T. S. Eliot and the Literature of Fascism

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In 1928, T. S. Eliot wrote a lengthy review of five contemporary studies of Italian Fascism, still a rising political movement at the time.[1] Published in the December issue of his literary magazine the *Criterion*, the review takes stock of J. S. Barnes's *The Universal Aspects of Fascism* (1928), Aline Lion's *The Pedigree of Fascism* (1927), Gaetano Salvemini's *The Fascist Dictatorship in Italy* (1927), Luigi Sturzo's *Italy and Fascism* (1926), and Luigi Villari's *The Fascist Experiment* (1926).[2] Together the five texts seem at first glance to cover Fascism comprehensively; Eliot hints at this in the broad sweep of the title of his review, "The Literature of Fascism." Yet his grand gesture turns out to be something of a ruse, as he ranks the studies below par. Each book gives Fascism short shrift, however "excellent" and "persuasive" they may appear to be on the whole. As Eliot puts it, "Unfortunately *for my purpose*, none of them quite meet."[3]

Odd phrasing, this. The notion of "purpose" smacks of a political pragmatism that would seem to jar with a critical manifesto Eliot had published in the *Criterion* just two years earlier. In 1926, he had announced his conviction that a literary review "must protect its disinterestedness, must avoid the temptation ever to appeal to any social, political or theological prejudices."[4] Previously, in a letter to his mother of 29 March 1919, he had boasted that literary London saw him as "disinterested."[5] This is an echt Arnoldian idea. It informs as well the aesthetic ideal he enshrined in "Thomas Middleton" (1927) of "impersonal passionless observation of human nature."[6] So, then, is the Eliot of 1928 forsaking disinterestedness in the face of Fascism's uneven but growing popularity in Italy and abroad? After all, in the months since the publication of his *Criterion* manifesto of 1926, the Italian confederacy had patently become a one-party

[1] The capitalization of "Fascism" is typically used in academic practice to refer to the movement's specifically Italian variant. This paper refers to it as such, using lowercase "fascism" as a general term.

[2] T. S. Eliot, "The Literature of Fascism," *Criterion* 8/31 (December 1928): 280–90; James Strachey Barnes, *The Universal Aspects of Fascism* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1928); Aline Lion, *The Pedigree of Fascism: A Popular Essay on the Western Philosophy of Politics* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1927); Gaetano Salvemini, *The Fascist Dictatorship in Italy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928); Luigi Sturzo, *Italy and Fascism*, trans. Barbara Barclay Carter (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1926); Luigi Villari, *The Fascist Experiment* (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1926). Faber & Gwyer, whose board of directors Eliot had joined in 1925, published Sturzo's and Villari's respectively anti- and pro-Fascist polemics.

[3] Eliot, "The Literature of Fascism," 280.

[4] T.S. Eliot, "The Idea of a Literary Review," *New Criterion* 4/1 (January 1926): 4. Cf. Eliot's commentary in 1923 that "it is the function of a literary review to maintain the autonomy and disinterestedness of literature and at the same time to exhibit the relations of literature—not to 'life,' as something contrasted to literature—but to all the other activities, which, together with literature, are the components of life" ("The Function of a Literary Review," *Criterion* 1/4 [July 1923]: 421). For further discussion of the historiography of the periodical, see Jason Harding's comprehensive study, *The Criterion, Cultural Politics, and Periodical Networks in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Jeroen Vanheste, *Guardians of the Humanist Legacy: The Classicism of T.S. Eliot's Criterion Network and Its Relevance to our Postmodern World* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007).

[5] T.S. Eliot, *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton, vol. 1, *1898–1922* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 331.

[6] T.S. Eliot, *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 193.

police state.[7] Tempting though it may be to assume a radical shift in Eliot's political thought, a closer look reveals that his call for critical neutrality stems from the non-sectarian and sceptical nature of his engagement with politics as a whole, not just Fascism. As David Moody aptly puts it, Eliot "is, strictly speaking, a metaphysician, one who in observing politics is always trying to see through the actuality to the ideal."[8] The poet's 1928 review conforms, for the most part, with Moody's premise. I side more strongly with Andrew John Miller, however, who warns against seeing Eliot as a figure who adopts the '"mystical' view of the nation that Kristeva attributes to the reactionary Romanticism of Herder."[9] As Miller cautions, such generalizations can easily lead us to downplay the intricacies "posed by the problem of sovereignty in its literary as well as its political manifestations."[10] In keeping with this idea, I contend that Eliot's omnibus review uncovers a far more cogent and astute political posture than the one for which he is typically given credit. Specifically, I argue that this 1928 review displays a surprisingly shrewd grasp of Fascism, thereby challenging the conventional portrait of Eliot as a political naïf or worse, a Fascist sympathizer.[11]

Tellingly, Eliot takes on Fascism *despite* his avowed ignorance of the subject. It is a bold move, and perhaps a rash one. Or, as I think more likely, he plays down his acquaintance with Fascism so as to critique it with the kind of detachment that he deems proper to a poet-critic engaged in literary journalism. It is little wonder, then, that his political thought is still suspect in many quarters, if hardly ever taken seriously. In a review of the second volume of Eliot's recently published correspondence, Denis Donohue writes that "instead of politics, Eliot had taste."[12] I subscribe to a less polarized position. While Moody and others have briefly commented on the *Criterion* review of 1928, no one to date has paid much attention either to what Eliot had to say about the five books or, less still, to the arguments made in each book. The following pages take modest steps in both directions. I am mainly concerned with situating the review as a touchstone of Eliot's anti-Fascist political thought. A brief comparison of Eliot's and Ezra Pound's politics in the late 1920s may also help to bring into sharper relief the nature of Eliot's political commitments at the time. I bring Pound into the discussion because the two American writers were at one time the closest of allies, aesthetically speaking.[13] The antithetical

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[7] Heinrich August Winkler, *The Age of Catastrophe*, trans. Stewart Spencer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 329.

[8] A. David Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot, Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 319.

[9] Andrew John Miller, *Modernism and the Crisis of Sovereignty* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 7.

[10] Ibid.

[11] This latter view is espoused most stridently by Christopher Hitchens, who alleges that under Eliot's directorship the *Criterion* "was at best loftily indifferent to the rise of Fascism" and takes for granted Eliot's "fascist sympathies" ("How unpleasant to meet Mr. Eliot," *Nation* 263/5 [12 August 1996]: 8). In this short review of Anthony Julius's *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Hitchens goes so far as to confuse Eliot and Ezra Pound in stating that the former poet publicly supported Social Credit (the economic doctrine espoused by Major C. H. Douglas). It was Pound, of course, who became one of the keenest supporters of Social Credit and Fascism.

[12] Denis Donoghue, "Eliot's letterbox," *New Criterion* 30/3 (November 2011): 65–69.

[13] It was Pound who famously wrote in October 1914 to Harriet Monroe, editor of the esteemed Chicago little magazine *Poetry*, urging her to publish "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," the avant-garde poetic experiment that caused a sensation when it was published in the June 1915 issue of the magazine and in effect launched Eliot's career as a poet to be reckoned with (T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," *Poetry* 6/3 [June 1915]: 130–35). Moreover, without Pound's radical editorial interventions to Eliot's early drafts of *The Waste Land*, the landmark poem would have looked strikingly different (T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* [New York: Horace Liveright, 1922]). See Ezra Pound, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907–1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: New Directions, 1971), 41.

paths their politics took render the contrast all the more salient, especially given Pound's notorious Fascist commitments in the 1930s.[14] I contend further that Eliot's measured scrutiny of each study of Fascism seeks to avoid any rigid partisan commitments, even as he takes a firm stand against Fascism. Somewhere in between, we may find his cultural politics writ large. The struggle for Eliot, and his critics, is to trace a course between the Scylla and Charybdis of our being "certain of everything—relatively, and of nothing—positively," as he puts it in his dissertation on the philosopher F. H. Bradley.[15]

To return to my earlier query, just what is Eliot's purpose in the review? The *Criterion* contribution itself offers few clues. Eliot would refer to it many years later as an attempt "to find out whether there is any idea in Fascism at all."[16] However open-ended, this recollection suggests that he remained unconvinced by what he had found in Mussolini's Fascist regime in 1928. I would hazard further that the poet's earnest probing of Fascism's ideational core yields at least two other interdependent and hitherto overlooked aims: Eliot seeks to untangle Fascist politics from Fascist mythology, and he aims to warn his readers of the likelihood that Italian Fascism might morph into a pan-European movement, perhaps even spawning an English version.[17] His dissatisfaction with the studies of Fascism under review arguably stems from these concerns, both of which follow from his scepticism of the notional idea of fascism. Yet, a year earlier he had also stated that "the transformation of Italy […] has directed our attention to our own forms of government."[18] In turn, his own investment in this timely debate stems from his awareness that "politics has become too serious a matter to be left to the politicians."[19]

Eliot's political philosophy hinges on the "psychology of politics."[20] By this he means the power exerted upon the imagination by geopolitical memes, such as "Empire," "Fascism," "Democracy," "Monarchy," "Republicanism," "Communism," and so on. Nested between quotation marks, these politico-ideological labels become hollow buzzwords, mere ciphers upon which we project our pathetic "craving to believe in *something*."[21] Of these, Fascism remains the most insidious variant for Eliot because it amounts to a de facto political religion. Its apologists are even bent on presenting the movement as coextensive with Catholicism. In engaging Fascism as a psychopolitical matrix that "excites" the imagination of the body politic, Eliot anticipates Freudian pathological-psychological studies of Fascism, such as Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass*

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[14] Pound's meeting with Mussolini at the Palazzo Venezia in Rome on 30 January 1933 cemented the poet's affiliation with Italian Fascism and marked his full-fledged conversion to the dictator's cult of personality. The brief encounter would also make a lasting impression on Pound's poetry and prose (Tim Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 95–98).

[15] T.S. Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 157.

[16] Cited in A. L. Rowse, *A Cornishman Abroad* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), 262–63.

[17] Eliot's fears of the birth of English fascism would be borne out a few years later when Oswald Mosley founded the British Union of Fascists (BUF) in 1932. For thorough discussions of the British version of fascism, see Thomas E. Linehan, *British Fascism, 1918–39: Parties, Ideology, and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Kenneth Lunn and Richard C. Thurlow, eds., *British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980); and Nigel Copsey and David Renton, eds., *British Fascism, the Labour Movement and the State* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Linehan argues that the essence of British fascism "must be viewed as an organic element of *fin-de-siècle* intellectual and cultural revolt" against the principles of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution (*Parties, Ideology, and Culture*, 2–3).

[18] T.S. Eliot, "A Commentary," *Criterion* 6/5 (November 1927): 386.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 282.

[21] Ibid.; Eliot's emphasis.

Psychology of Fascism (1933).[22] For Eliot, moreover, political praxis matters little in and of itself. He is wholly unconcerned, for instance, with "the feasibility of fascism as a working program for Italy."[23] A limitation in this approach is the rather impressionistic portrait of Fascism that emerges in his review.

Yet it is also worth bearing in mind, as his notes to Madame Sosostris's dramatic monologue in *The Waste Land* typify, that he concertedly tried to justify metonymic allusiveness as a mode of procedure. His peculiar construal of the figures in Tarot cards (about which he admits he knows very little) "to suit my own convenience" may indeed serve to illustrate, in brief, his approach to politics.[24] That is, just as Eliot teases arbitrary meanings out of the Tarot for his poetic designs, so, too, he brings to the discourse of Fascism a willingness to creatively engage the movement and knock it loose from its normative foundations. To this end, he draws on his Anglo-Catholic sensibility to impeach Fascism's misappropriation of Christian orthodoxy in its neo-Pagan rites and ultranationalist myths. Eliot's poetics and politics thus form a continuum, at least insofar as both tend to resist categorical absolutes.

Eliot undoubtedly sensed the grave danger posed by Fascism, as I have suggested. By the end of 1928, it could hardly have escaped his notice that in the past few months Mussolini had outlawed all other political parties in Italy and consolidated the Fascist Grand Council as a state institution.[25] The studies of Fascism reviewed in the *Criterion* constitute some of the earliest full-length attempts to come to terms with this rising juggernaut. For Eliot, however, the five books—from across the political spectrum—fall prey to the furor that attended the discourse of Fascism. None of the writers seems able to escape its emotional vortex, being either "too close to the object" or prone to respond with the "proper jerk."[26] Nor do the studies explore the mythico-political hybridity of the Italian political experiment. Eliot's review aims to synthesize and move beyond the extreme positions in interwar political debate. Broadly speaking, Eliot lays bare Fascism's Machiavellian political philosophy and its strategic alliance with the Church. More important, the review also positions him firmly against Fascist ideology and its cultic *mussolinismo* (Mussolini-worship), while cautiously staking out his royalist politics. Eliot submits a sophisticated, if aloof, deconstruction of Fascist totalitarianism, interrogating its neo-Pagan, *en masse* idolization of Mussolini in a heady brew of politics, culture, and religion.

Hence Eliot's self-styled naïveté—he dubs himself a "political ignoramus"[27]—seems a tad coy. He is a far savvier political theorist than he lets on here and elsewhere.[28] Granted, it might

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[22] Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, trans. Theodore P. Wolfe (New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1946).

[23] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 287.

[24] The passage I have in mind reads, "I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience. The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, *fits my purpose* in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V. The Phoenician Sailor and the Merchant appear later; also the 'crowds of people', and Death by Water is executed in Part IV. The Man with Three Staves (an authentic member of the Tarot pack) I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself" (T.S. Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose*, ed. Lawrence S. Rainey [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006], 71, my emphasis).

[25] Giuseppe Finaldi, *Mussolini and Italian Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 60.

[26] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 281–82.

[27] Ibid., 283.

[28] Despite the increasing focus on politico-economic discourse in the *Criterion* from 1925 onwards, as late as 1934, Eliot would disclose his insecurity about extra-literary affairs: "I am largely interested in subjects which I do not yet

be reasonable to imagine that his caginess on this hot-button issue is designed as an exit strategy to allow him safe passage back to his role as a celebrated poet and editor. Indeed, he begins the review as a self-professed unwilling spokesperson: "I am, I suppose, a typical representative of the British and American public in the extent of my knowledge and ignorance of Fascism in Italy," he submits.[29] We soon learn, however, that not only has he evidently read—very closely—the five books under review, but he has also kept in touch with friends living in Italy and has even paid one or two visits to that country "under the present regime."[30] He also seems to know at least enough to rebuff the "biased" anti-Fascist musings of H. G. Wells, a one-time Labour candidate for Parliament and member of the Fabian Society. He is even confident enough to challenge the "accumulations of facts" about Fascism by Sir Percival Phillips, the special correspondent for the *Daily Mail* in Italy.[31] Eliot's knowledge of Fascism hardly seems "typical."

It is also worth noting that Eliot had already repudiated Fascism in his *New Criterion* "Commentary" of April 1926. In the earlier number, he had affirmed that:

> The old Roman Empire is an [*sic*] European idea; the new Roman Empire is an Italian idea, and the two must be kept distinct. […] The general idea is found in the continuity of the impulse of Rome to the present day. It suggests Authority and Tradition, certainly, but Authority and Tradition (especially the latter) do not necessarily suggest Signor Mussolini. It is an idea which comprehends Hooker and Laud as much as (or to some of us more than) it implies St Ignatius or Cardinal Newman. It is in fact the European idea—the idea of a common culture of western Europe.[32]

That Eliot invokes Church leaders explicitly, in lieu of Mussolini, bears witness to the religious nature of his longing for a return to tradition and authority. In this, as Dominic Manganiello has shown, Eliot was especially indebted to "Dante's conviction of the special providential mission assigned to the Holy Roman Empire as the instrument of world order and peace."[33] The Dantean-Catholic slant in Eliot's political thought no doubt predisposed him to harbor ecclesiastical—though not theocratic—principles of governance. But it was his baptism into the Church of England in January 1927 that gave a local habitation and a name to his longstanding belief in the idea of European Christendom. Eliot's privileging of Richard Hooker and William Laud, the venerable Church of England theologians, anticipates his public testimony of faith less than a year later. The reference may also encode a political subtext, given Laud's steadfast support of royal absolutism in political and ecclesiastical matters in the court of Charles I. That the Archbishop of Canterbury eventually lost his head on the block in 1645 need not concern us here, except perhaps to underscore the kindlier fate Eliot has met for his alleged fantasy of

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know very much about: theology, politics, economics, and education" (T.S. Eliot, "The Problem of Education," *Harvard Advocate* 121 [September 1934]: 11).

[29] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 280.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Phillips also penned one of the earliest pro-Fascist studies published in England: Percival Phillips, *The Red Dragon and the Black Shirts: How Fascist Italy Found Her Soul. The True Story of the Fascisti Movement* (London: Carmelite House, 1923).

[32] T.S. Eliot, "A Commentary," *New Criterion* 4/2 (April 1926): 222. As Donald Gallup notes, the change in the title of the periodical was temporary, with only the issues from January 1926 through January 1927 bearing the title *New Criterion* (*T. S. Eliot: A Bibliography* [New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969], 14).

[33] Dominic Manganiello, *T. S. Eliot and Dante* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1989), 143.

restoring the political power of the Church. In the event, the Christian inflection of his cultural-political thought could brook neither the narrow nationalism nor the strong-arm tactics of totalitarian politics. It is no less significant that Eliot exposed the deep-rooted radicalism of the *movimento fascista* long before it became fashionable, or necessary, to do so.

Eliot's stern disavowal of Fascism suggests that he had staked a much more clearly defined political stance at this juncture than fellow American poet Pound, who in 1924 had taken up residence in Rapallo, the seaside town on the Italian Riviera. It was only well into the Great Depression that Pound's politics emerged out of the ferment of Major Clifford H. Douglas's Social Credit to find ideal expression in Fascism. Eliot's commitment to tradition and orthodoxy left out the need for a strongman or charismatic leader, the fascist minimum. In this, he remained uncompromising. In 1933, he would flatly refuse to serialize in the *Criterion* Pound's prose polemic, *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*.[34] He would also complain about its gnomic allusions in a January 1934 letter to Pound.[35] Where Eliot envisions Christianity as an ethico-moral bulwark against the chaos of modernity, Pound assembles a pantheon of political heroes. In *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, he associates the Duce with Dante, Confucius, and Jefferson, hailing Mussolini's construction of the Via dell'Impero (present-day Via dei Fori Imperiali) as an act of the "WILL [*VOLONTÀ*]."[36] It is hard to fathom a sharper contrast to Eliot's allegiance to a conservative Christian culture.

Eliot remained sceptical of totalitarian apparatuses, or for that matter of politics itself. His letter of April 1928 to the editor of *The Nation & Athenaeum* outlines the *Criterion*'s position in a way that also typifies his aversion to sectarian politics. "*The Criterion* is not a 'school,'" he affirms, "but a meeting place for writers, some of whom, certainly, have much in common; but what they have in common is not a theory or a dogma."[37] Similarly, as he notes in the review under scrutiny, he is "interested in political ideas, but not in politics."[38] The Fascist revolution, on the other hand, "began with no 'ideas' at all."[39] History bears out Eliot's indictment. The amorphous, proto-fascist animus that grew out of the political and social ferment of post-unification Italy would only coalesce into a *fascio* under the charismatic leadership of Mussolini.

Backed by the belligerent *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* he founded in 1919, the Duce deftly exploited the power vacuum and ideological schisms left in the wake of the Great War. Without racial prohibitions to restrict Fascist affiliation, membership remained open to virtually anyone until 1938.[40] On the surface, the Fascist dream of a second Risorgimento would seem to lend itself seamlessly to modernist hankerings for a new cultural and political age. As early as 1913, in "Patria Mia," Pound alluded to the humanist nationalism and literary movement that led to the unification of Italy in 1861 by calling his hope for a renaissance in America a

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[34] Ezra Pound, *Jefferson and/or Mussolini: L'Idea Statale; Fascism, as I Have Seen It* (London: Stanley Nott, 1935).
[35] Eliot was particularly nonplussed by Pound's references to Martin Van Buren, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson, which in his view would hardly excite but a few English readers (Eliot to Pound, 12 January 1934, Ezra Pound Papers, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University).
[36] Pound, *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, 9.
[37] T.S. Eliot, *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden, vol. 3, *1926–1927* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 133.
[38] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 281.
[39] Ibid., 284.
[40] Indeed, Mussolini enjoyed the financial support of Jewish industrialists, held a long-term relationship with his Jewish mistress and author of his first authorized biography, Margherita Sarfatti, and around 200 Jews joined his March on Rome in October 1922, which in effect began the *Era Fascista* (Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* [New York: Knopf, 2004], 9).

"Risorgimento."[41] While it might be trite to trace crypto-fascist tendencies in Pound's early cultural politics, it would not be too much to say that his early slogans already exhibit the same kind of sweeping logic that fascist propaganda would exploit with mass-scale success. For Pound, a Risorgimento signifies "liberations from ideas, from stupidities, from conditions and from tyrannies of wealth or of army."[42] Eliot, however, kept such nostrums at bay. Nor would he endorse Pound's deification of Mussolini as *polumetis*, a "resourceful" Homeric hero bringing forth a litany of "liberations."[43] Instead, Eliot saw the spiritual wasteland of the years between the world wars as clearing the stage for a new civilization to be built upon the ruins of the old. In a December 1925 letter to Herbert Read, Eliot reflects on a kind of "disintegration, which, WHEN the world has crystallized for another moment into a new order, can be treated as a form of generation; but which the historian at the present time, who does not anticipate, must regard partly as the history of corruption."[44] There is to my knowledge no evidence to suggest that Eliot thought even for a moment that Fascism might compose this "new order." In the *Times Literary Supplement* of 23 August 1957, he goes so far as to state explicitly that his review of 1928 "certainly gives no ground" for the charge of his alleged sympathy to Fascism.[45] Specious, too, is Rossell Hope Robbins's erstwhile branding of Eliot's conservative religio-politics as "clerico-Fascist."[46]

The fraught dialectic between political idea and political praxis in Fascism informs Eliot's suspicions of the protean Italian political experiment. He held the notion that the much-publicized differences between political parties are illusory, "a mere elaborate façade" for ad hoc beliefs.[47] In the same issue of the *Criterion*, W. A. Thorpe's review of Bertrand Russell's *Sceptical Essays* echoes Eliot's idea, affirming that "government is illogical in a double sense; its materials cannot be defined, and though it begin as calculation, beliefs will creep in ere it end in action."[48] That political beliefs can mimic religious beliefs to produce a kind of collective mystification suggests for Eliot a "human craving to believe in *something*," a condition that is "pathetic, when not tragic; and always, at the same time, comic."[49] Anticipating his later views on Fascism, Eliot had expressed the same idea in his review of T. E. Hulme's 1914 translation of Georges Sorel's *Réflexions sur la violence* (1908). Eliot rails against "the scepticism of the present, the scepticism of Sorel […] a torturing vacuity which has developed the craving for belief," itself a legacy of the philosophy of history of Ernest Renan and Henri Bergson.[50] The fascist meme replicates in this interzone of human consciousness, finding (or fabricating) a

[41] Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909–1965*, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), 112.
[42] Ibid. In a letter to Harriet Monroe, 18 August 1912, Pound expresses a clear sense of urgency: "Any agonizing that tends to hurry what I believe in the end to be inevitable, our American Risorgimento, is dear to me. That awakening will make the Italian Renaissance look like a tempest in a teapot! The force we have, and the impulse, but the guiding sense, the discrimination in applying the force, we must wait and strive for" (Pound, *Selected Letters*, 10).
[43] Pound thought of Mussolini and the third U.S. President, Thomas Jefferson, as *polumetis*, or "many-minded," as he puts it in *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (9). The Greek epithet was used by Homer for Odysseus, the wily hero of the *Odyssey*.
[44] T.S. Eliot, *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton, vol. 2, *1923–1925* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 798.
[45] Quoted in Roger Kojecký, *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), 12.
[46] Rossell Hope Robbins, *The T. S. Eliot Myth* (New York: H. Schuman, 1951), 46.
[47] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 288.
[48] W.A. Thorpe, Review of "Bertrand Russell, *Sceptical Essays* (1928)," in *Criterion* 8/31 (December 1928): 333.
[49] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 282 (Eliot's emphasis).
[50] T.S. Eliot, Review of "Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (1908)," in *The Monist* 27/3 (July 1917): 478.

habitat in nationalist creeds and self-made historical mythologies. As Peter Dale Scott observes, unlike Pound, W. B. Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, and Wyndham Lewis, "Eliot never warmed to [Fascism,] a movement that was (in his eyes) so demotic, chauvinist, anti-intellectual, intolerant, and ultimately pagan."[51] Accordingly, Eliot's review of the five contemporary studies of Fascism grudgingly accords the movement its much-vaunted kinship with early Rome, "but before Christianity."[52] As we shall see, that is a key distinction for Eliot.

In *The Fascist Dictatorship in Italy*, the first anti-Fascist book reviewed by Eliot, Gaetano Salvemini portrays the Italian proto-fascist Christian Democratic Party as having paved the way for a "new religion—the 'national faith.'"[53] He also blames the party for diminishing the Socialists' parliamentary gains in the elections of 1919. Had it not been for the ultra-nationalist support of these self-appointed "National Catholics," Salvemini argues, the Fascist party might well have fizzled out of existence, never moving past the revolutionary syndicalism of the first pre-war *fasci* and the reckless violence of *squadristi* gangs. Telescoping Salvemini's thesis, Eliot holds that "many political beliefs are substitutes for religious beliefs."[54] Fascism actively sought a rapprochement with the Church. The Lateran Concordat signed by Cardinal Pietro Gasparri and Mussolini in 1929 secured the autonomy of the Holy See of Rome and the Fascist movement's conciliatory nod to the power of the Church.[55] Mussolini pandered to religious faith, declaring that "Fascism respects the God of ascetics, saints, and heroes, and it also respects God as conceived by the ingenuous and primitive heart of the people."[56] But he arrives at this mollifying stance only after essentializing Fascism as the expression of "the whole group ethnically moulded by natural and historical conditions into a nation, advancing, as one conscience and one will, along the self-same line of development and spiritual formation."[57] However strongly Eliot subscribed to the idea of ethnic, cultural, and spiritual homogeneity—an idea he would explore at length in his controversial Page-Barbour lectures[58]—he could allow neither the affective-communal suppression of individuality nor the neo-Pagan ideology that underlay Fascism.

Furthermore, for Eliot the psychology of twentieth-century politics—be it Fascist, Bolshevik, democratic, or otherwise—is predicated on pseudo-religious ideologies and mythical histories. Political creeds illegitimately fill the void left by the loss of religious faith, few people being "sufficiently civilized to afford atheism."[59] Mass political rallies create powerful simulacra of religious practice and experience. Max Weber's term for the Greek word encoding the Christian concept of grace, "charisma," illustrates the German Führer's and the Duce's "mysterious direct communication with the *Volk* or *razza* that needs no mediation by priests or party chieftains."[60] Eliot thus seems less concerned with the localized and limited agency of

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[51] Peter Dale Scott, "The Social Critic and His Discontents," in *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David A. Moody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 65.
[52] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 286.
[53] Salvemini, *The Fascist Dictatorship*, 23.
[54] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 282.
[55] Emma Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican: Pope Pius XI and the Speech that Was Never Made*, trans. Carl Ipsen (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 37–39. As Fattorini aptly notes, the Lateran Treaties also served to legitimate Fascist rule and strengthen its nationalism, notwithstanding its significant political and financial concessions to the Vatican.
[56] Benito Mussolini, *Fascism: Doctrine and Institutions* (Rome: Ardita, 1935), 30.
[57] Ibid., 12.
[58] Published in 1934 under the title *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934).
[59] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 283.
[60] Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 126.

fascist politics than with the mass appeal of its ecstatic rituals. Jewel Spears Brooker notes (with Eliotic overtones of her own) that "for millions of people, the mythic vacuum was filled by political theories, especially when a prophet or savior figure like Mussolini, Stalin, or Hitler did the preaching."[61] Italian Fascism synthetized its heroic myths and nostalgia for the imperial glory of Augustan Rome into a political theology: *mussolinismo*, the cult of Mussolini. For Eliot, this form of hero-worship entails a grotesque caricature of religious faith and liturgy. Such transgressive interface between the sacred and the profane offended his idea of religion as "a scheme, a system of ideas, an abstraction, which allows one to make sense of the universe and to maintain values," as Brooker argues.[62] Fascism, too, as Aline Lion affirms in *The Pedigree of Fascism*, her book reviewed by Eliot, is "a doctrine, a system, and as such is philosophy expressing itself in history."[63] She traces a historiography of Fascist philosophy as a synthesis of Roman traditions and the historical idealism of Vico, Croce, Gentile, and Mussolini. But insofar as it offered a "total reconciliation of the nagging contradictions of modern society,"[64] Fascism violated Eliot's conception of order and hierarchy. In 1928, his concern with church-state separation informed his anxious reading of Fascism's mythopoeic origins and violent radicalism. Roger Griffin, a historian of Fascism, sees the totalitarian experiment as stemming from an act of idealizing abstraction (or ideal type) with a mythic core containing "the vision of the (perceived) crisis of the nation as betokening the birth-pangs of a new order."[65] According to this view, Fascism crystallized an image of the national community, both purged and rejuvenated, rising like a phoenix from the ashes of a morally bankrupt and decadent state system and culture. Griffin explains the groundwork of this generic myth-image: "The term 'myth' here draws attention, not to the utopianism, irrationalism, or sheer madness of the claim it makes to interpret contemporary reality, but to its power to unleash strong affective energies through the evocative force of the image or vision of reality it contains for those susceptible to it."[66] The iconography of Fascism teemed with references to the military victories and splendor of the Roman Empire while celebrating Mussolini's Italy as a modern-day Pax Augustea. Jeffrey Schnapp notes, moreover, that "Fascism required an aesthetic *overproduction*—a surfeit of fascist signs, images, slogans, books, and buildings—to compensate for, fill in, and cover up its forever unstable ideological core."[67] Fascism sought stability by investing its political propaganda and semiotics with mythico-heroic images of Italy's imperial past in a tireless campaign of self-legitimation. The movement enlisted a populist ultranationalist myth that Griffin credibly terms "palingenetic," palingenesis literally meaning "backward birth," from the Greek *palin* ("again, anew, back") and the Latin "genesis." It is thus hardly surprising that Eliot's review, written a relatively short time after his baptism into the Anglo-Catholic Church in 1927, should rail against the quasi-religious theatrics of the Fascist creed. Incidentally, baptism itself would provide for Eliot a sanctioned form of palingenetic rite. The baptized person is sent back, as it were, to their prenatal state of innocence.

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[61] Jewel Spears Brooker, *The Placing of T. S. Eliot* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 13.
[62] Ibid., 12.
[63] Lion, *The Pedigree of Fascism*, 4.
[64] Michael North, *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 14.
[65] Roger Griffin, "Introduction," in *Fascism*, ed. R. Griffin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Jeffrey Schnapp, "Epic Demonstrations, Fascist Modernity, and the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution," in *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*, ed. Richard Joseph Golsan (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992), 3, Schnapp's emphasis.

In the early 1900s, French revolutionary social philosopher Georges Sorel spoke of "myths" that would stem *fin-de-siècle* decadence. Sorel's *Réflexions sur la violence* became essential reading for any fascist worth his or her bootstraps. Wyndham Lewis discusses Hulme's translated edition approvingly in *The Art of Being Ruled* and devotes an entire, if ambivalent, chapter to Sorel.[68] Beyond Eliot's aforementioned review of Hulme's translation, he had also taught *Reflections* the previous year. Though Eliot guardedly approved of Sorel's longing for "a narrow, intolerant, creative society with sharp divisions," he deplored the "devious ways" the French Royalist sought to achieve it, among these the "Bergsonian 'myth'" of proletarian strike.[69] As early as 1916, as Michael North has shown, Eliot "saw Sorel as a reactionary, rejoining violently 'against bourgeois socialism.'"[70] Central to Sorel's radical politics was the idea that only "myths" could bring about revolutionary consciousness in the working class. "He saw these as simple verbal formulae," Roger Eatwell writes, "that underpinned social solidarity by crystallizing fundamental beliefs […] The point was to offer an inspiring myth, which would raise working-class consciousness and willingness to take action."[71] This also entailed the production and circulation of manufactured myths. Christianity, the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution encoded for Sorel the Nietzschean-revolutionary power of such myths. Their falsity, or failure to be fully actualized, interfered not at all with their effectiveness as historical forces.

Mussolini was a disciple of Sorel, as was J. S. Barnes, Secretary General of the International Centre of Fascist Studies at Lausanne. Barnes goes so far as to call Sorel a "prophet" in his book.[72] Meanwhile, even Luigi Sturzo, a staunch anti-Sorelian, charges that Italian Socialists have received Sorel "more as a faith than as a science."[73] Sorel and Mussolini referred often to Nietzsche and Gustave Le Bon, whose *Psychologie des foules* [*Psychology of Crowds*] anticipated Sorel's theory of epochal myths.[74] Mussolini's fascist *squadristi* acted upon Sorel's radical syndicalist theories. Sorel in essence rejected the program of gradual socialist reform that the Fabians espoused. In its stead, he adopted Nietzsche's master and slave morality as a justification of proletarian violence, casting off the Hegelian master-slave dialectic because the slave occupies in it a privileged position. Fascist aesthetic discourse reflected the movement's ideological polarities: revolution and reaction, nihilism and idealism, modernism and antimodernism.[75]

Eliot suggests that all political movements, however international in scope, essentially stem from local realities. "The Russian Revolution seen from a distance," he writes, taking a page

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[68] Lewis gives qualified praise to Sorel, situating the latter as "the key to all contemporary political thought" but also flagging his "highly unstable and equivocal figure" (Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled* [London: Chatto and Windus, 1926], 119). Pitting Sorel against conservative Charles Péguy, Lewis finds Sorel's preoccupation with "the production of the *hero*, and of the *heroic*" in light of his own experience in the Great War "deeply romantic, and by that I understand untrue. A truer part of him, as I see it, you get in his analysis of progress and ideas about 'class'" (ibid., 121–22).

[69] Eliot, Review of "*Reflections on Violence*," 478.

[70] Michael North, "Eliot, Lukács, and the Politics of Modernism," in *T.S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 170–71.

[71] Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995), 10–11.

[72] Barnes, *The Universal Aspects of Fascism*, 39.

[73] Sturzo, *Italy and Fascism*, 81.

[74] Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules* (Paris: Alcan, 1895).

[75] For a productive interdisciplinary exploration of proto-fascist and fascist aesthetic discourses, cultural policy, and artistic production, see the collection of critical essays, Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff, eds., *Fascist Visions*: *Art and Ideology in France and Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

straight out of Salvemini's book, "appears far more Russian than revolutionary; possibly the fascist revolution is more Italian than fascist."[76] Hence, he also moves beyond Salvemini's anti-Fascist philippic by suggesting that the Russian and Italian revolutions may be ethnically based, rather than, strictly speaking, revolutionary. He seeks, in short, to uncover the "purely local" essence of Italian Fascism. It is in this localized ethnographic matrix, I would argue, that we must place his concern with Fascism as an *ideational* totalitarian construct, rather than as a web of cultural and political practices.

Of the five books reviewed, Sturzo's *Italy and Fascism* aligns itself most closely with Eliot's own take on Fascism. Don Sturzo, a Catholic priest and leader of the *Partito Popolare*, a Wilsonian party founded in 1919, submits that "instinct drives Fascism to install a *régime* of violence, to become the total and sole expression of the country."[77] Eliot had spoken in strikingly similar Social Darwinian-Bergsonian terms about the nineteenth-century origins of the "romantic exaltation of herd instinct, or race" in his 1928 review of Julien Benda's *The Treason of the Intellectuals*.[78] For Sturzo, as for Eliot, "the problem is no longer political, but psychological."[79] That being so, Eliot dreaded the spread of Fascism's aestheticized brand of neo-Pagan mythology and mass politics, since its *instinctual* basis might easily be adapted to local realities elsewhere. The Fascist experiment, as he puts it, "may infect the whole of Europe as Parliamentarism infected it in the nineteenth century."[80] Eliot seems never to have abandoned the notion that the alternatives facing the West were starkly sectarian. In *The Idea of a Christian Society*—this time with Hitler in mind—he would likewise parlay the Manichean choice between "the formation of a new Christian culture or the acceptance of a pagan one."[81]

Sturzo situates the political climate that enabled the rise of Fascism in the nationalistic liberalism fostered in the *Risorgimento*, the series of political and military events that resulted in a unified kingdom of Italy in 1861. He dates the 1846 election to the Papal throne of Pius IX, a liberal pope, as consolidating the ideal of Italian nationalism. Speaking of the same "wave of enthusiasm" that Eliot fears in the spread of the cultic Fascist *mythos*, Sturzo argues that "the ferment of the new ideas was mingled with the most ill-assorted sentiments; but, in the meantime, the conviction was growing among the people that the national ideals could in some way be realized."[82] Ultranationalism, however, would find ideal expression not in Catholicism but in Socialism. Sturzo sees early Fascism as nothing more than "Socialism disguised under a cloak of victory and of national interests," while Socialism itself signifies "a disguised Bolshevism under a cloak of war neutralism and the Workers' International."[83] He also links the "economic dictatorship" of Socialism in Italy to the proto-fascist movement toward political

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[76] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 281. Cf. Salvemini: "A revolution of the Communist type was and is, technically speaking, impossible in Italy" (*Fascist Dictatorship*, 19).
[77] Sturzo, *Italy and Fascism*, 220.
[78] Julien Benda, *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, trans. Richard Aldington (New York: Norton, 1969). In his review, Eliot adopts the French philosopher's anti-Romantic rationalism in his analysis of the adverse effects of the exploitation of Romantic ideals across the political spectrum: "It is to be observed of the nineteenth century that a reaction against romantic individualism, liberalism, humanitarianism, sometimes leads to a romantic exaltation of herd instinct, or race […] or tradition and the soil, etc., whilst on the other hand the reaction against romantic collectivism (including all forms of communism, fascism, etc.) may just as well lead straight to a romantic individualism" (T.S. Eliot, "The Idealism of Julien Benda," *Cambridge Review* 49 [6 June 1928]: 486).
[79] Sturzo, *Italy and Fascism*, 231.
[80] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 281.
[81] T.S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939), 122.
[82] Sturzo, *Italy and Fascism*, 9.
[83] Ibid., 101.

dictatorship.[84] Eliot's portrayal of the proto-fascist movements then vying for power as offshoots of a home-grown "advanced socialism"[85] both cribs from Sturzo's political economy and looks to supplement it. Echoed in Eliot's discourse of Fascism is Sturzo's conclusion that Italy, in dread of Bolshevism in 1922, "became a prey to suggestion, to unreasoning fear and unreasoning hope."[86] In unpacking the psychology of fascist mass politics, Eliot goes even further. He indicts Fascism's draconian exploitation of the twentieth-century's "craving for a regime which will relieve us of thought and at the same time give us excitement and military salutes," a symptom of the decay of liberalism and its ensuing "spiritual anemia."[87] While his thought evidently intersects with Salvemini's and Sturzo's, Eliot still finds their judgment suspect. The Italian dissidents have "suffered too much" under Fascism, especially Salvemini.[88] Perhaps owing to Salvemini's history as a suffragist and political activist in the Italian Socialist Party, Eliot goes so far as to impugn him as "an English liberal in culture."[89]

Be that as it may, Eliot is far more perturbed by the pro-Fascist polemics of Barnes, Lion, and Villari, the last of whom Salvemini dubs "the propagandist of the Fascist Government in England."[90] In a lengthy commentary, Salvemini even uses the opportunity to thrash Villari's earlier tribute to Fascism, *The Awakening of Italy: The Fascista Regeneration*,[91] for misrepresenting the role of Anarchists, Communists, and Socialists in "the post-[World War I] troubles."[92] Villari's subsequent study of Fascism confirms Eliot's loathing for the rough-hewn ideas of Mussolini. Villari alleges that the Italian experiment, unlike other historical movements in the country, had no "literary origin."[93] Rather, its theory evolved from practice. He situates the beginnings of the Fascist experiment in post-war Milan on 23 March 1919 with the creation of Mussolini's paramilitary *Fasci di combattimento*, a motley crew of war veterans, revolutionary syndicalists, and Futurists.[94] Zeev Sternhell, the eminent scholar of European fascism, locates the rise of Fascism even earlier, in the pro-war agitations carried out by the proto-fascist Revolutionary Fascio for Internationalist Action in 1914.[95] Regardless of origins, for Eliot, Fascism aestheticized and sublimated violence and tyranny for mass consumption. He thus prefigures the aestheticization of politics that Walter Benjamin would famously ally to the logic of fascism.[96] Fascism's stylized rituals re-enacted the Sorelian myths of national community and ethnic homologies, masking a virulent political radicalism.

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[84] Ibid., 86.
[85] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 284.
[86] Sturzo, *Italy and Fascism*, 108.
[87] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 288.
[88] Ibid., 280.
[89] Ibid., 280–81. Following his arrest in 1925 for leading anti-Fascist resistance in Italy, Salvemini fled the country. While in exile in England, however, he quickly found opponents, including an Italian professor at Oxford, who attempted to block a series of lectures that Salvemini eventually delivered in February 1926 on "The Rise of Fascism." See Charles L. Killinger, *Gaetano Salvemini: A Biography* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), 65, 208. In a clear bid to prevent precisely such hostile reception, Gilbert Murray, a Whig activist and professor of Greek at the University of Glasgow, writes in his preface to *Italy and Fascism* that Sturzo's tone is that "of a dispassionate and Christian philosopher. There is no touch of the embittered exile" (v).
[90] Salvemini, *Fascist Dictatorship*, 41.
[91] Luigi Villari, *The Awakening of Italy: The Fascista Regeneration* (London: Methuen & Company, 1924).
[92] Salvemini, *Fascist Dictatorship*, 43.
[93] Villari, *The Fascist Experiment*, 35.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder, and Maia Ashéri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 175.
[96] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Random House, 1968), 241.

Lion's essentialist reading of Fascism as "the expression of the national consciousness of Italy"[97] comports with Eliot's own. But the two differ fundamentally, otherwise. In doubting the affinity Lion posits between "the action of Mussolini and the thought of Croce and Gentile,"[98] Eliot's argument uncannily anticipates current scholarship. It is now beyond doubt, for instance, that Mussolini's lengthy article, "Fascismo," published in the *Treccani* encyclopedia, was ghost-written or "fundamentally inspired" by Gentile, as Umberto Eco reveals.[99] Eco also notes that the article "reflected a late-Hegelian notion of the 'ethical and absolute state' that Mussolini never completely realized. Mussolini had no philosophy: all he had was rhetoric."[100] Croce, with whom Eliot dined in Paris in 1920,[101] dropped his initial support of Mussolini in 1924 and eventually coined the term "*onagrocrazia*" ("onagrocracy," or "government by braying asses") to designate the Fascist regime.[102] Eliot lays the groundwork for Eco in stating that "the Duce is a politician rather than a political theorist."[103] Yet it was sheer rhetoric, allied with militarism, ultranationalism, pageantry, folklore, and myth—Eco's "tangle of contradictions"[104]—that positioned Fascism as the first credible alternative to Communism, Fascism's "enemy twin."[105] Worrisomely in 1928, this was an alternative that Eliot saw as on the brink of spilling beyond the borders of the Mediterranean peninsula.

Of the five books reviewed, Barnes's *Universal Aspects of Fascism* proves to be the most vexing for Eliot. Barnes seeks to align the political philosophy of Fascism with Catholic-Thomistic philosophy and social thought. He defines Fascism as a movement founded upon "the main current of traditions that have formed our European civilization, traditions created by Rome, first by the Empire and subsequently by the Catholic Church."[106] This is eerily reminiscent of Eliot's conception of the renewal of the cultural heritage in his influential essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent."[107] Moving beyond Villari and Lion, Barnes envisions the Fascist experiment as a global phenomenon. For Barnes, the dictatorial nature of Italian Fascism is a mere "accident of history," owing to the "Michael-Angelesque eloquence, which together with [Mussolini's] exuberant personal magnetism is of the stuff that leads men and multitudes."[108] That his fulsome portrait of Mussolini impressed the dictator can be gleaned from the fact that the Duce himself wrote (or at least signed) the preface. Mussolini clearly saw the book as a proselytizing tool for Fascism. In a send-off wishing for it "the very best success among the English public," he also warns "statesmen to convince themselves that it is impossible

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[97] Lion, *Pedigree of Fascism*, 10.
[98] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 285.
[99] Umberto Eco, *Five Moral Pieces*, trans. Alastair McEwen (New York: Harcourt, 2001), 71.
[100] Ibid. Cf. Camillo Pellizzi's argument in *Problemi e realtà del Fascismo* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1924) that "within the postwar setting, fascism was the sole movement that not only had recourse to violence but also systematically integrated violence into a highly distinct 'national rhetoric,'" quoted in *A Primer of Italian Fascism*, ed. Jeffrey T. Schnapp, trans. Olivia E. Sears, Maria Galli Stampino, and Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 95.
[101] See Eliot's letter to Mary Hutchinson, 22 September 1920, in *Letters of T. S. Eliot*, 3:502.
[102] Denis Mack Smith, "Benedetto Croce: History and Politics," *Journal of Contemporary History* 8/1 (January 1973): 47.
[103] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 283.
[104] Eco, *Five Moral Pieces*, 73.
[105] Schnapp, "Epic Demonstrations," 3.
[106] Barnes, *Universal Aspects of Fascism*, 39.
[107] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent I," *Egoist* 6/4 (September 1919): 54–55; "Tradition and the Individual Talent II-III," *Egoist* 6/5 (December 1919): 72–73.
[108] Barnes, *Universal Aspects of Fascism*, 25–26.

to have a foreign policy if they ignore Fascism."[109] Mussolini prescribes Fascism as a panacea "to those peoples who have experienced and are tired of Demo-Liberal rule and of the conventional lies attached thereto."[110] Wary of such cant, Eliot nonetheless felt much the same way about the alleged bankruptcy, as Barnes puts it, of "liberal statecraft" and the need for "independent moral authority."[111] Hulme, Pound, Lewis, and many other modernists shared similar views. Significantly, however, Eliot strongly rebuffs the Catholic conception of the State espoused by Barnes for being "ultimately theocratic."[112] In its Napoleonic concordat with Mussolini, Eliot cautions, the Vatican might find itself under the yoke of Erastian forces, that is, yielding its tradition-bound ecclesiastical authority to the whims of secular power.

Given such perils, Eliot sees no reason why the Church should swallow Fascism, especially when "the *Action Française* is spewed out."[113] Here he alludes to the fact that in 1926, the Vatican put the reactionary, antirepublican political movement in France, along with books by its leader, poet-critic Charles Maurras, on the Index.[114] Eliot finds Maurrasian politics closer kin to British politics than Fascism. Indeed, Maurras maintained that only the monarchy and the church could keep France together.[115] In contrast to the *Action Française*'s program of decentralization and royalism, in the ideal fascist polity the king occupies a nominal position, with de facto legislative powers assigned to the Prime Minister. Eliot's "exclusionary 'tradition,'" Peter Dale Scott notes, owed much to the "'integral nationalism' of Charles Maurras and l'Action Française,"[116] a review that stressed the supremacy of the state. Going further, Kenneth Asher argues that Eliot inherited the political vision that inflects his poetry and prose chiefly from Maurras.[117] His commitment to the French thinker did run deep, though perhaps not as deep as Asher claims. It can be traced at least as far back as 1911, when Eliot read Maurras's apologia for French neoclassicism, *L'Avenir de l'intelligence*.[118] Eliot would continue to defend him in the pages of the *Criterion* and would go so far as to dedicate his important 1929 essay on Dante to Maurras.[119] It is with a Dantean accent, too, that he portrays Maurras in 1948 as "a sort of Virgil who led us to the gates of the temple."[120] The tribute is all the more consequential in light of the fact that Maurras was under arrest for actively supporting the Vichy regime of Henri-Philippe Pétain in Nazi-occupied France during the Second World War. Yet, it is not too far-fetched to say that Maurras stood as a buffer between Eliot and Fascism. Eliot suggests as much in his 1928 review. Most tellingly, he reveals that "most of the concepts which might have attracted me in

[109] Ibid., XXI.
[110] Ibid., XIX.
[111] Ibid., 63, 130; cf. Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 285.
[112] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 286; cf. Barnes: "Fascism has formally recognised the Catholic religion as the Religion of the State in Italy, and has thereby chosen well, not only because it is the Religion of the vast majority of Italians; not only because the Catholic tradition is part of the very soul of Italy and, given the historical antecedents of Fascism, leaves Fascism really no alternative choice; but because the Catholic Religion is perhaps the only Religion that preserves *in every sense* its complete independence of State authority" (*Universal Aspects of Fascism*, 103; Barnes's emphasis).
[113] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 286.
[114] Lucia Ceci, *The Vatican and Mussolini's Italy*, trans. Peter Spring (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 129.
[115] C. K. Stead, *Pound, Yeats, Eliot, and the Modernist Movement* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 197.
[116] Scott, "The Social Critic," 63. Scott is quick to caution, however, that Eliot leaned even more toward the "vision of a united, federal, Catholic Europe" of French Catholic thinkers Henri Massis and Jacques Maritain (ibid., 65).
[117] Kenneth Asher, *T. S. Eliot and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2–3, 53–59.
[118] Leon Surette, *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia: Literary Modernism and Politics* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2011), 165–68.
[119] Asher, *T. S. Eliot and Ideology*, 59.
[120] T.S. Eliot, "L'Hommage de l'étranger," *Aspects de la France et du Monde* 2 (April 1948): 6.

fascism I seem already to have found, in a more digestible form, in the work of Charles Maurras."[121] Earlier that same year, he had fended off attacks on the classical humanism of Maurras by a Roman Catholic polemicist, Leo Ward. Key to Eliot's riposte, for my purposes, is his belief that only an ethos stemming from the study of Maurras could preserve England "from a sentimental Anglo-Fascism."[122]

Lest we read too much into Eliot's endorsement of Maurras, however, it is worth noting that as early as 1919, Eliot already had denounced his "intemperate and fanatical spirit" and in a letter to Lord Halifax of October 1927, he partly echoed Pope Pius XI's condemnation of Maurras.[123] The last year Eliot would mention Maurras in the *Criterion* was 1928. In "The Literature of Politics," a lecture he gave to the London Conservative Union in 1955, even as he nods to the late controversial thinker with admiration and respect, Eliot categorically declares that "some of [Maurras's] views were exasperating and some deplorable."[124] Hence, while Maurrassian classicism left an indelible mark on Eliot, it did so only up to a point. His concept of a Christian society and cultural theory would go well beyond the French thinker. Shun'ichi Takayanagi has recently traced stronger influences on Eliot's political ideas to S. T. Coleridge, F. H. Bradley, Christopher Dawson, and Jacques Maritain.[125] Eliot would continue to retreat from his earlier Maurrasianism. While Maurras's royalists borrowed Sorelian-fascist tactics with riots and demonstrations, leading to sensational charges and trials, Eliot's genteel conservatism could hardly brook such excesses.

As such, by the end of the review, Eliot seems ready to slough off both the *Action Française* and Fascism for a yet-unrealized indigenous school of political thought in England. Ideally, the new movement would also clean out the cobwebs of Fabianism. The review suggests that Eliot was becoming increasingly impatient with political apathy in England, a condition which, ironically, seemed to facilitate the spread of Fascism.[126] In a "Commentary" of 1931, he would even go so far as to cite the arch-symbol of Fascism, the *fasces*, saying that "unless Toryism maintains a definite and uncompromising theory of Church and State, Toryism is merely a fasces of expedients."[127] Eliot's political thought embeds a traditional, transhistorical, and self-

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[121] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 288.

[122] T.S. Eliot, "The *Action Française*, M. Maurras and Mr. Ward," *Monthly Criterion* 7/3 (March 1928): 196–97.

[123] T.S. Eliot, "Was There a Scottish Literature?" *Athenaeum* 4657 (1919): 680–81 and *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, 3:754. It is also noteworthy that very few commentators have made the leap from drawing affinities between Maurras's "integral nationalism" and Fascism to firmly placing him in the fascist tradition. The most notable exception is Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966). Paul Mazgaj observes that another leading member of the *Action*, Georges Valois, held a series of meetings with Sorel in the 1910s (Paul Mazgaj, *The Action Française and Revolutionary Syndicalism* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979], 44, 52–53). Valois grew so close to fascist ideology that he ended up distancing himself from the elitism of the *Action* (Ibid., 17).

[124] T.S. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1965), 142.

[125] Shun'ichi Takayanagi, "T. S. Eliot, the *Action Française*, and Neo-Scholasticism," in *T. S. Eliot and Christian Tradition*, ed. Benjamin Lockerd (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014), 94–95. In the same volume of essays, William Marx revisits Eliot's famous self-description in 1928 as a classicist, royalist, and Anglo-Catholic as more indebted to the French critic Albert Thibaudet than to Maurras ("Eliot and Maurras on Classicism," 84–87). In a later chapter, I myself caution that "the influence of Maurras on Eliot can easily be exaggerated" ("Between 'Absolutism' and 'Impossible Theocracy': Hierarchy in Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism," 201).

[126] Cf. Pound's "Hell Cantos" of 1924–25, especially Canto 15, in which Fabians share a Dantesque ditch with usurers, conservatives, and "back-scratchers" (Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* [New York: New Directions, 1995), 15).

[127] T.S. Eliot, "Commentary," *Criterion* 11/42 (October 1931): 68–69.

disruptive matrix. It explicitly eschews the narrowly cultic ultra-nationalism of Fascism. Also going against the discourses of degeneration of Oswald Spengler, Giambattista Vico, Vilfredo Pareto, Max Nordau, and Gustave Le Bon,[128] Eliot's review of 1928 seeks to pluralize the political debate that Fascism and Communism had polarized. The putative death of democracy, he suggests, has steered the political imagination towards the archetypal myths aestheticized by totalitarian state apparatuses. And therein lies the danger. So, rather than seek to replace democracy with regionally acculturated versions of Fascism or Bolshevism, the West ought to dig deeper in its own backyard. As Eliot puts it, "the frame of democracy has been destroyed: how can we, out of the materials at hand, build a new structure in which democracy can live?"[129] This weighty question could hardly lie at a further remove from the enclosed totalities of autocracy and theocracy. Extreme statism in effect renders it inconceivable. Granted, Eliot's idea of democracy is always already restricted. Contrary to the decadent laissez-faire liberalism of capitalist democracy, for him a *real* democracy "can only flourish with some limitation by hereditary rights and responsibilities."[130] Yet, ever the moderate, he envisions a political synthesis in England. As Eliot dares to hope at the end of the review, "a new school of political thought is needed, which might learn from political thought abroad, but not from political practice."[131]

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[128] For a comprehensive discussion of the cultural and political critique of *décadence* in interwar Europe, see Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York: Norton, 1996).
[129] Eliot, "Literature of Fascism," 287.
[130] Ibid., 287.
[131] Ibid., 290.

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