’ In one midrash, a killing field known as ‘Hadrian’s vineyard’ stretched for many miles and was fenced by the emperor with bodies of Jews killed at Betar...this midrash suggests how dangerously close Rome’s murderous vengeance came to genocide, as southern Palestine was almost totally de-judaized. Thousands of survivors were paraded in degrading victory celebrations. They were taunted, tortured and murdered in public entertainments in Roman amphitheaters.”⁴⁵⁸ Similarly, James Bloom explains that “The Romans had to resort to severe brutality to win the war. Bodies were

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 203.

⁴⁵⁷ Aberbach, 93.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 94-95.

left unburied for several years. There are three reports that children were wrapped in Torah scrolls and burned alive. This may be extravagant overstatement, but earlier experience shows that Roman legionaries were perfectly capable of fear-provoking acts like these.”⁴⁵⁹ Hadrian’s near “genocide” resulted in the death of nearly all Jews tied to the revolt. Fifty of the most important Jewish outposts in the war were destroyed, 985 of the better known Jewish villages were razed to the ground, 580,000 Jews were killed in various engagements with the Romans, and more died from starvation, fire and disease.⁴⁶⁰ This policy of near-genocidal total destruction has been linked to Hitler’s own genocide by other scholars, such as Martin Goodman, who has written that Hadrian “visited Judaea and put into operation his final solution for Jewish rebelliousness,” noting that he uses “the term ‘final solution’ deliberately.”⁴⁶¹ When the war finally ended at the Battle of Bethar, the Romans killed every remaining Jew who surrendered, those same Jews whom Yourcenar describes in familiar holocaust imagery as “hâves, décharnés, hideux.”

Even after the defeat of Bar Kokhba, Hadrian did not relent in his persecution of the Jews. He realized his plans for Jerusalem by building his new pagan city, *Aelia Capitolina*, on the grounds of the ruined city. On the site of the destroyed Jewish temple he constructed a temple to Jupiter, and he banned Jews from the city.⁴⁶² Even if Jews

⁴⁵⁹ Bloom, *The Jewish Revolts Against Rome*, 207.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁴⁶¹ Martin Goodman, “Trajan and the Origins of the Bar Kokhba War,” in *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt Against Rome*, ed. Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 28.

⁴⁶² Aberbach, 87.

were allowed in the city, explains Goodman, “No Jew, however acculturated into Greek or Roman society, can have greeted the new *colonia* with any pleasure, for it was explicitly intended for the settlement of...foreign religious rites...[that] were deliberately Roman...Aelia Capitolina is unique in its use of the new colony not to flatter but to suppress the natives.”⁴⁶³ In addition to banishing Jews from the destroyed and reimagined Jerusalem, Hadrian depopulated Judaea and drove many Jews away either in chains through forced deportation or as a result of terror, poverty and famine.⁴⁶⁴ In addition, Hadrian renamed Judaea “Syria Palestina,” a deliberate reference to the ancient enemy of the Jewish peoples, the Philistines, in order to further sever Jewish claims to the land.⁴⁶⁵ Hadrian’s project of empire, then, far from being exclusively ruled by the liberalism and pacifism for which Yourcenar praised him, bordered unsettlingly close to the sort of racially-motivated persecution, violence and genocide that defined fascism in Yourcenar’s era.

Hadrian’s unsettling proximity to the legacy of National Socialism contrasts sharply with his presentation as an “anti-Hitler” elsewhere in *Mémoires d’Hadrien*. Responding to the absolute, often tyrannical nature of Hadrian’s civilizing mission in Yourcenar’s novel, Carlston writes that the novel might be read “as a reactionary attempt to reground ‘civilization’ in a fundamentally oppressive Western tradition that Yourcenar has falsely romanticized.”⁴⁶⁶ Carlston goes on to argue that “Yourcenar’s ‘monument...to the need

⁴⁶³ Goodman, “Trajan and the Origins of the Bar Kokhba War,” 28.

⁴⁶⁴ Aberbach, *The Roman-Jewish Wars*, 87.

⁴⁶⁵ Bloom, 208.

⁴⁶⁶ Carlston, *Thinking Fascism*, 124.

to preserve civilization' never really questions whether that project does not inevitably preserve some civilizations at the expense of others; even Hadrian is bent on the political subjugation of the cultures he claims to respect."⁴⁶⁷ While Hadrian is in fact "bent on the political subjugation of the cultures he claims to respect," Yourcenar's novel does not ignore the question of what price others are forced to pay for Hadrian's vision. By suggesting a dangerous affinity between Hadrian's actions and those of the National Socialists, the novel warns of the dangers that lie latent in the project of empire, no matter how purportedly just. Similarly, the novel's subtle but troubling suggestions that all is not always "upright" with Hadrian—the killings of his political opponents, the banishing of poets and philosophers, the suspected poisoning of his estranged wife, his clearly problematic racial thinking, the dubious legality of his rule—further undermine his claims to the role of Yourcenar's prized "pacificateur et administrateur libéral." In juxtaposing these two contrasting images of Hadrian, one of an enlightened ruler harnessing the power of empire to bring peace and prosperity to the world, with one of a ruler wielding violent power for his own desires, driven by ideologies of cultural superiority to near-genocidal ends, an anti-Hitler and Hitler figure at once, *Mémoires d'Hadrien*'s ambivalently suggests the dangerously fine line between the redemptive power of empire and the attendant dangers it threatens.

Just as Yourcenar's portrait of ancient empire in *Mémoires d'Hadrien* responds to the reality of modern fascism, so too does it respond to that other bastion of modern empire, European colonialism. If Hadrian's version of what is often just or benevolent empire serves as an antidote to the horrors of fascism, *Mémoires d'Hadrien* seems to

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 125.

suggest that this model might find its modern counterpart in British and French colonialism. As Margit Dementi has acknowledged, the novel fuses its image of imperial Rome with that of the British Empire: “[She attributes] to Hadrian a vision of a future British empire,” writes Dementi, noting a passage in which Hadrian visits Britain and from there envisions “a hypothetical empire governed from the West, an Atlantic world’ (137).” This passage, she continues, “functions within the text as a means of making another connection between contemporary political reality and the historical past. By referring obliquely to the modern Western world and to the British Empire that Churchill inherits, Yourcenar ties the two ages together.”⁴⁶⁸ In so doing, Yourcenar’s work suggests that the possibility of benevolent empire has not been exhausted by fascism, but upheld by one of its most ardent combatants.

The connection between Hadrian and Churchill in *Mémoires d’Hadrien* is not surprising, given that Yourcenar herself professed to have modeled Hadrian partially after Churchill: “At the time I began writing, there was one statesman who may have inspired me in a very remote way: Churchill. For the simple reason that he had written his own memoirs, of which I had read the first volume when I undertook to write Hadrian. In reading Churchill I said to myself that it was indeed possible, up to a certain point, for a political leader to explain his actions, even notwithstanding possible falsifications and omissions.”⁴⁶⁹ These echoes of Churchill, expertly elucidates Dementi, can be found throughout Yourcenar’s text. “Both Churchill and Yourcenar’s Hadrian affirm similar goals of establishing universal peace and civilization,” she explains. “Just as Churchill,

⁴⁶⁸ Dementi, “Luminous Obscurity,” 122.

⁴⁶⁹ Yourcenar, quoted in Dementi, “Luminous Obscurity,” 122.

early in his career, had asserted that Britain would bring ‘peace, civilization and good government to the uttermost ends of the earth,’ so Hadrian writes: ‘I desired that the might and majesty of the Roman peace should extend to all...that the most humble traveler might wander from one country or one continent, to another without vexatious formalities, and without danger, assured everywhere of a minimum of legal protection and culture.’ (134) In addition, Hadrian's analysis of his own situation in relation to Trajan's legacy closely resembles, in tone and attitude, Churchill's discussion of his political inheritance in the preface to *My Early Life: A Roving Commission*. Churchill writes: ‘I was a child of the Victorian era, when the structure of our country seemed firmly set, when its position in trade and on the seas was unrivaled, and when the realization of the greatness of our Empire and our duty to preserve it was ever growing stronger. In those days the dominant forces in Great Britain were very sure of themselves and of their doctrines. They thought they could teach the world the art of government, and the science of economics. They were sure they were supreme at sea and consequently, safe at home. They rested sedately under the convictions of power and security. Very different is the aspect of these anxious and dubious times. (6)’ Similarly, Hadrian pens, ‘The world which I had inherited resembled a man in the full vigor of maturity who was still robust (though already revealing, to a physician's eyes, some barely perceptible signs of wear), but who had just passed through the convulsions of a serious illness’ (95). Hadrian's comparison of his world to ‘a man in the full vigor of maturity’ showing perceptible signs of wear might well apply to the crumbling Victorian legacy left to Churchill and the leaders of the British Empire at the end of the period of vast colonial expansion and after the ravages of the First World War, as well as to the

legacies of almost all European leaders of the period.”⁴⁷⁰ Churchill’s role as both an imperial administrator and arch-enemy of fascism places him in a unique position to serve as Yourcenar’s “anti-Hitler,” then, a figure at once entangled in the web of power that is empire while at the same time passionately fighting what he sees as its ultimate misuse in the expansive empires Hitler and Mussolini attempted to build during the 1930s and 1940s.

A telling allusion to Churchill and the British Empire occurs late in *Mémoires d’Hadrien*, when Hadrian describes the beginnings of his military campaign in Israel. “Julius Sévérus,” he writes, “qui avait naguère pacifié les régions montagneuses de la Bretagne du Nord, prit la direction des opérations militaires; il amenait avec lui de petits contingents d’auxiliaires britanniques accoutumés à combattre en terrain difficile.”⁴⁷¹ [Julius Severus, who had hardly just finished pacifying the mountainous regions of northern Britain, took control of the military operations; he brought with him small contingents of British auxiliaries who were accustomed to fighting in difficult terrain.] Hadrian’s deployment to Israel of Sévérus, a commander from Britain, alongside British troops, evokes Britain’s own imperial presence in Israel-Palestine during the time at which Yourcenar wrote *Mémoires d’Hadrien*. Britain’s support for the Jewish community in Palestine, which ultimately contributed to the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, when Yourcenar was writing her novel, stands as a powerful antidote to the genocide unleashed by Hitler upon European Jewry. It was precisely Churchill, furthermore, who helped accomplish this end. Zionism was “very dear to [Churchill] and

⁴⁷⁰ Dementi, “Luminous Obscurity,” 122.

⁴⁷¹ Yourcenar, *Mémoires d’Hadrien*, 244.

integral to his worldview,” explains Michael Makovsky.⁴⁷² Despite the frequent lack of political and public support for Zionism, it was a cause Churchill championed throughout the 1930s and 1940s. As Makovsky explains, “As prime minister during the Second World War, Churchill eagerly and confidently battled the overwhelming majority of officials in his Conservative Party and government bureaucracy who were unsympathetic to Jews and Zionism, and he worked diligently but ultimately unsuccessfully to fashion a postwar Middle Eastern settlement that included a Jewish state. He also pushed for closer relations with the State of Israel from shortly after its founding in 1948 through his second premiership in the 1950s.”⁴⁷³ Given that the Bar Kokhba war took on significant nationalistic significance for Jews in British Palestine, having become “one of the most important Zionist symbols of heroism” in the late 19th and early 20th century period of British rule, Hadrian’s and Churchill’s interventions in Israel-Palestine were already conjoined in the modern political imaginary.⁴⁷⁴ If Hadrian’s deployment of troops to Israel spells disaster for the Jews within the context of the Second Century, by linking his actions to those of the British in Yourcenar’s own era, *Mémoires d’Hadrien*’s suggests a faith in the redemptive possibilities of empire.

Hadrian’s imperial project alludes not only to Britain, but to Yourcenar’s native French Empire as well. “*Humanitas, Felicitas, Libertas*,” the three “beaux mots qui figurent sur les monnaies de [Hadrian’s] règne,” closely recalls the tri-partite motto of the

⁴⁷² Michael Makovsky, *Churchill’s Promised Land: Zionism and Statecraft* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), x-xi.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁷⁴ Yael Zerubavel, “Bar Kokhba’s Image in Modern Israeli Culture,” *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt Against Rome*, ed. Peter Schäfer ((Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 279.

French Empire, “*Liberté, égalité, fraternité.*”⁴⁷⁵ Given that this motto was suppressed in France during the time of its fascist occupation, Yourcenar’s evocation thereof can be read as a timely rehabilitation of those same values that found themselves under assault during the period in which she wrote. Similar to Hadrian’s tri-part motto, Rome’s imperial mandate, as he professes it, closely recalls the French *mission civilisatrice*: the uncultivated and foreign cities of the empire will one day “reproduiraient Rome,” [recreate Rome] a city that “se perpétuerait dans la moindre petite ville où des magistrats s’efforcent de vérifier les poids de marchands, de nettoyer et d’éclairer leurs rues, de s’opposer au désordre...de réinterpréter raisonnablement les lois.”⁴⁷⁶ [will perpetuate itself in the smallest little village where the magistrates attempt to verify the weights of the traders, to clean and light up their roads, to oppose disorder...to sensibly reinterpret the laws.] In Hadrian’s desire to bring order, progress and justness to the world through his project of empire, he mirrors the purported mission of Yourcenar’s own native empire, providing an imperial model that stands in sharp contrast to those of Hitler and Mussolini.

If *Mémoires d’Hadrien* suggests the possibility of benevolent empire through European colonialism as an antidote to the abuses of fascism, it is also weary of the dangers of the colonial project. Yourcenar wrote the novel at a time of great nationalist upheaval within the colonial world, and her invocations of the British and French empires are difficult to separate from the legacy of this revolutionary turmoil. When Hadrian disparagingly declares that the practices of the Indians whom he has witnessed “nous

⁴⁷⁵ Yourcenar, *Mémoires d’Hadrien*, 119.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

sépare trop du commun des hommes,” [separate us too much from the community of men] his disapproval strikes an uncomfortable chord with Britain’s own arguments about India’s supposed cultural inferiority, arguments used to justify their rule there despite the growing presence of nationalist resistance. Yourcenar herself championed the cause of Indian independence, lamenting in one of her letters of the time that “modern India has abandoned Gandhi.”⁴⁷⁷ Her support for Gandhi and Indian independence was not surprising, given that Indian independence was a popular cause in France at the time. The French press had been interested in promoting Indian decolonization starting in 1919, often focusing their attention on Gandhi and subsuming the Indian struggle against the British into France’s own revolutionary model of history.⁴⁷⁸ British India failed, argued the French frequently, because Indians did not receive the same degree of liberty as the Indians of the French Indian colonies did.⁴⁷⁹ If such an argument was used to minimize or conceal France’s own colonial misdeeds, Yourcenar did not fall prey to such posturing. Just as *Mémoires d’Hadrien* suggests to the dangers of British imperial rule, so too does it gesture toward the abuses of the French Empire.

At the time Yourcenar wrote *Mémoires d’Hadrien*, Algerian nationalism and revolt against French colonial rule was on the rise, having substantially strengthened in the 1930s.⁴⁸⁰ At the same time, France saw renewed domestic interest in her colonial empire,

⁴⁷⁷ Yourcenar, *Lettres*, 482.

⁴⁷⁸ Kate Marsh, *Fictions of 1947: Representations of Indian Decolonization 1919-1962* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 42, 53.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁸⁰ Peter Dunwoodie, *Writing French Algeria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31.

beginning with the 1931 Colonial Exhibition in Paris.⁴⁸¹ Anticolonialism, however, had begun to take shape in France during this time of nationalist upheaval, starting as early as 1923.⁴⁸² Anticolonialists were often motivated by the increasing violence of French colonialism: in 1946, for instance, the bombardment of Haiphong killed 6,000 Vietnamese, while one year later the French suppression of an insurrection in Madagascar cost up to 200,000 lives.⁴⁸³ Among the colonies undergoing nationalist upheaval, Algeria held an especially prominent place in French intellectual discourse at the time.⁴⁸⁴ In the middle of writing *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, the French waged a bloody suppression of an Algerian uprising at Sétif.⁴⁸⁵ The suppression, in which the French killed a number of Algerian protestors in what is known as the Sétif massacre, began the same day that Nazi Germany surrendered to the Allies, ending the Second World War. In total, up to 45,000 Algerians were killed by the French during the revolts of 1945.⁴⁸⁶ Ironically, it was precisely Hitler's defeat that had spurred the French massacre, as Algerians interpreted the fall of fascism as a forerunner to their own freedom. The French suppression finds an uncanny echo in Yourcenar's novel, when Hadrian travels to the Roman province of Mauretania, part of then-French Algeria, to suppress a native revolt. "Les beaux guerriers tatoués des montagnes de l'Atlas inquiétaient encore les villes," [the

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 28-29.

⁴⁸² Marsh, *Fictions of 1947*, 81.

⁴⁸³ Gildea, "Myth, Memory and Policy," 71.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁸⁶ Daniel Woodley, *Fascism and Political Theory: Critical Perspectives on Fascist Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2010), 119.

handsome tattooed warriors of the mountains of Atlas again threatened the towns] describes Hadrian, recounting his suppression of the revolt: “je revis les tribus domptées une à une, la fière soumission des chefs prosternés en plein désert au milieu d’un désordre de femmes, de ballots, et de bêtes agenouillées.”⁴⁸⁷ [I re-experienced the tribes tamed one by one, the proud submission of the prostrated chiefs in the middle of the desert among a disorder of women, idiots, and kneeling beasts.] Similarly, Hadrian speaks of the “formes brutales...aux frontières,” [brutal forms...on the frontier] where, driven by “le patriotisme romain, l’inébranlable croyance dans les bienfaits de notre autorité et la mission de Rome de gouverner les peuples,” [Roman patriotism, the inextinguishable belief in the good deeds of our authority and in the mission of Rome to govern the peoples] the empire suppresses “chefs nomades” [nomadic chiefs] with “des abus” [abuses] becoming of “le soldat” [the soldier] rather than “l’homme d’État.”⁴⁸⁸ [man of state.] In pointing out the failures of Rome’s civilizing mission and the resultant violence and abuses it brought about in Algeria and elsewhere, *Mémoires d’Hadrien* reflectively challenges the integrity of France’s own imperial aims and practices at the time the novel was written.

Yourcenar’s ambivalent coupling of empire, fascism and modern colonialism comes as no surprise given the discourse surrounding fascism and French imperialism at the time she wrote. During the period of the Algerian uprisings, Robert Gildea describes, “When it became known that French police and paratroopers were using torture against Algerian nationalists in order to elicit information, they [French intellectuals] provoked a

⁴⁸⁷ Yourcenar, *Mémoires d’Hadrien*, 147.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

violent debate and crisis of identity by suggesting that what the Gestapo had done to the French, the French were now doing to the Algerians.”⁴⁸⁹ While *Mémoires d’Hadrien* appears to rehabilitate the possibility of just empire as an alternative to the abuses of empire by fascism, at the same time it also questions the dangers and viabilities of the imperial project in the modern world. In fusing an image of both French and Hitlerian misuses of power in the figure of Hadrian, the novel suggests an uncomfortable affinity between the French colonial empire and fascism that the intellectuals of Yourcenar’s day proposed. At the same time, the novel suggests the redemptive possibilities of modern-day empire, particularly through its allusions to Churchill and British rule in the Middle East. Deeply engaged with its own times, Yourcenar’s *Mémoires d’Hadrien* muses ambivalently on the prospect of empire in the wake of fascism, optimistically championing empire’s potential as an antidote to fascism while at the same time warning of its attendant dangers.

⁴⁸⁹ Robert Gildea, “Myth, Memory and Policy in France Since 1945,” in *Memory and Power in Postwar Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 72.

Chapter 4. Italy and the End of Fascism: Dino Buzzati and Ennio Flaiano

Writing during and immediately after the Second World War, Dino Buzzati and Ennio Flaiano make use of the literary space to criticize the nationalistic, bureaucratic and militaristic cultures of fascist Italy through their unique evocation of empire. Often fantastical and always enigmatic, the writings of famed Italian author Dino Buzzati seem to have little in common with the real world in which he lived. That world, marked by twenty plus years of fascist rule in his native Italy, the concomitant expansion of a colonial empire and two devastating world wars, was one that nevertheless found its way into his fiction time and again. Two of his novels written from the height of Italian fascism, *Il Deserto dei Tartari* in 1940 and *La Famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* in 1945, bear witness to the turbulent times in which Buzzati lived and wrote. *Il Deserto dei Tartari* tells the story of Lieutenant Drogo, a young officer sent to a remote imperial military outpost where he slowly serves out his military career into old age, anticipating a great battle that never seems to come. *La Famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia*, an illustrated children's book, recounts the invasion of Sicily one winter by a group of starving bears. Once the bears oust Sicily's evil ruler, the Granduca, they slowly fall prey to moral laxness themselves. The evil bear Salnitro robs the Sicilian treasury and even attempts to overthrow the rightful bear king Leonzio before his uprising is put down. At the work's conclusion the bears leave Sicily for their ancestral mountains, where they live in peace and moral righteousness once again.

Both *Il Deserto dei Tartari* and *La Famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia*, written from within fascist Italy and under the threat of censorship, surreptitiously subvert fascist codes of militarism and anti-Semitism as well as the assault on individual liberty that

fascism brought to Italy. At the same time, Buzzati's landscapes fantastically merge the colonial space, where he himself spent much time, with that of his native northern Italy. In so doing, Buzzati sets the stage for a concomitant critique of colonialism, the privileged child of Mussolini's fascist empire. By linking Italy's overseas colonial experience, notably its legacy of territorial aggression and racist ideology, with that of its aggressive irredentism at home on the continent, *Il Deserto dei Tartari* and *La Famosa inavisione degli orsi in Sicilia* problematize and complicate the relationship between overseas colonialism and domestic fascism, highlighting and interrogating their mutual symbiosis while at the same time using each to question the moral authority of the other.

Despite the wealth of scholarship on Dino Buzzati, few critics have explored the relationship between his writings and the turbulent times in which he lived. Many scholars have argued that there is, in fact, no possibility of a significant relationship between the two. Giocanna Ioli's 1988 volume on Buzzati summarizes this attitude well in reference to *Il Deserto dei Tartari*: "Il libro quindi non voleva parlare dei pericoli, dei timori che la situazione politica suggeriva sempre piú fitti. I suoi 'reggimenti', i suoi soldati, i presagi incombenti, percorrevano strade che non potevano essere registrate sulle mappe della Storia."⁴⁹⁰ [The book did not, therefore, want to speak of the dangers and fears the political situation made ever more dense. Its "regiments," its soldiers, its looming foreboding, travel streets that could not be inscribed on the map of history.] Scholars like Ioli have typically treated Buzzati's landscapes from a theoretical rather than a historical perspective. Felix Siddell, for example, has recently taken a theoretical approach to Buzzati's writings to explore how they construct a sense of place, rather than

⁴⁹⁰ Giovanna Ioli, *Dino Buzzati* (Milano: Mursia, 1988), 47.

examining the historical places they suggest.⁴⁹¹ Similarly, Fausto Gianfranceschi foregoes a historical reading of place in Buzzati's fiction in favor of an examination of the symbolic significance of Buzzati's landscapes.⁴⁹² David Barioni likewise limits his reading of Buzzati's geographic space to a symbolic one, arguing that *Il Deserto dei Tartari* has nothing to do with Italy's fascist climate.⁴⁹³ Other critics, while still maintaining that there exists no concrete connection between Buzzati's writings and their historical climate, argue that a vague sense of the times resonates throughout his fascist-era writings.⁴⁹⁴ "Il romanzo di Buzzati," writes Marcello Carlino, a member of this school, "traduce il clima sonnolento ed immobile che annichilisce uomini e cose, prodotto storico e culturale del fascismo italiano negli anni Trenta."⁴⁹⁵ [Buzzati's novel translates the drowsy and immobile atmosphere that annihilates men and things, a cultural and historical product of Italian fascism during the 1930s.] Carlino, like his fellow critics, denies the writings of Buzzati, however, any political valency with regard to fascism.

In recent years, some critics have begun to question the long-held assumption in Buzzati scholarship that Buzzati's writings from the fascist period lack any historical

⁴⁹¹ Felix Siddell, *Death or Deception: A Sense of Place in Buzzati and Morante* (Leicester: Troubador, 2006).

⁴⁹² Fausto Gianfranceschi, *Dino Buzzati* (Turin: Borla, 1967).

⁴⁹³ David Barioni, *Incontro con Dino Buzzati* (Firenze: Phasar, 2012).

⁴⁹⁴ See, for example, Antonia Veronese Arslan, *Invito alla lettura di Dino Buzzati* (Milano: Mursia, 1974).

⁴⁹⁵ Marcello Carlino, *Come leggere Il Deserto dei Tartari di Dino Buzzati* (Milano: Mursia, 1976), 69.

specificity or political valency. Renata Asquer, for example, has sought to locate the landscapes of *Il Deserto dei Tartari* within specific geographical locations in Italy that Buzzati was well acquainted with, and has suggested some ways in which *La Famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* reflects on German fascism.⁴⁹⁶ Patrizia Dalla Rosa also attempts to trace Buzzati's settings to actual geographical locations.⁴⁹⁷ Other critics, mostly recent, have pointed to the political valency of Buzzati's writings. Lucetta Fris, while largely abstaining from specifics, for example, identifies *La Famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* as "una sorta di parabola allegorica antimilitarista," [a sort of allegorical antimilitarist parable] while she identifies what she sees as an evasion from reality in *Il deserto dei tartari* as a reflection on an interior flight from fascism.⁴⁹⁸ Similarly, Claudio Toscani reads *Il Deserto dei Tartari* as an allegory for an intellectual caught in fascism and awaiting liberation, arguing that the novel offers a decidedly critical vision of fascist militarism but forfeiting a detailed reading of the text to further his argument.⁴⁹⁹ Leslie Raffay's work on Buzzati also acknowledges that his writings have political valency, arguing that they are filled with images of political dissent that "present a pessimistic image of heroism not in keeping with fascist ideals," namely those

⁴⁹⁶ Renata Asquer, *La grande torre: Vita e morte di Dino Buzzati* (Lecce: Manni, 2002).

⁴⁹⁷ Patrizia Dalla Rosa, *Dove Qualcosa Sfugge: Lingue e Luoghi di Buzzati* (Pisa: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2004).

⁴⁹⁸ Lucetta Fris, "Chi sono gli orsi? per 'La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia,'" *L'Attesa e l'ignoto: L'opera multiforme di Dino Buzzati*, ed. Mauro Germani (Forlì: L'arcolao, 2012).

⁴⁹⁹ Claudio Toscani, *Guida alla lettura di Buzzati* (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1987).

of the *culto degli eroi*.⁵⁰⁰ Despite pointing to the existence of such politically valent images, her work stops short of a thorough exploration of those specific images and moments in Buzzati's writings that contradict fascist ideals. Whereas these authors acknowledge but fail to thoroughly explore the political dimensions inherent in Buzzati's writings, Ellen Nerenberg's work on *Il Deserto dei Tartari* presents a detailed and thorough reading of the ways in which Buzzati's novel mounts a critique of fascism's fetishization of masculinity.⁵⁰¹ Common among all these authors, however, is a rejection of the long-held view that Buzzati's writings lack historical specificity or political valency.

Dino Buzzati's acquaintance with fascism was an intimate one. Not only did he remain in Italy for all twenty plus years of fascism and the Second World War, but he also participated in the war effort as a journalist and combatant, taking part in a 1940 battle at Cape Matapan and a subsequent battle at Sirte.⁵⁰² He also experienced fascist censorship first-hand, as many of his journalistic and political writings had to be either revised or erased in order to pacify censors. In any discussion of Buzzati as a political dissenter, however, it is important to note his professed apathy toward politics and his conservative, even, it might be argued, somewhat fascist views toward militarism. In his conversations with Yves Panafieu, for instance, Buzzati argues for the benefits that war confers upon the young and speaks fondly of the aesthetics of war, a common trope of

⁵⁰⁰ Leslie Raffay, "Dino Buzzati: His Careers and the Critical Response" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1999), 44.

⁵⁰¹ Ellen Nerenberg, "Tartar Control: Masculinity and Impegno in Buzzati's *Il Deserto dei Tartari*," *Italica* 74 (2) (1997): 217-234.

⁵⁰² Raffay, *Dino Buzzati*, 5.

fascist ideology.⁵⁰³ If Buzzati often professed a political apathy and a fondness for militarism, however, it would be a mistake to limit a reading of his literary writings to such parameters. Buzzati's fiction, and, some argue, his journalism, betray a very contradictory attitude toward fascism and politics than some of his public statements might otherwise suggest.

Buzzati's long career as a journalist has furnished much material to help better assess his attitudes toward fascism. In a recent work by Franco Zangrilli, part of the latest movement to better historicize Buzzati's writings, Zangrilli sees in Buzzati's journalism from the 1930s and 1940s a veiled critique of fascism. While Buzzati adopts fascist rhetoric, argues Zangrilli, he does so only in an effort to undermine it: "Gli elogi che se ne fanno nei servizi giornalistici condizionano Buzzati ad adoperare il linguaggio della retorica fascista, infarcita anche di lessico burocratico. Ma Buzzati a volte utilizza una prosa che esalta solo in apparenza, che quanto più lo espone a una critica sottile, che si intride di sarcasmo."⁵⁰⁴ [The praise often practiced in services of journalism conditioned Buzzati to adopt the language of fascist rhetoric, stuffed full of bureaucratic language. But Buzzati sometimes made use of a prose that glorified only in appearance, and which much rather exhibited a subtle criticism, which was marked by sarcasm.] Similarly, Buzzati's descriptions of Mussolini mythologize and idolize him in such a way as to subtly undermine him through parody and ridicule, argues Zangrilli.⁵⁰⁵ Buzzati uses a

⁵⁰³ Yves Panafieu, *Dino Buzzati: Un Autoritratto: Dialoghi con Yves Panfieu, Luglio-Settembre 1971* (Verona: A. Mondadori, 1973), 118-119.

⁵⁰⁴ Franco Zangrilli, *La penna diabolica: Buzzati scrittore-giornalista* (Pesaro: Metauro, 2004), 40.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

similar irony in order to undermine the fascist glorification of war, he argues, one that “può essere colta solo dall’occhio del lettore accorto, e che riesce scaltramente a scavalcare gli ostacoli della censura.”⁵⁰⁶ [could be noticed by an astute reader, and which shrewdly succeeds in evading the obstacles of censorship.] The result, suggests Zangrilli, is that “non manca ad ogni giro di pagina l’implicazione che la guerra è un teatro di sciagure, di tristezze, di dolori, che semina ovunque la ‘morte’.”⁵⁰⁷ [there does not lack, with every turn of the page, the implication that the war is a theater of tragedy, sadness and pain, which sows death everywhere.] The polysemantic nature of Buzzati’s journalism attests both to the realities of censorship he faced in Italy as well as to Buzzati’s less than orthodox loyalty to fascism.

After the fall of fascism, Buzzati often criticized the movement in public. Immediately after the regime collapsed Buzzati openly condemned the regime, faulting the fascists with vast destruction and massacre.⁵⁰⁸ He later declared that the National Socialists and Italian fascists were “disonorati” [dishonored] by virtue of their anti-Semitism.⁵⁰⁹ While this sort of explicit political commentary from Buzzati was rare, his interviews with Yves Panafieu suggest a place for it in his literary work. When Panafieu asks Buzzati if he has ever participated in any sort of collective political action, he responds resolutely in the negative. *Mai?* [Never?] asks Panafieu again. “No. Mai,”

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 77.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁵⁰⁸ Vittorio Caratozzolo, *La Finestra sul deserto: A Oriente di Buzzati* (Acireale: Bonanno, 2006), 19.

⁵⁰⁹ Panafieu, *Dino Buzzati*, 103.

responds Buzzati, “E questo, lo riconosco, è una mia mancanza. La mia teoria (non solo teoria, anche sensazione) è che se ciascuno nel suo piccolo fa il suo mestiere onestamente, la società funziona in modo perfetto. Sono anche d’accordo che in certe circostanze sia giusto – anzi, necessario, che ci siano delle forze esterne, e cioè politiche, che intervengano. Ma forse per pigrizia, forse perché io sono di natura aliena da questi problemi, non mi è mai capitato di intervenire in forma attiva.”⁵¹⁰ [No. Never. And this, I recognize, is a shortcoming of mine. My theory (not only a theory, but a feeling) is that if each person does his own little job honestly, then society will function perfectly. I also agree that in certain circumstances it is just – necessary, rather, that there are external forces, and those political ones, that intervene. But perhaps for laziness, perhaps because I am by nature alien to such problems, it never occurred to me to intervene in an active manner.] At first glance, Buzzati’s statement appears to deny him any sort of a political voice, “di natura aliena da questi problemi” as he is. Buzzati’s argument that “se ciascuno nel suo piccolo fa il suo mestiere onestamente, la società funziona in modo perfetto,” however, suggests a reverse-Kantian path toward societal well-being in which one’s private labors provide a privileged means toward greater social progress and order. It is precisely Buzzati’s “mestiere” then, his literary and journalistic writing, that provides a key to society’s political and social well-being. Buzzati’s closing remark, that he never thought to “intervenire in forma *attiva* (italics mine),” subtly suggests another, more passive role of political participation and resistance. It is this type of political engagement, subtle, veiled, and passive in the sense that it materializes through Buzzati’s “mestiere” rather than through direct political action, that emerges throughout *Il Deserto*

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 99.

dei Tartari and *La Famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia*.

That Buzzati would have veiled his critique of fascism within carefully polysemantic works of literature is no surprise given the climate of censorship and repression writers faced under Mussolini. “Although Mussolini may have placed fewer overt controls on artistic content than did other dictators,” explains Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “a web of tacit regulations kept intellectuals in check and encouraged them to practice self-censorship. Even as the Duce declared his respect for creative freedom, he tapped intellectuals’ telephones, intercepted their mail, and spied on them through a web of specialized police informers culled from the universities, the cinema, the theater, and journalism.”⁵¹¹ Buzzati himself was no stranger to fascist censorship, as many of his journalistic and literary writings had to undergo revision or deletion. The years during which he wrote *Il Deserto dei Tartari* and *La Famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* saw the worst of fascist censorship, whose standards were heightened successively in 1936 and then 1940.⁵¹² Consequently, just as readily as Buzzati’s works lend themselves to a critique of fascism, they also repeatedly complicate and obscure the grounds upon which they make such a critique. Political allusions seem to shift rapidly in his novels, making it difficult to definitively isolate or decipher any sort of large-scale allegorical significance. Given the persistent threat of censorship and the stiff penalties for those who transgressed the fascist regime under Mussolini, it is no surprise that Buzzati’s novels would resist any sort of simple allegorization. In place of allegory, one finds a complicated and shifting

⁵¹¹ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 9-10.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 131, 174-175.

web of political allusions that collectively challenge the militaristic, repressive and racially discriminatory tenets of fascism.

When *Il Deserto dei Tartari* first appeared, it was immediately considered to be in dialogue with its times. Buzzati's initial 1939 manuscript bore the name *La Fortezza*, which his editors believed was too evocative of the oncoming war that Italians were actively trying to ignore.⁵¹³ It was at his editors' urging that Buzzati ultimately changed the name to *Il deserto dei Tartari*. That Buzzati's editors feared the novel might remind people too much of the times at hand is not surprising given the work's many allusions to fascist Italy. While the setting of *Il deserto dei Tartari* is undeniably fantastical, it is in many ways concrete: Maria suggests a European geographic context when she declares that she is taking a trip to Holland, and the novel's famed fort, where nearly all its action takes place, is located only 30 kilometers from San Rocco, as Captain Ortiz tells Drogo, suggesting a specific location near San Rocco al Porto in northeastern Italy.⁵¹⁴ This northeastern Italian setting is further suggested by the novel's Alpine landscape and by the figure of Captain Fonzaso, whose name is shared with that of a northeastern Italian town. Renata Asquer has noted that the mountain Drogo passes upon leaving his native city at the beginning of the novel resembles Mount Civetta, a mountain also found in northeastern Italy.⁵¹⁵ The fact that Drogo and his peers are stationed at the empire's mountainous northern frontier also aligns the setting with the northern Italian border, just as their territorial aggressivity evokes northern Italian irredentism and fascist territorial

⁵¹³ Asquer, *La grande torre*, 92.

⁵¹⁴ Dino Buzzati, *Il deserto dei Tartari* (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1945), 13.

⁵¹⁵ Asquer, *La grande torre*, 89.

claims in the region.⁵¹⁶

While the broader geographic and cultural world of *Il deserto dei Tartari* suggests fascist Italy, so too do passing allusions within the novel. Buzzati's emphasis on the fort's "ancientness" evokes Mussolini's call for a return to the grandeurs of ancient Roman society, as do the figure of the Roman-named Colonel Magnus, the teacher at Drogo's military academy, and the Latin inscription found within the fort.⁵¹⁷ Similarly, the fort's yellow flag, yellow being a pervasive color throughout the entire novel, evokes the yellow fasces that Italian fascism took as its symbol. When the fort's troops at one point appear as a black pattern against its yellow yard, the black and yellow of Italy's fascist flag finds its echo.⁵¹⁸ Less explicit connections to Italian fascism include two of the fort's soldiers, Monti and Consulvi, whose names suggest support for fascist ideals of empire and the leader cult: Vincenzo Monti was a 19th-century Italian poet who opposed the French Revolution while supporting Napoleon and the Austrian Empire, and Ercole Consalvi was a 19th-century cardinal prominent for supporting the divine right of kings. Similarly, the emperor in the novel, Pietro III, evokes that other Peter III, the Russian Czar noted for his excessively authoritarian rule.⁵¹⁹ Just as Mussolini closely aligned Italy with the Germans, Peter III, who was originally born as Karl Peter Ulrich in German

⁵¹⁶ Ellen Nerenberg suggests the borderlands north of Friuli long, long coveted by irrendtists as she notes, as a site of the empire's northern border. See Nerenberg, "Tartar Control," 225.

⁵¹⁷ Buzzati, *Il deserto dei Tartari*, 6, 26.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵¹⁹ Carol S. Leonard, *Reform and Regicide: The Reign of Peter III of Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 1.

Kiel, made an alliance with German Prussia, promoting pro-Prussian Russian policies and going so far as to dress his personal regiments in the Prussian style.⁵²⁰ Like Mussolini, Peter III attempted to actively mobilize his domestic economy and expand the powers of the state.⁵²¹ Peter III, who often fraternized with military officers, recalls Mussolini as well through his noted militaristic persona.⁵²² Given the extensive similarities between Peter III and Mussolini, the fact that Peter III's compatriots saw him as yielding too strongly to German domination, eventually going so far as to overthrow him, suggests a similar wishful vision for Mussolini himself.⁵²³ Lastly, the perpetual threat of an imminent war in *Il deserto dei Tartari* evokes the nervous state of Italian society when the book was completed in 1939, knowingly awaiting the beginning of hostilities on the continent.⁵²⁴

Drogo's growing dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the fort and its militaristic culture provides the grounds upon which *Il deserto dei Tartari* mounts its critique of fascism. The novel's central plot, in which Drogo lives out an uneventful life at the solitary fort in the hopes of one day achieving some sort of heroic greatness, a life motivated by the fascist *culto degli eroi*, as Leslie Raffay has pointed out, only to ultimately be disillusioned by the dishonesty and brutality of the military establishment whose promises of greatness are ultimately exposed as vapid, sounds a strident critique of

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 5, 2.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 1.

⁵²² Ibid., 7.

⁵²³ Ibid., 10, 1.

⁵²⁴ Leslie Raffay notes that after the Munich Agreements of 1939, war seemed both inevitable and imminent to Italians. See Raffay, *Dino Buzzati*, 44.

Mussolini's militaristic culture as well as the frequent dishonesty and brutality of his regime. In aligning Drogo's experience of the fort with that of fascist Italy, then, Buzzati provides the grounds for an extensive critique of fascist culture.

Drogo's disillusionment with the military establishment reaches its zenith at the end of *Il deserto dei Tartari* when he is ungratefully forced to leave the fort just as a battle is about to begin, after so many years of patiently waiting there for something to happen. When Drogo protests he is warned of possible disciplinary action by his superior, whose true dishonesty is revealed when he threatens to write a false report implicating Drogo with the death of a sentry whom Drogo did not kill. If the commander's dishonesty and threats of unjust punishment protest the frequent dishonesty and injustice of Mussolini's regime, so too does the military's obsessive emphasis on discipline throughout the novel. This discipline is perhaps nowhere greater than in the scene where the soldier Lazzari, having left the fort briefly, forgets the password for re-entry. Despite the fact that his peers recognize Lazzari at the gates, they not only deny him entrance to the fort for his laxity but shoot him to death, an event later celebrated by command. In thus suggesting the dangers of an obsessive emphasis on discipline, *Il deserto dei Tartari* sounds a critique not only of the Italian military but of Italian fascist culture in general, which placed a large emphasis on a disciplined citizenry.⁵²⁵

The shooting of Lazzari underscores not only the degree of dysfunction and danger inherent in the fascist emphasis on discipline, but also the extreme brutality and constraint upon individual liberty within Mussolini's Italy. Just as Lazzari is shot shortly after illegally leaving the confines of the fort, Mussolini allowed his fascist troops to fire

⁵²⁵ Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 123.

upon any persons attempting to leave the country illegally. While Lazzari's death might be the most extreme example of an assault on individual liberty in the novel, characters in *Il deserto dei Tartari* repeatedly find their freedom impinged upon. Drogo is sent to the fort without having asked to be assigned there, but promised that he could transfer assignments should he one day choose to do so. Only toward the end of Drogo's life does he learn that promise was a lie, realizing that he, like the tailor Prosdocimo and the other soldiers in the fort, were never allowed to leave despite frequently wanting to do so. Drogo's forced and prolonged displacement far from the center of society where he longed to be, as he declares early on in the novel, also suggests the practice of forced exile carried out by Italian fascists. Similarly, one of Drogo's earliest impressions of the fort, "pensò a una prigionie," evokes the realities of imprisonment for political and other ideologically driven ends in fascist Italy.⁵²⁶ Although it foregoes an explicit critique of Mussolini's state, *Il deserto dei Tartari* uses its subtle allusions to the fascist regime and its condemning portrait of military culture at "the fort" in order to subvert fascist ideologies of excessive militarism, discipline and constraints on personal freedom.

Buzzati's novel defies fascist ideological constraints on individual liberty not only through narrative content but through syntax, by electing to use the prohibited "Lei" in place of the fascist-sanctioned "voi." Buzzati initially wrote the novel using the "Lei" in defiance of fascist prohibition on the term, and only later, at the urging of his editors who anticipated the censors' response, was he convinced to change the "Lei" to "voi."⁵²⁷ Buzzati nevertheless let one of the "Lei"s stand in the original 1940 edition, suggesting a

⁵²⁶ Buzzati, *Il deserto dei Tartari*, 15.

⁵²⁷ Caratozzolo, *La finestra sul deserto*, 13.

subtle but pointed defiance of fascist policy.⁵²⁸ Once fascist leadership had fallen, Buzzati unsurprisingly changed all the “voi”s in the novel back to “Lei”s.⁵²⁹ Given the larger critique of fascism that *Il deserto dei Tartari* delivers, Buzzati’s use of the “Lei” should not be read innocently.

If readers in wartime Italy saw *Il deserto dei Tartari* as a reflection on its historical moment, they greeted his 1945 *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* with similar eyes. Written during the Nazi occupation of Italy and published in early 1945, the novel caused immediate anxiety among fascist censors. Some of Buzzati’s illustrations of the main city in the story, the city of “uomini cattivi,” [bad men] were seen as too evocative of the German city of Nürnberg.⁵³⁰ Similarly, his depiction of the bears’ triumphant entrance into the conquered city appeared too similar to the Russian entrance into Berlin for the fascist censors, who forced him to re-illustrate the city to be more colorful and less resembling of Nürnberg, Berlin or any other German cities.⁵³¹ When the censored version of the novel finally reached the general public, Italians still saw many allusions to its fascist present: the tyrannical Granduca was read as a figurehead for the occupying Germans and the frequent searches, misery and famine they brought to Italy, while the Granduca’s use of boars as bombs evoked for them the new weaponry of modern warfare

⁵²⁸ Giuseppe Fanelli, “Le Tre Edizioni del Deserto dei Tartari di Dino Buzzati,” *Il Lettore di Provincia* 19 (71) (1988), 23.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵³⁰ Asquer, *La grande torre*, 127.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

that Italians were increasingly confronted with.⁵³²

Readers' responses to *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* were not surprising given the many connections and allusions that the novel, even after having been censored, made to fascist Italy in 1945. As its title suggests, the novel takes place in Sicily, albeit a slightly fantastical version thereof, placing its diegesis within a frame of Italian reference. The title and action of the novel harken back to two seminal events in modern Italian history: the 1943 Allied invasion of Sicily and Garibaldi's famed conquest of Sicily during the *Risorgimento*. At the same time, however, the novel resists any attempt at simple allegorization, continually shifting and confusing allusions. If, as fascist censors at the time believed, the novel identifies the conquered city and its wicked leader as fascists, the work just as readily suggests that it is the conquering bears, who ultimately commit great wrong, who are markers of contemporary fascism. By resisting any sort of simplistic and absolute allegorization, Buzzati's novel survived censorship and spared him charges of disloyalty to the regime, charges that might have placed him in a dangerously precarious position.

It is understandable that fascist censors would have so quickly identified the city and its human occupants in *La famosa invasione degli orsi* as representative figures for fascism. Just as the novel's original illustrations identified the city as a dark and gloomy site of German fascism, overrun by Allied liberators, the lavish attention its humans devote to their leader the Granduca, that "tiranno della Sicilia" [tyrant of Sicily] as Buzzati describes him, recalls the fascist cult of the leader as well as tyrannical power

⁵³² Lorenzo Viganò, *Album Buzzati* (Milano: Oscar Mondadori, 2006), 198.

welded by Mussolini and Hitler.⁵³³ The Granduca's malicious kidnapping of the bear king Leonzio's son, Tonio, whom the Granduca will ultimately try to murder, furthers this malicious portrait of fascist leadership.

When the city is first invaded by the bears, the novel presents its readers with a metanarrative about the relationship between art and history, reflecting on its own historical engagement. As war rages outside, the Granduca watches a show from within the city's lavish theater featuring Tonio as a principal performer. While the Granduca's soldiers tell him that all is well and his people are safe from harm, it is not long before Leonzio and his troops burst into the theater to disrupt the performance, rescue Tonio and kill the Granduca. Written around the time that the Scala was bombed in Buzzati's beloved Milan, the scene is freshly charged with the experience of the ongoing war. History, the novel seems to suggest, despite our best efforts, finds its way into the comfort of the artistic space with great force. Buzzati's metanarrative reflects on *La famosa invasione degli orsi*'s own narrative stakes, those of a children's novel that takes place in a quasi-fantastical world whose diegetic integrity is rudely interrupted by the exigencies of modern Italian history.

Just as readily as the bears' conquest of Sicily may be read as an allegory for the Allies' own, wherein Leonzio's disposal of the Granduca wishfully stands in for the disposition of Mussolini himself, so too does the novel align the bears with images of fascism, thereby complicating what might be an otherwise readily identifiable allegory. The name of the bears' leader, Leonzio, is itself a nod to the fascist vision of a revived Roman Empire, as the name was used by numerous political figures of ancient Rome.

⁵³³ Dino Buzzati, *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1945), 3.

The fact that the bears are ill equipped militarily also connects them to the Italian fascists, whose military was notoriously outdated and unprepared for a war effort. If the bears are evocative of Italian fascism, however, they are equally evocative of German fascism: their descent upon the city from the northern mountains suggests the movement of German troops into Italy from the northern Alps, while Buzzati's note that one of their war horses recalls that of the "Baron Münchhausen" again aligns them with the Germans.⁵³⁴

Buzzati's illustrations in *La famosa invasione degli orsi*, too often overlooked by critics, furnish further clues as to the work's subversive evocation of fascism. The three-striped red, white and black of the bears' flag evokes the early state flag of Germany under the National Socialists, taken from the flag of the German Empire. The massive rallies and marches the bears undertake in these illustrations further evoke fascism's cult of militarism and the masses, especially as they are seen goose-stepping against the backdrop of a city that resembles the medieval architecture of Nürnberg, the site of many of the National Socialists' annual rallies. Similarly, the Tyrolean hats worn by some of the bears in Buzzati's illustrations further connect the bears to Germany. The image of Leonzio addressing the city's denizens from far atop a balcony also recalls the familiar images of Hitler and Mussolini addressing the masses below from balconies and privileged vantage points.

Not only do Buzzati's illustrations of the bears align them with fascist imagery, but the bears' behavior upon entering the human city does so as well. As the bears turn to gluttony, waste and general deviousness upon conquering the city, the bear Salnitro leads

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 38.

a group of other bears to steal money from the city treasury while framing the incident upon the humans. Buzzati's illustrations, in which Salnitro's bears penetrate the treasury, a monumental classical edifice, late at night with giant columns of fire to light the way, suggests the night-time Reichstag fire that the fascists used to frame their political rivals and consolidate power. A later illustration, in which Salnitro's followers tie a bear down to a table while beating him with some sort of rod-like device, a vessel spewing fire above him in the secluded attic room where the action takes place, suggests the visual imagery of torture, again evoking the misdeeds of fascist regimes in Italy and Germany. After the theft of the treasury has been carried out, Leonzio, addressing the masses below from his balcony much like Mussolini, threatens heavy penalties upon the innocent humans for the recent robbery. In placing blame on the humans, Leonzio affirms his professed belief that such a crime could never have been committed by the bears because of their inherent racial superiority to man.⁵³⁵ Leonzio's racial ideology further aligns him with the fascists, who passed anti-Jewish laws in Italy as early as 1938 without any German interference.⁵³⁶ That the human Granduca has a prominent "gran naso a becco" [great hooked nose] additionally allies the object of Leonzio's racial intolerance with one of the most caricatured images of the Jews.⁵³⁷ *La famosa invasione degli orsi* reveals this sort of racial thinking to be profoundly problematic, as it becomes the cause of Leonzio's failure to find the true culprits of the treasury robbery and thus nearly results in the success of the mischievous Salnitro's plot to ultimately gain power and overtake Leonzio.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 55.

⁵³⁶ Joshua Zimmerman, *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922-1945* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2005), 3.

⁵³⁷ Dino Buzzati, *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia*, 3.

If Leonzio's racial thinking aligns him with fascism, so too does his megalomania. Upon assuming leadership Leonzio becomes increasingly obsessed with his own power and image, thereby evoking the megalomania of Mussolini and the fascist cult of the leader. Such behavior is portrayed as deeply flawed by Buzzati when Leonzio, overwhelmed with flattery when a monument to him is proposed, neglects his official duties by forgetting entirely about the crime against the treasury he is charged with uncovering and prosecuting. When the monument is finally erected, albeit incompletely, its unfinished head serves as a powerful image of the novel's polysemantism. Unidentifiable as Leonzio, the headless figure reinforces both the universality of Leonzio's megalomaniac position and the political valency of the figure as a symbol of the one suggested but yet unseen, gesturing toward the fascist leadership of Hitler or Mussolini that Leonzio's actions suggest. Just as the killing of the Graduca suggested a wishful disposition of that other Italian "tiranno," Mussolini, the end of *La famosa invasione degli orsi*, in which the conquering bears depart the city, suggests a similarly wishful and political charged gesture toward the fall of fascist leadership in Italy.

Closely intertwined with the critique of fascism made by *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* and by *Il deserto dei Tartari* is a critique of Italian fascism's privileged child, colonialism. While both novels suggest an explicitly Italian landscape, that landscape is complicated by the geography of Italy's African colonies in Libya and Ethiopia. Buzzati's combination of mountainous northern Italian terrain with desert imagery in *Il deserto dei Tartari* and *La famosa invasione degli orsi* fuses these two prominent spaces of Italian empire, the Alpine borderlands and the colonial African desert, into one. Buzzati had put these landscapes to words earlier in his 1933 journalistic

writings about the Syrian and Libyan deserts⁵³⁸ and the mountains of Ethiopia.⁵³⁹ Multiple critics have pointed to the striking similarities between these journalistic descriptions of the Italian colonies and the landscapes of *Il deserto dei Tartari*, including Vittorio Caratozzolo and Franco Zingrilli. Both argue that Buzzati's colonial articles employ the same descriptive language, that of the mirages and distant mountains he found in the African desert, that he uses to set the scene of *Il deserto*.⁵⁴⁰ Not only do Buzzati's literary landscapes fuse an Italian continental setting with a distinctively overseas colonial one, a colonial scene that he described in strikingly similar language in his journalism, but he himself frequently compared the two distinctive landscapes in his journalism.⁵⁴¹ By mythically fusing these two spaces, Buzzati's novels extend their subversive critique of continental fascism to its overseas brethren, colonialism. The critical portrayal of territorial aggression, militaristic culture and racial intolerance of both the bears in *La famosa invasione* and the loyal subjects of Peter III in *Il deserto*, once set against the colonial African landscape, suggests not only the dangers and moral bankruptcy of fascism but those of the colonial enterprise as well.

That Buzzati's novels should confront colonialism is no surprise given the time Buzzati himself spent in the colonies. Buzzati first traveled to the colonies in 1933 on

⁵³⁸ Bruna Lamalle-Ferrucci, "Le journaliste Buzzati et le désert," *Buzzati Giornalista: Atti del Congresso Internazionale*, ed. Nella Giannetto (Milano: Mondadori, 2000), 517.

⁵³⁹ Marie Hélène Caspar, "Buzzati in Ethiopia – Un cronista scrittore?" *Buzzati Giornalista: Atti del Congresso Internazionale*, ed. Nella Giannetto (Milano: Mondadori, 2000), 87.

⁵⁴⁰ See Caratozzolo, *La finestra sul deserto*, 17, and Zingrilli, *La penna diabolica*, 34.

⁵⁴¹ Zingrilli, *La penna diabolica*, 39.

journalistic assignment, spending time in the Libyan desert that would make a great impression on him and of which he would write a series of articles.⁵⁴² He was later sent to Ethiopia to cover Italy's colonial war effort there, witnessing the brutality of the Italian campaign against the natives.⁵⁴³ Later describing his work there under the fascist regime, Buzzati would protest the many downsides he saw to Italian colonialism as well his inability to voice those criticisms because of fascist censorship. "Il lavoro giornalistico era difficilissimo," he detailed, "difficilissimo perché tutti i problemi interessanti – e Dio sa se ce n'erano – erano tabù e bisognava girarci intorno con estrema precauzione: in ogni problema c'era infatti un elemento positivo e uno negativo; del positivo si poteva parlare, del negativo no; le più scottanti e fondamentali questioni, come il banditismo, come i rapporti tra i bianchi e i neri, non si potevano toccare che per dirne bene; e quindi era meglio abbandonarli. Cossicché a un certo punto io mi occupai soprattutto delle cose più innocenti...come la boscaglia, le bestie, certi tipi di uomini solitari che l'Africa produce...e involontariamente facevo così un servizio al mio giornale evitandogli *a priori* delle grane."⁵⁴⁴ [Journalistic work was difficult, difficult because all the interesting problems – and God knows that there were many – were taboo and one had to approach them with extreme caution: in every problem there was in fact a positive and a negative element; one could speak of the positive, but not of the negative; the most burning and fundamental questions, like banditry, or like the relations between whites and blacks, one could not touch except to speak well of them; and therefore it was better to abandon the

⁵⁴² Asquer, *La grande torre*, 93.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵⁴⁴ Zangrilli, 37.

whole subject. In this way, at a certain point I occupied myself mainly with the most innocent of things...like the woods, the animals, certain types of solitary men that Africa produces...and I involuntarily did my journalism a service while evading *a priori* stirring up trouble.] Buzzati's comments about the state of journalism in the colonies could apply equally well to his novels, where he foregoes any explicit criticism of those "elementi negativi" he saw in colonialism and fascism, instead writing of the "uomini solitari" of *Il deserto* and "le bestie" of *La famosa invasione* that he first discovered in Africa.

Despite Buzzati's perennial contention that his writings lack any political valency and remain perpetually "innocenti," his journalistic writings on Africa, argue critics, betray the same subversive tendencies that his literary writings do. His overly flattering portrait of Italy's Ethiopian colony and its heroic builders, for instance, betrays a subtle irony that undermines its purported bombast, argues Zangrilli.⁵⁴⁵ Buzzati's journalistic praise of the Il Duca d'Aosta, a new Italian ruler in Ethiopia who was noted for being significantly more humane than his predecessor, also suggests his disdain for the often repressive nature of the Italian administration.⁵⁴⁶ Even the fascist censors were wary of Buzzati's articles about the colonies, going so far as to ban a story they felt portrayed the colonial natives in too sentimental and flattering a light. Buzzati, in response, simply complained to his editor over the decision.⁵⁴⁷ Buzzati's colonial writings did more than undermine the fascist agenda ironically or show a hint of favor to the colonial natives, however: Buzzati violated the fascist Racial Manifesto of 1938 by choosing to write

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁴⁶ Asquer, 99.

⁵⁴⁷ Caspar, "Buzzati in Etiopia," 80-81.

extensively and in detail about the natives.⁵⁴⁸ In these illegal portraits of Africans he often lavished praise upon them. In one article, for instance, he celebrated native music, comparing it very favorably to European music.⁵⁴⁹ Given the restrictive and ideologically charged fascist climate of the time, Buzzati's colonial writings voiced a decidedly contrarian worldview.

In violating both fascist legal and racial codes that sought to reinforce the supposed superiority of Italians over their colonial subjects, Buzzati challenges the same racially-driven ideology in his journalism that he exposes as ethically bankrupt in *La famosa invasione degli orsi*. By fusing the two landscapes of continental Italian fascism and overseas colonialism, the novel's critique of racially-motivated discrimination sounds the alarm against both the continental anti-Semitism he deplored and the colonial prejudice and persecution of natives against which his journalism stood at odds. It also suggests the dangerous affinities between these two spaces, underscoring the ease with which their underlying ideologies of racial prejudice and territorial aggression can seamlessly transition between the overseas Italian empire and its center in continental Europe. Such was the case, for example, when Italian Jews took anti-fascist and anti-colonial positions during Mussolini's brutal colonial war in Ethiopia. As a result, Mussolini declared that Jews were part of an international anti-fascist campaign, further solidifying anti-Semitism

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 84.

⁵⁴⁹ Marie-Hélène Caspar, "Le journaliste Buzzati en Afrique: Visions de l'Altérité exotique," *Dino Buzzati: d'hier et d'aujourd'hui: à la mémoire de Nella Giannetto*, ed. Angelo Colombo (Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2008), 192-193, 200-201.

in Italy.⁵⁵⁰ It is precisely this sort of dangerous and mobile affinity between racial ideology at home and abroad that Buzzati's texts interrogate.

If Buzzati's mythical fusion of colonial and domestic landscapes in *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* suggests a dual-critique of territorial aggression, militarism and racial ideology as products of both the fascist and colonial world, suggesting an underlying continuity between the two spaces, *Il deserto dei Tartari* extends this critique. Buzzati's portrait of territorial aggression in Italy's northern region, coupled with the desert imagery of the colonial sphere, suggests an underlying continuity between the two spaces. If the bands of primitive men who occupy the desert landscape before the fort suggest the natives of the African colonies, the territorial conflict between this "regno del nord" and the empire of Peter III also suggests Italy's domestic irredentism and military deployment along its own northern border, one remarkably similar to their colonial conflict.

For a long time before the outbreak of the Second World War, irredentists in Italy had been pushing for the Italian annexation or conquest of various neighboring territories, especially many of those to Italy's north. Mussolini and the fascists readily took up the goals of these irredentists, claiming for Italy such diverse territories as Nice, Savoy and Dalmatia, which would be largely annexed to Italy in 1941. From 1937 to 1939, around the time Buzzati was writing *Il deserto dei Tartari*, fascist and irredentist demands for Nice and Savoy were repeatedly mentioned publicly in the context of Italian discussions

⁵⁵⁰ Zimmerman, *Jews in Italy*, 6.

with the British and French governments.⁵⁵¹ In April of 1939, the year before *Il deserto* was published, Italy annexed Albania, a long-sought target of irredentists.⁵⁵² Buzzati's novel evokes the active irredentism of this period through the aggressive territorialism of Peter III's empire. This is most evident when Colonel Filmore commands Drogo's unit to re-chart the empire's northern boundary, telling them to push the imperial border as far north as they are able to.

Drogo's regiment often complains about, and Buzzati's narrative often draws attention to, the outdated military equipment with which they are supplied and the fact that they are generally ill equipped for any sort of military engagement.⁵⁵³ These complaints echo the seriously ill-equipped and outdated state of the Italian army's forces when Buzzati wrote the novel, knowingly having served in the Italian military himself. Such complaints not only reinforce the novel's critique of fascist leadership and ground the work in its historical moment, but further the connections it establishes between the location of the fort and irredentist northern Italy. The northeastern regions of Friuli, Udine and Venezia Giulia were seriously neglected by the fascist government, which failed to supply necessary economic aid to the region.⁵⁵⁴ Just as regiment and region at the lonely northern fort are largely neglected by the empire, so too, writes Apih, were "the north-eastern region and Trieste...seen merely as border regions more important for

⁵⁵¹ Aristotle A. Kallis, *Fascist Ideology: Territory and Expansion in Italy and Germany, 1922-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 118.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 133.

⁵⁵³ Buzzati, *Il deserto dei Tartari*, 94, 97, 163.

⁵⁵⁴ E. Apih, "Fascism in North-Eastern Italy," *Altro Polo: A Volume of Italian Studies* (Sydney: University of Sydney, 1979), 107.

their strategic significance than for their value as part of the system of worthwhile international collaboration...the Italian government was not in a position to offer effective aid for the economy of the region.”⁵⁵⁵ As a result, the region saw a high degree of unemployment and general inactivity⁵⁵⁶, of which the near total lack of activity at the fort in *Il Deserto dei Tartari* suggests.

If the serious state of disrepair in which the Italian army stood shortly before the second world war links the imperial regiments of *Il deserto dei Tartari* to those of the fascists, so too does the ambivalence with which these regiments perceived a threat along their northern border. Until the novel’s very end, Drogo’s peers oscillate between fear of an oncoming attack from the “regno del nord” [northern kingdom] and reassurance that such an attack will never come. This sort of ambivalence mirrors that of the fascists themselves, who, while generally neglecting much of their northern border, often voiced concerns over the possibility of an attack there. This ambivalence was largely directed toward the threat of an attack from the French. Just as the “regno del nord” undertakes the construction of a military road along the northern frontier in *Il deserto dei Tartari*, so too had French engineers begun constructing a network of military fortifications along Italy’s Alpine border beginning as early as 1928.⁵⁵⁷ Despite France’s efforts, however, many in the Italian military viewed the threat of a French attack as negligible, just as many of the officers in *Il deserto dei Tartari* underestimate the threat posed by the “regno

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ Emanuele Sica, “June 1940: The Italian Army and the Battle of the Alps,” *Canadian Journal of History* 47 (2) (2012), 367.

del nord”’s encroaching military. Many in the Italian command underestimated the French army, believing that the French *Armée des Alpes* was on the verge of collapse.⁵⁵⁸ The result was a drastic reduction in the number of troops along the northern Italian border. “The Italian High Command had disbanded entire regiments and cut back the strength of several divisions...[and] extended leaves were granted,” describes Emanuele Sica.⁵⁵⁹ Such is the case in *Il deserto dei Tartari*, where fort forces are gradually reduced as a result of the empire’s growing skepticism over the threat of an attack. This growing skepticism of an attack along the northern border also echoes the larger suspicion among Italian troops that Mussolini would never bring the nation to war: “Morale among Italian troops was already low before the start of the conflict. The rank-and-file had been puzzled by the period of “non-belligerence,” not understanding why, after years of flamboyant speeches about the new Italian warrior race, the Duce in 1939 had decided to sideline Italy. Soldiers had the impression that Italy would never enter the conflict. Discipline was lax as a ‘peace mentality’ spread among the ranks of the *Regio Esercito*.”⁵⁶⁰ Buzzati’s portrait of an imperial northern frontier, then, echoes not only the state of military affairs among Italy’s own irredentist northern border, but the general sense of malaise in the Italian military at the prospect of a long-anticipated military engagement never arriving.

While much of the Italian military underestimated the threat of a possible French attack along the northern border, others were deeply concerned, however, over the

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 376.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 375.

possibility of such an event. “The Italian General Staff,” writes Sica, “was deeply worried about the danger of a French attack across the Alps. As early as January 1938, the P.R. 12...assumed the formations on the Italian western border would take a defensive stance. This prudence stemmed from the realization that the French army, at least until May 1940, could boast many more troops in the Alpine region than the Italian army, while the Alpine terrain favored attacks from French territory.”⁵⁶¹ One year before Italy had created an Alpine core, similar to the French *Armée des Alpes*, in order to man Italy’s defensive network of forts in the Italian Alps.⁵⁶² This sort of mobilization is reflected in *Il deserto*, where at the novel’s end the military believes an attack imminent and sends increasing numbers of troops to the frontier. In its overall ambivalence toward the possibility of a threat from the north, however, the military of *Il deserto dei Tartari* strongly evokes that of Buzzati’s modern-day Italy, laying the grounds for a critique of irredentist bellicosity and territorial avarice that the fascists supported often forcefully and always ideologically.

Just as the territorial aggression behind Italy’s growing colonial ambitions found echo in the irredentism that *Il deserto dei Tartari* alludes to, so too did the racial discourse employed in the colonies find echo along Italy’s northern border. Italians feared not only a possible French attack, but a more insidious infiltration by supposedly inferior Slavic elements. In response, describes Maura Hametz, “The [Italian] secret police adopted brutal tactics to deal with suspected disloyalty in the borderland. Violent repression in Venezia Giulia responded to fears of ‘foreign’ infiltration and suspicions

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 367-368.

⁵⁶² Ibid., 367.

that ‘Slavs’ took part in trans-border terrorism and were engaged in networks aided and abetted by Yugoslavia. [This] formed part of the government’s combative ‘border fascism.’”⁵⁶³ This battle against Slavic “infiltration” was framed with the very language of racial difference that the Italians were concomitantly using in their overseas colonial empire. Like in the colonies, Serbian, Slovenian and Croatian speaking populations in the annexed northeastern territories were “easily placed into the lower echelons of contemporary racist taxonomies,” writes Roberta Pergher.⁵⁶⁴ Irredentist claims, much like colonial ones, were often justified by such racial taxonomies. Italians, argued irredentists, had a right to govern Italy’s borderlands because the inhabitants of these spaces were inferior peoples in need of Italian civilization, modernization and enlightenment.⁵⁶⁵

In South Tyrol, a heavily Germanic region in northeastern Italy, fascist racial taxonomies expressed themselves through attempts to “Italianize” the native population, a move that also reflected colonial attempts to homogenize native populations through forceful state control.⁵⁶⁶ As mentioned in chapter one, fascists attempted to bring Tyroleans into linguistic conformity with the rest of Italy, banning the use of German and closing down German presses. Beginning in 1923 the use of Italian was broadly

⁵⁶³ Maura Hametz, “Naming Italians in the Borderland, 1926-1943,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 15 (3) (2010), 417.

⁵⁶⁴ Roberta Pergher, “A Tale of Two Borders: Settlement and National Transformation in Libya and South Tyrol Under Fascism” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2007), 9.

⁵⁶⁵ Hametz, “Naming Italians,” 412.

⁵⁶⁶ Pergher, “A Tale of Two Borders,” 34.

mandated in the region, while street and business names were forcefully “Italianized.”⁵⁶⁷ Like the northern frontier of *Il Deserto dei Tartari*, the region was militarized shortly thereafter and declared a “fortified region” by the Italian government.⁵⁶⁸ The shooting of Lazzari in *Il Deserto dei Tartari* can be read as an allusion to such fascist attempts at “de-foreignizing” Italy’s borderlands, particularly given the fascists’ emphasis on language. It is Lazzari’s failure to pronounce the fort password, a linguistic failure, that marks him as an outsider to the fort who must be shot at all costs. Even though Lazzari’s comrades are fond of him, his inability to conform to the linguistic homogeneity of the fort cannot be tolerated to any degree. The violent repression and paranoia with which Lazzari is met along the imperial boundary testifies to the fascist practice of suspicion, violence and cultural homogenization within both Italy’s domestic borderlands and colonial hinterlands. It is exactly this sort of fascist logic which Buzzati’s novel challenges in its grotesque and absurd portrayal of Lazzari’s murder.

Given the use of racial ideology to justify territorial aggression and the repressive use of force in both domestic Italian fascism and overseas colonialism, it is no surprise that Buzzati’s writings suggest a continuum between both spaces, each fantastically fused in his African-Alpine landscape of *Il deserto dei Tartari* and *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia*. In fusing these spaces, Buzzati’s narratives not only use colonialism as a safe site from which to construct a veiled critique of fascism, but ask their readers to rethink the project of European colonialism in light of its many affinities to fascist doctrine. “The histories of Italian expansionism along the Alpine ridge and on the African

⁵⁶⁷ Rolf Steininger, *South Tyrol: A Minority Conflict of the Twentieth Century* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 23.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

shoreline were intertwined,” asserts Roberta Pergher. “Nationalist ideologies of ‘redemption,’ judicial and administrative directives in support of ‘Italianization,’ strategies aimed at the creation of a ready-made ‘Italian’ environment, and even the attitudes and expectations of settlers converged in remarkable ways. The juxtaposition of policies and outcomes of colonization in Europe and overseas shows that, under Fascism, national policies did not merely inform imperial policies or vice versa. Rather, national and imperial practices were part of a common, albeit at times ineffectual, strategy of rule.”⁵⁶⁹ It is precisely this mutually reinforcing effect domestic fascism and overseas colonialism exerted on one another that Buzzati’s novels challenge their reader to ponder. In so doing, Buzzati’s works go beyond a simple, veiled critique of fascism or a critical rethinking of colonialism, inviting their readers to cast a critical eye toward the complicated ties between racial ideology, territorial belligerence and the use of force within the modern European sphere of influence.

Written shortly after *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* in the wake of the Second World War, Ennio Flaiano’s *Tempo di Uccidere* (1947) confronts the specter of Italian fascism through its radical representation of the colonial scene. The novel tells the story of its unnamed protagonist, a soldier in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War who deserts his unit in Ethiopia. The protagonist sleeps with an Ethiopian native, Mariam, whom he later accidentally shoots and kills. The protagonist attempts to hide his crime, all the while suspecting he has contracted leprosy from Mariam when he notices he has developed strange sores. The sores eventually disappear and the protagonist returns to his camp, where his peers fail to punish him for any of his crimes. Shortly thereafter, the

⁵⁶⁹ Pergher, “A Tale of Two Borders,” xxvi.

protagonist and his unit return to Italy. Unlike the majority of Italian colonial narratives of its era, *Tempo di Uccidere* refuses the lure of fascist propaganda in favor of a critical de-mythologizing of fascist ideology. The novel uses the figure of its unnamed protagonist to challenge fascism's valorization of militarism, collectivism and racism. In its critique of fascist racial doctrine in the colonies, the novel often alludes to fascist anti-Semitism, thus building a problematic bridge between Italy's colonial exploits and its participation in Hitler's Final Solution. At the same time, *Tempo di Uccidere* reflects on the national amnesia toward fascism, colonialism and the persecution of the Jews that overtook much of Italy in the period immediately following the Second World War. In so doing, the novel not only unveils the troubling affinities between the two targets of its critique, fascism and colonialism, but also suggests an urgent need to confront both specters even after Mussolini and Hitler had already fallen.

Since its publication in 1947, *Tempo di Uccidere* has sparked considerable interest among literary critics and scholars. Critics have explored such diverse themes in the novel as its Kafkaesque style (Maria Bellonci), the inspiration of the poet Vincenzo Cardarelli on Flaiano's narrator (Giacinto Spagnoletti), and the Christian elements in the novel (Maria Rosaria Gallo).⁵⁷⁰ Anna Longoni has attempted to situate the novel within Flaiano's larger body of work, while Lucilla Sergiacomo has explored the theme of ineptitude in the novel and Giuseppe Papponetti has explored the connections between *Tempo di Uccidere* and Gadda's writings.⁵⁷¹ One common point of interest among critics,

⁵⁷⁰ Cited in Lucilla Sergiacomo, *Invito alla lettura di Flaiano Vol. 108* (Milano: Mursia, 1996), 207-208.

⁵⁷¹ See *Tempo di Uccidere: Atti del Convegno Nazionle: Pescara, 27-28 Maggio 1994* (Pescara: Ediards, 1994).

however, has been the novel's relationship, or lack thereof, with its historical era. Many have argued that the novel bears no meaningful connection with the period in which it was written. Franco Treguedraina, for instance, argues that the novel might be best read as a myth or fairy tale, rather than as a reflection on its site of production, while Sergiacomo argues that to read the novel as a reflection of a specific historical moment or as a critique of colonialism would be "troppo riduttiva e deterministica."⁵⁷² [too reductive and deterministic.] Similarly, Sergio Pautasso has declared that "I problemi del tenente di Flaiano sono problemi universali e assoluti dell'uomo, non importa in quale condizione o contingenza storica si trovi a vivere... *Tempo di Uccidere* conferma... come l'intelligenza va sempre al di là delle polemiche contingenti e delle mode."⁵⁷³ [The problems of Flaiano's lieutenant are universal and absolute problems of man, and it does not matter in which particular condition or historical contingency they are found to be... *Tempo di Uccidere* confirms... how the intelligence always transcends passing polemics and fashions.] Such criticism rehearses that of the novel's first critics, who, when the novel was published during the height of post-war Italian neorealism, condemned the work for its excessive intellectualism and indeterminacy, which they saw as automatically forfeiting the novel any sort of political engagement.⁵⁷⁴ Since then, however, some critics have argued for the novel's historical and political relevance, beginning with Alberto Moravia's 1956 protest against those who contended that the work was politically

⁵⁷² Ibid., 53.

⁵⁷³ Sergio Pautasso, "Attualità di un romanzo: *Tempo di Uccidere*," *Nuova Antologia* 527 (1976): 559.

⁵⁷⁴ Sergiacomo, *Invito alla lettura di Flaiano*, 205.

disengaged and his encomium over what he termed *Tempo di Uccidere*'s "realismo coraggioso."⁵⁷⁵ [courageous realism.] Roberta Orlandini, for instance, examines the relationship between the narrator and protagonist in the novel, arguing that the relationship between narrator and protagonist, of whom the narrator is always morally one step ahead, is also used to condemn the colonial system.⁵⁷⁶ Marilyn Schneider also reads the novel as a critique of fascism, arguing that Flaiano sets the biblical discourse in the work against fascist ideology.⁵⁷⁷ Despite this newfound willingness to interrogate the novel's historical and political valence, however, critics have yet to explore the ways in which the novel's critique of colonial racial ideology implies a critique of fascist anti-Semitism, thus interrogating the often surprisingly close relationship between the two. Similarly, critics have yet to explore how the novel reflects on the realities of national amnesia in the wake of colonialism and fascism, thereby suggesting more than ever the need to confront fascism's abuses.

Ennio Flaiano, like many of the authors discussed in this work, bore an intimate acquaintance with both fascism and colonialism. Flaiano lived in Italy throughout Mussolini's reign and the Second World War, and he served in the Italian military from October of 1935 to November of 1936, during its brutal war of conquest in Ethiopia in which he participated.⁵⁷⁸ While Flaiano may have served in the war, he by no means

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 207.

⁵⁷⁶ Roberta Orlandini, "(Anti)colonialismo in *Tempo di Uccidere* di Ennio Flaiano," *Italica* 69 (4) (1992), 479-480.

⁵⁷⁷ Marilyn Schneider, "Allegory and Antihistory in Ennio Flaiano's *Tempo di Uccidere*," *Stanford Italian Review* 4 (1), 113.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 49.

supported it. Flaiano often wrote letters to his friend Orfeo Tamburi expressing his dissatisfaction with military life⁵⁷⁹, and his private diary in which he recounted his war-time experience at the time, *Aethiopia, appunti per una canzonetta*, betrays a strident critique of both the colonial endeavor and fascist ideology at large.⁵⁸⁰ It was precisely the experience of colonialism, in fact, that was responsible for Flaiano's complete disillusionment with fascism. In a 1972 interview with Aldo Rosselli, Flaiano spoke of the colonial conquest as something "cui ho preso parte e che mi ha portato ventiquattrenne a ripudiare il fascismo e a desiderare che la cosa finisse, brutalmente, nella sconfitta," [which I took part in and which brought me, at the age of twenty-three, to repudiate fascism and to desire that the thing ended, brutally, in defeat] adding that "ho visto come queste persone, che noi andavamo a 'liberare' erano invece oppresse e spaventate dal nostro arrivo. La nostra funzione era soltanto una bassa funzione di prestigio colonialistico, ormai in ritardo."⁵⁸¹ [I have seen who these people, who we were going to 'liberate,' were instead oppressed and terrified of our arrival. Our purpose was only a low purpose of colonial prestige, by then overdue.] This critical voice, however, was never expressed publicly by Flaiano during these years, or at least not explicitly. As a young intellectual Flaiano remained officially silent throughout the fascist period, refusing to place himself at risk by betraying his true views. He later justified this official silence by pointing toward the risks of currying disfavor with the fascist regime,

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ Patrizia Palumbo, "National Integrity and African Malaise in Ennio Flaiano's *Tempo di Uccidere*," *Forum Italica* 36 (1) (2002), 54.

⁵⁸¹ Sergiacomo, *Invito alla lettura di Flaiano*, 50.

defensively declaring that “La repressione di cui oggi tanto si parla era allora veramente repressione.”⁵⁸² [The repression of which is spoken today was truly repression back then.]

Silence, for Flaiano, even offered a form of resistance. “L’unica protesta contro il fascismo,” he affirmed, “era quella di non parlare mai delle cose ma sempre di altre cose.”⁵⁸³ [The sole protest against fascism was to not ever speak of such things but to always speak of other things.]

Despite Flaiano’s public silence during the fascist era, he did, as we have seen, often express criticism of the regime privately. In a 1943 letter to his daughter, Flaiano condemned the “ventun’anni di miseria morale” [twenty-one years of moral misery] that Italy had suffered under Mussolini, whom he blamed for keeping Italy “bene ingabbiata.”⁵⁸⁴ [thoroughly caged.] Flaiano also lamented the “migliaia di persone” [thousands of people] who, unlike himself, had lost their lives as a result of their dissidence.⁵⁸⁵ Like Buzzati, Flaiano was a journalist at this time, and many critics have read signs of coded resistance in his journalism. Sergiacomo, for instance, argues that Flaiano’s journalism from 1944 onward protested in a veiled manner against fascism.⁵⁸⁶ Marisa Trubiano identifies this tendency even earlier in Flaiano’s work, noting that he wrote for a number of dissenting newspapers in the 1930s before they were shut down by

⁵⁸² Ibid., 61.

⁵⁸³ Marisa S. Trubiano, *Ennio Flaiano and His Italy: Postcards from a Changing World* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), 29.

⁵⁸⁴ Ennio Flaiano, *Omaggio a Flaiano*, ed. Gian Carlo Bertelli et. al (Pisa: Giardini, 1986), 29.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁶ Sergiacomo, *Invito alla lettura di Flaiano*, 54.

the regime.⁵⁸⁷ “A close analysis of Flaiano’s early art, theater, and film criticism and literary and cinematic projects,” she argues, “with very few exceptions—reveals the subtle stirrings of what would be his laborious, decades-long shedding of the rhetorical, nationalistic, xenophobic, imperialistic, Eurocentric, and historicist thinking with which he was surrounded.” Trubiano’s work charts a number of decidedly anti-fascist moments in Flaiano’s journalism: “Flaiano’s caustic reviews published in the cultural section of Pannunzio’s and Benedetti’s *Oggi* from 1939 to 1942, for example, by constantly pointing out instances in which the “libero arbitrio teatrale” [free theatrical will] was being thwarted, provided for an important dissonant note to the pro-Fascist articles in the political section. Indeed, in numerous theater reviews, Flaiano alluded to the dictator’s hold over the means of cultural production...He wrote against the idea of creating consensus, so crucial to the success of dictatorships...Flaiano’s appreciation for figures like Petrolini and Zacconi and for Ibsen ran decidedly countercurrent...In addition, Flaiano’s constant attention to French and American cinema and literature, coupled with his critical stance with regard to Italian cinema, denote a dissident and insistent internationalism that would not be stifled.”⁵⁸⁸ Perhaps most telling with regard to *Tempo di Uccidere*, Trubiano identifies a “subtly present...oppositional stance to colonialism” in Flaiano’s journalism, arguing that he remained “mistrustful of imperialism and its rhetoric of cultural superiority.”⁵⁸⁹ Just as he used his tale of *madamismo*, or racial mixing, to challenge fascist racial codes, so too did he use his journalism to attack

⁵⁸⁷ Trubiano, *Ennio Flaiano and His Italy*, 29.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 29-31.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

prejudiced images of African natives promoted by the fascist regime. “Pochi sospettano,” wrote Flaiano later, “che l’Africa è soprattutto abitata da gente onesta, rispettosa delle leggi e della morale, che vive ordinariamente lavorando e, quando può, frequenta i cinematografi.”⁵⁹⁰ [Few suspected that Africa was above all a place where honest people lived, respectful of laws and morals, who lived ordinarily, worked and, when they could, went to the movies.] It is this distaste for fascism’s legacy of racial intolerance and the colonial project which grew from it that Flaiano confronts in *Tempo di Uccidere*.

Like many of the works discussed in this dissertation, *Tempo di Uccidere* stands apart from the traditional colonial literature of its time. In Italy, colonial literature of the period typically upheld fascist propagandistic ends, such as portraying the colonial project as a Christianizing mission of humanitarianism and Africa as a fertile Eden.⁵⁹¹ Even major canonical writers of the period who remained in Italy contributed to this sort of fascist vision of colonialism, including Gabriele D’Annunzio and F.T. Marinetti. Insofar as Flaiano’s novel offers a radical alternative to this tradition, it stages a dual act of literary and political resistance, both of which are intimately intertwined.

One of the ways in which *Tempo di Uccidere* contests fascist ideology is through the figure of its unnamed protagonist, whose radical individualism stands in sharp contrast to fascism’s valorization of the collective masses. When the protagonist deserts the army and begins to lead an isolated life in the desert, his action marks a symbolic refusal of both military life and the fascist cult of the masses, whose core principle of collectivism he has betrayed. Trubiano also sees the protagonist’s individualism as a

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 47-47.

⁵⁹¹ Palumbo, “National Integrity,” 54.

means of contesting fascism's valorization of the masses, just as his ineptitude challenges, much like Buzzati's work does, fascist conceptions of heroism as well as the virtues of the "civilizing mission."⁵⁹² Similarly, Palumbo reads the protagonist's encounter with the native Ethiopian whom he accidentally kills, Mariam, as a critique of the fascist myth of benevolent Italian intervention in Africa.⁵⁹³ Roberta Orlandini, in a slightly different reading of the killing at the center of the novel, argues that Mariam's death can be read not merely as a failure of fascist myths of heroism and benevolence but as an allegory for the explicit European violation of Africa.⁵⁹⁴ In his stark individualism and violence toward Mariam, Flaiano's protagonist offers a clear critique of fascist collectivism, militarism, heroism and the myth of the benevolent colonizer.

Like the work of Broch and Yourcenar, Flaiano's *Tempo di Uccidere* contests fascism's claims to ancient Roman greatness and its misappropriation of this tradition. Early on in the novel, when the protagonist is setting off on his journey, he is wished good luck by a fellow Italian. "Quest'augurio," the protagonist tells us, "finì col precipitarmi nel malumore: voglio dire che mi parve esagerato invocare l'aiuto della fortuna in quell'occasione. Non andavo in battaglia, né avrei traversato le Alpi."⁵⁹⁵ [These good wishes ultimately put me into a bad mood: that is to say that it seemed exaggerated to me to invoke fortune's help in that occasion. I wasn't going into battle, nor would I be crossing the Alps.] The protagonist's declaration that he will not be

⁵⁹² Trubiano, *Ennio Flaiano*, 42.

⁵⁹³ Palumbo, "National Integrity," 60.

⁵⁹⁴ Orlandini, "(Anti)colonialismo in *Tempo di Uccidere*," 484.

⁵⁹⁵ Ennio Flaiano, *Tempo di Uccidere* (Italy: Mondadori, 1972), 7.

“crossing the Alps” alludes to Caesar’s famous crossing of the Alps, part of the Roman mythology on which Mussolini’s regime founded its claims to empire. Mussolini, as discussed elsewhere, sought with his colonial and continental wars to resuscitate the lost greatness of the ancient Roman Empire, of which his empire would be a continuation. In refusing this tradition, *Tempo di Uccidere* suggests a disjunct between the realities of the African war and the grandeur of fascist mythologizing. Given that the fascists would be “crossing the Alps” into France only a few years after the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, the protagonist’s statement not only rejects the mythologizing of fascist violence abroad, but points toward its closely related misuse at home. This connection between overseas exploits and continental practices will be made again later in the novel, when racial intolerance in the colonies will be used to allude to anti-Semitism at home.

Tempo di Uccidere’s rejection of fascist claims to ancient Roman greatness recurs during the protagonist’s first encounter with Mariam. As she begins to dress, he writes that “L’operazione era molto semplice, doveva prima infilarsi una tunica, e poi avvolgersi in una larga toga di cotone. Vestita ancora come le donne romane arrivate laggiù, o alle soglie del Sudan, al seguito dei cacciatori di leoni e dei proconsoli. ‘Peccato,’ dissi ‘vivere in epoche così diverse!’”⁵⁹⁶ [The operation was very simple, she first had to get into a tunic, and then roll herself up in a large cotton toga. She was dressed like the Roman woman having arrived down there once again, or at the threshold of the Sudan, following the lion hunters and the proconsuls. ‘A shame,’ I said, ‘to live in times so different!'] The protagonist’s declaration is subversive in two important ways. Firstly, by declaring that it is a shame to live in a different epoch than the Roman one, it draws a

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 19.

clear distinction between the fascist present and the Roman past that it purported to rehabilitate. Secondly, by suggesting that it is a native African, rather than an Italian, who fits the model of elite Romanness, the statement challenges the exclusivity of Italian claims to Romanness and the fascist myth of cultural superiority over others upon which their, and the Roman's, "civilizing" mission depended.

Just as the novel's re-framing of Romanness as blackness upsets fascism's claims to cultural superiority over its colonized—Mussolini claimed that Italy won its war in Ethiopia because of Italian racial superiority—its portrayal of the the protagonist's sexual relationship with an Ethiopian native also transgresses fascist racial and legal codes. *Madamismo*, or sexual relations between Italians and African natives, were criminalized in 1938, while mixed marriages had been banned as early as 1933 in Eritrea and 1937 in Ethiopia. Such laws reinforced rigid racial barriers that fascists sought to erect between Italians and colonial natives. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat explains, "Official desires for the new colony to perform as a laboratory of the fascist social engineering projects produced codes of collective comportment... Many Italian colonial authorities and experts felt that assimilationism on the French model led to the loss of white prestige by encouraging the colonized to mimic their European rulers. They advocated the propagation of a politics of difference that would continually remind the Africans of their inferior status."⁵⁹⁷ The protagonist of *Tempo di Uccidere* not only blurs such a rigid ideology of difference upon sleeping with Mariam, but also by growing a beard and carrying himself with an increasingly wild demeanor, making himself into "un indigeno" [a native] as he is at one

⁵⁹⁷ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 129-130.

point called.⁵⁹⁸ In so doing, the protagonist not only transgresses Italian racial and legal codes of differentiation, but betrays their ultimate artificiality.

If *Tempo di Uccidere* deconstructs Italian codes of racial hierarchy, it also suggests a close affinity between these codes and those of the anti-Semitism that the fascist regime adopted on the continent. When Mariam's brother Elias feels that he has gotten the best of the protagonist, for instance, the narrator describes Elias as a "piccolo David che aveva vinto il gigante e ora tornava ai suoi commerci," [small David who had defeated the giant and was now returning to his trade] connecting the Jewish fight against the Philistines with the Ethiopians' own fight against the Italians.⁵⁹⁹ In linking African and Jewish struggle, the novel suggests the common victimization both shared at the hands of the Italian fascists. Similarly, the protagonist suspects that his victim Mariam was a leper, or one, as a second lieutenant informs him, who bore "un segno che tutti conoscono, e allora nessuno si avvicina troppo."⁶⁰⁰ [a sign that everyone recognized, and therefore nowhere neared the person.] The wearing of the "segno che tutti conoscono" recalls the widespread practice in Nazi-occupied Europe of the Jewish star, just as the lepers' status as outcasts recalls the marginalization of Jewry from European society. Echoes of continental racial injustice are also sounded when some of the protagonist's peers optimistically discuss the possibility of looting native gold for themselves, a practice recalling the looting of gold from the Jews in Italy and other Axis powers under fascism. In connecting African and Jewish victimhood, then, Flaiano's text not only uses

⁵⁹⁸ Flaiano, *Tempo di Uccidere*, 65.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

colonialism to critique continental fascism, but suggests the profound similarities between the racial ideologies employed overseas and those unleashed at home in Italy.

That Flaiano would link Italian colonial prejudice with fascist anti-Semitism is not altogether surprising, given that it was precisely the expansion of Italy's colonial empire, as many scholars contend, that contributed substantively to the development of the sort of racial thinking that would later be turned against the Jews. The conquest of Ethiopia in which Flaiano took part forced the Italian peoples to encounter blacks on a hitherto unprecedented scale, an encounter with otherness that drove Italy to refine and racially fortify its own conceptions of Italianness.⁶⁰¹ Such racial thinking did not bode well for the Jews, who were largely excluded from such racialized definitions of national belonging.⁶⁰² Many of the same racial principles articulated and refined in the colonies, notes Salvatore Garau, were later taken up by the anti-Semitic movement in Italy. The colonial belief that the races were differentiable, hierarchized and improvable through legislation, for instance, formed part of the basis for Italy's racial and legislative persecution of the Jews.⁶⁰³ Just as *madamismo* was banned in the colonies, so too was marriage between Italian "Aryans" and Jews prohibited as of 1938.⁶⁰⁴ As Ben-Ghiat explains, "The antimiscegenationist rhetoric that accompanied the Italian colonial

⁶⁰¹ Michael A. Ledeen, "The Evolution of Italian Fascist Antisemitism," *Jewish Social Studies* 37 (1) (1975), 14.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁰³ Salvatore Garau, "Between "Spirit" and "Science": The Emergence of Italian Fascist Antisemitism Through the 1920s and 1930s," *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 15 (1), 44.

⁶⁰⁴ Joshua Zimmerman, *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922-1945* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2005), 3.

enterprise was extended to Jews once they too were defined as a non-European race. Indeed, official pronouncements on racial issues considered the anti-Semitic measures and colonial legislation together as measures designed to ensure that Italians' Aryan and European characteristics would 'not be altered in any way.' Both the Grand Council's 'Declaration on Race,' and Mussolini's Trieste speech in the fall of 1938 spoke of the anti-Jewish laws as part of a larger effort to create a 'racial consciousness' that would allow Italians to avoid 'bastardization' as their empire expanded throughout the world."⁶⁰⁵ Such close affinity between colonialism and domestic anti-Semitism is not surprising given the long history, discussed elsewhere, of Jews and Africans becoming fused in the European imaginary. Insofar as *Tempo di Uccidere* connects colonial and continental fascist misdeeds, then, it suggests a pre-existing affinity between the two sets of practices, probing the complex origins and mutually reinforcing structures of racial thinking.

Tempo di Uccidere does not simply lay bare fascism's racially motivated violence, but also suggests that Italy has yet to adequately confront this legacy. After the novel's protagonist has killed Miriam, he removes his watch from her wrist. "Mi dispiacque toglierle quel dono che aveva accettato," he states, "ma sulla cassa c'era inciso il mio nome: non dovevo lasciar tracce."⁶⁰⁶ [It displeased me to remove that gift that she had accepted, but on the case was inscribed my name: I could not leave a trace.] Similarly, later in the novel the protagonist, in an attempt to come to terms with his feelings of guilt,

⁶⁰⁵ Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 155.

⁶⁰⁶ Flaiano, *Tempo di Uccidere*, 45.

declares that “potevo persino credere che Mariam non fosse mai esistita.”⁶⁰⁷ [I could even believe that Mariam had never even existed.] This desire to keep his crimes a secret, even to the point of disavowing to himself that they ever happened, speaks to Italy’s own collective amnesia in the years immediately following the fall of fascism and colonialism. His disavowal recalls Robert Fletcher’s definition of “imperialist amnesia”: “a tendency on the part of ‘agents of postcolonialism’ to either ignore the history of colonial domination in their accounts or to present a sanitized version of colonialism from which evidence of exploitation, persecution, subjugation and genocide has been effectively effaced.”⁶⁰⁸ Symptomatic of this definition of “imperialist amnesia,” the Ethiopian war was largely forgotten in Italy, where only one “true historical analysis” of Italian colonialism was published in the first three decades of the postwar period.⁶⁰⁹ “In the immediate postwar cultural climate,” explains Palumbo, “recollections concerning the failures and horrors of Italian colonialism threatened to undermine an unquestionable Italian cultural commitment to the construction of a heroic national profile, best exemplified by Roberto Rossellini’s celebrated movie *Roma città aperta* and by an endless series of literary works on the Resistance and the war in its European setting.”⁶¹⁰ Such national amnesia persisted long after the end of Italian colonialism: as late as the mid-1950s newsreels continued to stress the beneficial work Italians had done in Ethiopia, ignoring the true brutality of Italy’s campaign there, while works critical of

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 189.

⁶⁰⁸ Robert Fletcher, “The Art of Forgetting: Imperialist Amnesia and Public Secrecy,” *Third World Quarterly* 33 (3) (2012), 423.

⁶⁰⁹ Palumbo, “National Integrity,” 53.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 57.

Italian colonial project were often banned by the Italian government as late as into 1980s.⁶¹¹ Within the field of literature, *Tempo di Uccidere* was the sole work on Italy's war in Africa published in the years immediately following the Second World War.⁶¹² In failing to bear witness to his crimes, the novel's protagonist thus rehearses the very same forgetting that defined Italy in the years following fascism's fall.

If many Italians failed to confront the misdeeds of their recent colonial past in the postwar years, they also failed to adequately address the plight of Italian and European Jews. Alberto De Bernardi argues that Italy suffered a collective amnesia regarding the plight of the Jews in the Second World War, a topic not addressed in academic circles until as late as 1962 with Renzo DeFelice's work *Ebrei sotto il fascismo*.⁶¹³ Ilaria Pavan speaks of "dell'oblio nel quale caddero velocemente tanto la persecuzione antiebraica, quanto le sue più evidenti conseguenze di natura economica. Il lungo silenzio maturato a questo riguardo nel dopoguerra si configura come un'intricata architettura alla cui realizzazione concorsero fattori diversi: ad uno proveniente, per così dire, dal basso, dalla gente comune animata dal desiderio più o meno consapevole di allontanare da sé responsabilità e miserie 'collettive', si sovrappose il silenzio degli stessi ex perseguitati, spinti dalla 'necessità terapeutica' dell'oblio e dall'amara e crescente consapevolezza di non trovarsi di fronte ad interlocutori, pubblici e privati che fossero, disposti all'ascolto. L'altra spinta verso la rimozione proveniva invece dall'alto, 'dai nuovi centri del potere

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 53-54.

⁶¹² Ibid., 57.

⁶¹³ Alberto De Bernardi, "La memoria della Shoah e la ricerca storica," in *Totalitarismo, Lager e Modernità: Identità e Storia Dell'Universo Concentrazionario*, ed. Hans Mommsen (Milano: B. Mondadori, 2002), 293.

politico che, stretti tra la necessità di consolidare la legittimità di fragili democrazie, considerarono l'oblio un efficace strumento di stabilizzazione politica.”⁶¹⁴ [The forgetfulness into which the anti-Semitic persecution fell just as quickly as its most evident consequences of an economic nature. The long silence ripened in this regard in the postwar period like an intricate architecture to whose realization diverse factors contributed: one coming from below, so to say, from the common people animated more or less by the conscious desire to distance from themselves “collective” responsibility and misery, to which is added the silence of the ex-persecuted themselves, driven by a “therapeutic necessity” toward forgetfulness and by the growing awareness of not finding themselves faced with interlocutors, be they public or private, willing to listen to them. The other motivation toward repression came from on high, from the new centers of political power, which, constrained by the necessity of consolidating the legitimacy of fragile democracies, considered forgetfulness an effective instrument of political stabilization.] In alluding to the significance of both African and Jewish victimhood at the hands of fascism, then, *Tempo di Uccidere* suggests the dangers of this dual amnesia. It is not surprising that Flaiano would thematize this sort of amnesia in the novel, as it is a concern that he raises in his private writings from the times. “Mi scrive un lettore,” he writes in a June 1944 diary issue, “Come credi che finirà? (intende: Mussolini). Circolano da tempo varie profezie. Chi lo vorrebbe a Sant’Elena, chi in Svizzera, chi ultima vittima di Hitler, chi condannato a ripetere i suoi discorsi al Cinema Trionfale. Io penso invece che ce lo dimenticheremo: e un bel giorno, aprendo il giornale, ecco la notizia del suo pietoso decesso in un paese che portrebbe essere Montevideo o Caracas; una notizia di

⁶¹⁴ Ilaria Pavan, *Tra Indifferenza e Oblio: Le Conseguenze economiche delle leggi razziali in Italia 1938-1970* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2004), 24.

poche righe; e – supremo oltraggio di un proto giovane e innocente – col nome sbalgiato.”⁶¹⁵ [A reader wrote to me, ‘To what end will Mussolini come?’ For some time various prophecies had been circulating. Those would think his end to be at Sant’Elena, in Switzerland, Hitler’s last victim, condemned to repeat his speeches at the Cinema Trionfale. I, instead, thought that we would forget him: and one beautiful day, opening the newspaper, there would be the news of his sorry death in a place that could be Montevideo or Caracas; a notice of only a few lines; and – the greatest offense of a young and innocent people – with his name mistaken.] Similarly, in an entry from July of 1945, Flaiano describes Italy’s penchant for forgetting: “Noi di questo paese dimentichiamo, invece, volentieri. Il passato merita soltanto una pietra che lo nasconda; e otteniamo il risultato di ritrovarci ogni volta indifesi, appunto come gli smemorati. Per questa ragione, molto di quel che è successo negli ultimi anni sta perdendo il suo valore di insegnamento. I fatti si sono susseguiti con tale violenza che ricordiamo soltanto i più recenti. Gli altri...sono sprofondate nel nulla.”⁶¹⁶ [We in this country forget, rather, willingly. The past merits only a stone to hide it; and we manage to retrieve each time helpless, exactly like the forgetful. For this reason, much of what has occurred in these last years is losing its education worth. The matters follow one another in such violent succession that we remember only the most recent. The others...are cast away into nothingness.] Flaiano’s lamentation that “Il passato merita soltanto una pietra che lo nasconda” uncannily echoes the action of *Tempo di Uccidere*, in which the protagonist, upon killing Mariam, covers her body with stones to hide his crime. In bringing to light the crimes of fascism,

⁶¹⁵ Ennio Flaiano, *Un Bel Giorno di Libertà: Cronache Degli Anni Quaranta* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1979), 55.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

however, *Tempo di Uccidere* counteracts this national forgetting, saving memory from being “sprofondate nel nulla.”

It is not only amnesia that is problematized in *Tempo di Uccidere*, but amnesty for the engineers of fascism’s crimes. When the protagonist robs a fellow major toward the end of the novel, even compromising the major’s life by removing a crucial bolt from his truck, the protagonist escapes punishment because the major refuses to denounce him. The protagonist puzzles over this with another officer, however he is ultimately unable to make sense of why he was not denounced and prosecuted. Similarly, at the conclusion of the novel, the military fails to prosecute the protagonist for his crime against Mariam. When a military trumpet sounds in the distance, the protagonist declares that “È una tromba abbastanza comica per il mio Giudizio,” [it is rather comical a trumpet for my own judgment] to which a fellow officer responds “Non farti illusioni. Non ci saranno altre trombe. Le uniche che udrai sono queste.”⁶¹⁷ [Don’t fool yourself. There will not be any other trumpets. The only ones you will hear are these.] In failing to sound the trumpets of judgment and justice, in effectively granting the protagonist amnesty for his crimes, the novel gestures toward the postwar failure in Italy to not only confront the crimes of the past, but to prosecute them. When Italy passed a widespread amnesty in the spring of 1946, shortly before Flaiano started writing *Tempo di Uccidere* in December of the same year⁶¹⁸, it was taken as an affront to victims of fascism whose rights had not yet

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 250.

⁶¹⁸ Ennio Flaiano, *Opere: 1947-1972*, ed. Maria Corti et. al (Milano: Bompiani, 1990), 1408.

been completely restituted.⁶¹⁹ As Michele Battini explains, “The end of the punishment of crimes and of purges around 1946 was sanctioned by a diagnosis of ‘complete recovery’ from Fascism that proved lethal for the assessment of the ruling classes’ historical responsibilities for the accession and consolidation of the regime. That decision also compromised the start of the proceedings on crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Italian military during the war in Greece, Yugoslavia and Albania.”⁶²⁰ The officer’s declaration that “non ci saranno altre trombe,” then, casts a troubling portrait of the future of justice for the victims of fascism, both overseas and on the continent.

By not only offering a critique of fascist ideology but also “unearthing” the often forgotten and un-vindicated victims of fascist abuse in the figure of Mariam, Flaiano’s novel offers a powerful symbolic antidote to the shortcomings of national memory and justice. *Tempo di Uccidere* thus not only uses the colonial scene to critique fascism, and in so doing underscore the troubling structural affinities shared by both fascism and colonialism, but to urgently bring to light fascism’s crimes in an act of performative resistance to the specters of national amnesia and injustice that characterized Flaiano’s contemporary world.

⁶¹⁹ Pavan, *Tra Indifferenza e Oblío*, 25.

⁶²⁰ Michele Battini, *The Missing Italian Nuremberg: Cultural Amnesia and Postwar Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 19.

Conclusion

A careful analysis of European literature of the fascist era reveals a dynamic interplay at work between empire and fascism in the literary imaginary. Writers from across Western and Central Europe, from both democratic and fascist states, invoked Europe's legacy of empire and colonialism in their attempt to come to terms with the specter of fascism. Empire became the site upon which these writers built their critiques, sometimes overt and other times subvert, against the fascist regimes that increasingly menaced their native lands. By placing empire and fascism into dialogue, their writings not only proffered a powerful critique of fascism, but also set into motion a critical rethinking of the project of empire. Uncomfortable affinities between a purportedly benevolent European overseas colonialism and the horrors committed by fascist powers within continental Europe challenged conventional wisdom about the colonial *mission civilisatrice* at the same time as they offered the raw material for a sustained critique of fascism. The works discussed in this dissertation boldly confronted these affinities, upsetting both fascist and colonial myths.

Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* and *L'Église* used the colonial sphere to contest numerous aspects of fascist ideology, including racially-motivated discrimination and violence, the syndicalist fusion of state and corporatism, and the dangers of absolute power and dictatorship. Joyce Cary's colonial novels similarly made use of colonial injustice as a mirror image to fascism, warning of the danger of the British replicating fascist ideology and practice within their own domestic and overseas borders. In Germany, Gerhart Hauptmann subversively used the colonial narrative to create an anti-fascist novella replete with veiled criticisms of the Third Reich. Hermann Broch evoked

both fascism and modern colonialism in his portrait of ancient empire in *Der Tod des Vergil*, challenging shared tenets and practices of both movements while at the same time suggesting the possibility of a humane empire that might stand in opposition to the imperial projects of fascist regimes. Marguerite Yourcenar similarly attempted to rehabilitate the possibility of a humane empire in *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, at the same time using her narrative of ancient empire to critique fascism and to point to the dangers of colonialism. In Italy, Dino Buzzati and Ennio Flaiano used the colonial scene to subversively publish anti-fascist texts, challenging fascist and colonial codes of discipline and urging the need to resist national amnesia toward fascism and colonialism after the fall of Mussolini and Hitler.

The works of these authors suggest the need to broaden our thinking of colonial literature during the fascist years. While many colonial narratives, like those of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Hans Grimm, were either written to serve fascist regimes or later put in the service of them, the writers in this dissertation show that colonial narratives were often put to radically different ends. They also reveal a nuanced and subtle confrontation with the legacy of colonialism itself, one standing apart from national dogmas about the necessities and virtues of the imperial project.

If the authors discussed in this dissertation each responded to the particular exigencies that confronted their own nations, they also shared a remarkably similar set of ideas and concerns. Despite the different fascisms and empires they faced, they each created works that interwove fascism and empire in remarkably similar ways. In addition to their remarkably similar thematic and critical approaches, they also created works that frequently looked beyond their own national borders. Their writings provide a compelling

argument for the ongoing value of a comparative approach to the study of fascism and colonialism across both historical and literary disciplines. They also suggest the shortcomings of too narrow and categorical an approach to thinking about the interrelated subjects of fascism, empire and colonialism. By looking to the myriad continuities and discontinuities between them, that is to say by following the path laid out for us by Céline, Cary, Hauptmann, Broch, Yourcenar, Buzzati and Flaiano, we may begin to better understand the complex ways in which they reinforced and undermined one another.

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