

2019

Borrowing Time: The Classical Tradition in the Poetic Theories of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound

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BORROWING TIME: THE CLASSICAL TRADITION IN THE POETIC
THEORIES OF T. S. ELIOT AND EZRA POUND

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in English
in the College of Arts and Humanities
and in the Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Fall Term

2019

Thesis Chair: Louise Kane

ABSTRACT

T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound are two of the most prominent figures of Anglo-American modernist poetry, both having played central roles in the development of a distinct poetic style and atmosphere in the early 20th century by means of their publishing and editing the work of other poets as well as publishing their own poetry. However, Eliot and Pound have an interest in the classical world that is not clearly shared with the majority of other modernist poets, and this interest distinguishes the sense of “modernism” that Eliot and Pound promoted from that of other major modernists like William Carlos Williams. The general notion of modernism representing a radical break from tradition is, in the works of Eliot and Pound, not at all obvious despite the two poets’ shared status at the forefront of Anglo-American modernist poetry. This thesis explores the aesthetic theories that Eliot and Pound describe in their prose works and compares them with the aesthetic theories of other modernist poets to illustrate how Eliot and Pound appreciate the past, and in particular the classical world, in ways that other modernists simply do not.

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INTRODUCTION: LITERARY MODERNISM, TRADITION, AND CONTINUITY

Literary modernism is difficult to characterize as a cohesive artistic movement given that there is no historical event or figure that differentiated what is “modernist” in literature from what is not. Peter Nicholls introduces his book *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* by noting that “[t]he beginnings of modernism, like its endings, are largely indeterminate, a matter of traces rather than of clearly defined historical moments” (1). The nebulous origins of modernism in late nineteenth century literary movements like Decadent literature and Aestheticism led into the more easily recognizable category of twentieth-century modernism, but even here there were deep conceptual disputes about what a modern writer should be concerned with and how a modern writer ought to write. The many “-isms” of twentieth century modernism, including Expressionism, Imagism, Futurism, Vorticism, and Dadaism, did not conceive of themselves as participating in a single artistic effort and often quarreled over whose aesthetics was superior and whose methodology produced the best literature.

However, there are some generalizations about literary modernism that can do explanatory justice to how such a fragmented group of writers and literature can form a single movement. Peter Childs argues that the key feature of literary modernism is that it “‘plunges’ the reader into a confusing and difficult mental landscape which cannot be immediately understood” (4), requiring the reader to grapple with a text in order to understand what it is trying to communicate. The complexity of modernist texts, Childs argues, stems from their authors’ conceptions of the twentieth century as a period of “disintegration and reformation, fragmentation and rapid change, [and] ephemerality and insecurity” (15). A great deal of

modernists thought that older, more entrenched forms of prose and poetry were weighed down by conventions that could not capture the feeling of living in an increasingly industrialized and incoherent modern world. Because of this, modernists have been generally understood as having eschewed tradition and sought to create new work that did not appeal to a sense of continuity with literary tradition.

However, despite their shared position at the forefront of modernist poetry, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound do not fit comfortably into Childs' characterization of literary modernism when one examines their personal aesthetic theories and methods of writing poetry. Eliot writes in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that poets need to develop a "historical sense" in themselves and their work, one that "compels a man to write ... with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" (*The Sacred Wood* 41). The necessity of a "simultaneous order" of past and present literary output immediately distinguishes Eliot's poetics from that of modernist writers who tended to emphasize the disjunction between the modern industrialized world and the receding past. However, Eliot stipulates that his conception of tradition, the connection with the whole of Western literary history that requires the historical sense, "cannot be inherited ... [one] must obtain it by great labor" (*The Sacred Wood* 40). A writer cannot simply acknowledge the past to become part of the Western tradition, nor is it enough for a writer to attempt to revive the past by bringing it in modern dress to a modern audience.¹ The poet must enter into an exchange with older works of literature, for "[h]is

¹ In his essay "Euripides and Professor Murray" Eliot criticized Gilbert Murray's translation of Euripides' *Medea* into verse inspired by nineteenth century romantic poetry, asserting that it is "inconceivable that anyone with a genuine feeling for the sound of Greek verse should deliberately elect the William Morris couplet, the Swinburne lyric, as a just equivalent" (*The Sacred Wood* 62).

significance ... is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists” of the past, and in this exchange “the relations, proportions, [and] values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted” (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* 41). Contextualization, for Eliot, is the key to having any form of meaning at all, and the referential interplay between modern works and works of the past is what creates genuinely new art. The essay’s final sentence, which is preceded by a Greek quotation from Aristotle’s *On the Mind*,² explains exactly Eliot’s understanding of the relationship between past and present poetry and the necessity for poets to establish their work as part of a continuity with the past: “[the poet] is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living” (*The Sacred Wood* 49).

While it is harder to capture Pound’s views on writing poetry due to his association with several different modernist movements, it is still clear that some of his core aesthetic values are nearly identical to those of Eliot. In his essay “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” Pound details some basic guidelines for writing Imagist poetry, including that one should write poetry in “the way of the scientists rather than the way of an advertising agent for a new soap” (“A Few Don’ts” 203). Pound’s ideal poet “begins by learning what has been discovered already” and develops from that point onward instead of attempting to innovate in his or her initial works (“A Few Don’ts” 204). Pound’s metaphor for the poet-as-scientist is reflected in the section of “Tradition and the Individual Talent” where Eliot talks of the poet being a catalyst for ideas. For sulfuric acid to

² Eliot’s quote, “ὁ δὲ νοῦς ἴσως θειότερόν τι καὶ ἀπαθές ἐστιν,” is taken from *DA* I.4 408b29-30, which W. S. Hett renders: “Possibly the mind is too divine, and therefore unaffected” (Aristotle 49). In the same section of *On the Soul* Aristotle observes that, though physical features of the human body like sense organs and basic emotions degenerate over time, the mind or soul does not. The notion of a mind unaffected by time and perhaps immortal by nature supports Eliot’s argument that poets should convey those emotions which are eternal, unchanging, and “impersonal.”

be produced from oxygen and sulfur dioxide, the two substances must be “mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum” which, as a catalyst and not a reagent in the chemical reaction, “remain[s] inert, neutral, and unchanged” after the reaction (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* 44-45). On this metaphor the poet is a necessary component of the synthesis of ideas in poetic creation but is not directly changed by the creative process itself. The use of scientific metaphors in both Eliot and Pound’s theories of poetry illustrates the impersonal poetics they both espoused and partly explains their preoccupation with past works of literature. Just as the chemist needs to understand how various atoms and molecules react with each other to form new substances, the poet must understand poetic tradition in order to create new work from the existing stock of ideas.

Eliot and Pound both prescribe particular methods for conveying ideas and feelings through the medium of poetry which in some ways extend their scientific metaphors for poetic creation. Eliot posits the notion of an “objective correlative” for an emotion in his essay “Hamlet and His Problems” and describes it as “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion” (*The Sacred Wood* 85). *Hamlet*, following Eliot’s criticism in the same essay, fails to meet the standards of Shakespeare’s greatest tragedies since “Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear” (*The Sacred Wood* 86). The many scenes of Hamlet’s feigned psychosis are not warranted by Hamlet’s apparent motivation, which Eliot takes to be “the feeling of a son towards a guilty mother” (*The Sacred Wood* 85). Because there is a lack of a systemic and justified relation between Hamlet’s emotional motivation and his behavior as seen by the audience, *Hamlet* does not properly communicate the emotions which Shakespeare intended for the audience to feel. Eliot’s objective correlative is scientific in the same way as his conception

of poetic creation in that the transference of emotion through the medium of poetry requires explicit relations between phenomena and feeling, and that something material or “objective” must instantiate the same abstract property for each of its appearances.

One of Pound’s own concepts for expressing poetic emotion is the ideogrammic method, which he in large part developed from the theoretical work of Orientalist scholar Ernest Fenollosa. Fenollosa argued that Chinese characters are visual and temporal representations of real-world phenomena that mirror human cognition and mental representation, since “[t]hought deals with no bloodless concepts but watches things move under its microscope” (Fenollosa and Pound 47). Under Fenollosa’s view, the visual features of a Chinese character literally depict the events which they semantically fix. Fenollosa’s analysis lead him to conclude that Chinese characters refer neither to abstract concepts nor specific parts of speech but are something entirely distinct: they are “vivid shorthand pictures of actions and processes in nature” (Fenollosa and Pound 53). From Fenollosa’s radical and revisionary study of Chinese characters and their manner of communicating ideas, Pound developed his ideogrammic method,³ or a method of writing poetry that consists of “Images” or “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (*Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* 4). The ideogrammic method became an important theoretical component of Imagist poetry and motivated its general style of short, aphoristic lines that are individual snapshots of thought and feeling.

³ Elsewhere Pound calls the ideogrammic method “the method of Luminous Detail, a method most vigorously hostile to the prevailing mode of to-day—that is, the method of multitudinous detail, and to the method of yesterday, the method of sentiment and generalisation” (“I Gather the Limbs” 130). In the same *New Age* article Pound argues for its use in scholarship in opposition to sentiment and generalization, which are “too inexact and ... too cumbersome to be of much use to the normal man wishing to live mentally active” (130), and later works by Pound like *Guide to Kulchur* are written in a style inspired by the ideogrammic method.

Although Eliot and Pound's mutual interest in poetic concepts inspired by scientific understandings of poetry might compel one to conclude that these poets are proposing radical theories as an act of rebellion against literary tradition, Eliot deliberately identifies historical examples of literary figures that have followed his method and Pound's ideogrammic method is drawn primarily from a study of traditional Chinese characters and poetry. The historically-rooted poetic theories of Eliot and Pound, as well as their concern for analyzing and understanding the poetry that preceded them, are fixated on the past in ways that seemingly contradict their consideration as "modernists" following Childs. Childs' characterization of modernism may aptly describe central features of the work of certain modernists, but it fails to capture these two poets who are clearly antithetical to the notion of breaking away from tradition and in fact intentionally connect themselves to tradition.

Some modernist poets strongly disagreed with the poetic theories that Eliot and Pound outlined in their prose and practiced in their poetry. William Carlos Williams, one of the most prominent figures of Anglo-American modernist poetry, asserted that his form of modernism was distinct and superior to Eliot's due to Williams' emphasis on creating a new poetic language. For Williams, Eliot chose "[t]o go where there was already a mass of more ready distinction ... an already established place in world literature—a short cut, in short" to gain the approval of the literary mainstream (Williams 285). Williams contended that Eliot reached back into history and incorporated artistic works of the past into his poetry about the modern day to legitimize his work, whereas Williams and writers with similar views instead represented "a different phase—a new language—[they were] making the mass which some other later Eliot will dig up" (Williams 285). Eliot and Pound's poetics of historical synthesis and collage are, to Williams, the product of plundering from more uniquely generative poets who transformed language. Williams wanted

to “propose sweeping changes from top to bottom of the poetic structure” rather than relying on the successes of the past (Williams 281), believing that this was the best way to write poetry for the modern day.

If Williams is correct in a general sense, that throughout literary history there have been poetic innovators who have progressed the form alongside mere “extractors of genius” that have done little more than take and refashion older works for antiquarian audiences (Williams 285), then much of the early history of Western poetry is filled with extractors and few true innovators. Some of the most influential works of classical literature, those that continue to occupy the minds of many modern day readers and writers, were written in a manner more closely reflecting the poetics of Eliot and Pound than of modernists like Williams. The archaic Greek poet Hesiod derives many of his poetry’s core elements from Near Eastern sources, including themes of “the origin of the cosmos, the loss of a golden age, women’s introduction of evil into the world, and the necessity of labor in order to survive in a fallen world distant from the paradise in which humans once lived” (Powell 9). Not only are his themes deeply connected to those found in Near Eastern traditions but also to those of the mythological figures he includes in the *Theogony*, which “owes a great deal to Mesopotamian myth” (Powell 9). In the work of Sappho, widely regarded by the ancients as one of the greatest Greek poets and frequently touted as an example of refined and cultivated style, “Eastern motifs and the influence of Vedic Sanskrit poetic structures and patterns on Greek poetry are more palpable ... than in other Greek poetry” (Gordon xxvi). The Augustan poet Vergil wrote Latin poetry that deliberately adapted elements of Greek verse, and his *Aeneid* “is in many ways the ultimate example of generic enrichment in Augustan poetry” (Harrison 207), generic enrichment being the complexity a piece of literature generates by interacting with several literary genres at once. These ancient authors are certainly

original in many respects, but their observance of and participation in established literary traditions challenges the notion that the best poets are those that try to radically depart from tradition. Eliot and Pound, although categorized as modernist poets, deliberately fit themselves into literary tradition in the same way these major classical poets have, not by merely extracting genius but by adapting existing characters, themes, and tropes while innovating in how such preexisting material is synthesized.

The preceding discussion has shown an underlying tension in the relationship Eliot and Pound have with the broader category of literary modernism in the ways they both emphasize the need to interact with literary tradition and how they write deeply intertextual poetry that often recalls classical literature. In contrast with the majority of modernist writers, Eliot and Pound extensively reference ancient works within as well as outside of the Western canon and are concerned with writing for a highly educated readership that is very aware of the Western classical tradition. Although the subject of Eliot and Pound's indebtedness to the Western canon as a source for themes and ideas has received copious critical attention, surprisingly few sources have compared their writings on literary criticism and poetics against the manner in which they incorporate classical content into their oeuvre. In my thesis I collect the various thoughts on literary criticism, aesthetics, poetics, and the notion and significance of a continuous Western literary tradition that Eliot and Pound expressed and compare these to the aesthetic views of other modernists in general, showing the gulf of thought that separates the two from other major modernist writers.

Structure of Thesis

I separate my thesis into four subsequent chapters that analyze Eliot and Pound's prose, scholarly works on these two poets, their respective literary and aesthetic inspirations, and various topics concerning the classical world and its relation to the two poets.

Chapter 2, "Eliot, Pound, and T. E. Hulme: Confusions of Classicism," primarily consists of an overview of some of the literary theory of poet and critic T. E. Hulme and his influence on Eliot and Pound. Hulme uses the terms "classicism" and "romanticism" to categorize quite large and diverse sets of literature, and Eliot and Pound's recognition and acceptance of the term may make it appear as if dissecting the relationship both poets have with the classical world is a trivial task. The main contention here is that Hulme does not actually mean the classical world of ancient Greece and Rome when he uses the term "classical," and one ought to consider what Hulme's classicism and romanticism mean carefully.

Chapter 3, "Categorizing Forms of Modernist Literary Modernism and Aesthetics," utilizes identifiable tendencies and concerns of various modernists to demonstrate the divide between Eliot and Pound and the broader category of Anglo-American literary modernism. I use James Seaton's *Literary Criticism from Plato to Postmodernism: The Humanistic Alternative* and the categories of literary criticism he defines as a means of sorting modernists into different groups, which can highlight how outside the norm of modernism Eliot and Pound were.

Chapter 4, "The Poetics of Eliot and Pound," traces some of the most significant components of their respective poetic theories through different sources for each poet. The subsection on Eliot covers his early philosophical development and relates the discoveries he made at Harvard and Oxford to his essential poetic concepts. In contrast, the subsection on Pound discusses the political views that informed him and their effect on his poetic theory, since

it is difficult to truly capture Pound's thoughts on what makes good literature without understanding that his aesthetic views fit into a larger world view with radically conservative political dimensions.

Chapter 5, "The Connection between Eliot, Pound, and Classical Literature," looks into the similarities in conditions and worldviews of classical writers and of Eliot and Pound. The chapter ends with a consideration about whether Eliot and Pound might be considered "neoclassical," or poets concerned with reviving art forms of the ancient world.

CHAPTER 2: ELIOT, POUND, AND T. E. HULME: CONFUSIONS OF CLASSICISM

There is a long-standing view that Eliot and Pound wrote in their difficult, idiosyncratic style to escape exhausted forms of contemporary poetry, and are thus true exemplars of mainstream literary modernism. In the introductory chapter of *Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T. S. Eliot, T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound*, Rebecca Beasley writes that these three modernists “revolutionized Anglo-American poetry, arguing that traditional poetic forms and themes could no longer encapsulate the experience of the modern world” (1). But, though it is true that Eliot, Hulme, and Pound found that recent forms of poetry have become tired and may be passed over in order to seek new forms of literary expression, one cannot say that their views on the significance of literary tradition were at all identical. Hulme indeed influenced Eliot and Pound in how they conceptualized what a good poet should be doing, but a closer analysis of Hulme’s poetic theory along with some important prose works by Eliot and Pound reveals very different thoughts about tradition and continuity.

Beasley identifies Hulme as an important modernist theorist and critic for his deep influence on both Eliot and Pound. Beasley describes Hulme’s “A Lecture on Modern Poetry” as having “[a]dvocated writing in free verse and juxtaposing distinct images on separate lines to convey the new emotions conjured up by the modern world” (3), and these aesthetic contentions clearly form an inspiration for Imagist poetry. Hulme’s concerns about how poetry represents modernity and his advocacy for a new and revolutionary means of representation link him closely to the class of modernist poets who believed that a new poetic voice should be fashioned for the peculiarities of the modern day. But Hulme’s desire to capture “new emotions” seems to

run contrary to Eliot's assertion that "[o]ne error ... of eccentricity in poetry is to seek for new human emotions to express" (*The Sacred Wood* 48). Hulme's ideas on poetry, culture, and politics in some ways inspire those of Eliot and Pound, but because of the ambiguity of some of Hulme's theoretical terms one can develop false impressions about Eliot and Pound's connection to the classical world.

Hulme's Aesthetic Taxonomy: Classicism and Romanticism

A reader somewhat acquainted with Hulme's writing on aesthetics might think that considering Eliot and Pound "classical" poets in the sense that they are particularly indebted to the classical world is a rather facile claim. Hulme distinguished between "classicism" and "romanticism," two aesthetic categories which differ primarily in their conceptions of human nature. Hulme considers romanticism "[t]he view which regards man as a well, as a reservoir full of possibilities" (117), whereas classicism is the view which "regards him as a very finite and fixed creature" (117). Romanticism is an unfortunate historical aberration in Hulme's view, since he takes it that only a person "disciplined by order and tradition" can "do something fairly decent" (117). Hulme himself identifies as a classicist in his conservative and anti-democratic political views, which were largely inspired by the monarchist French political movement Action Française and its principle organizer and leader Charles Maurras.

These categories have political and philosophical implications, but Hulme primarily utilizes them in order to discuss different styles of poetry. Hulme holds exact and precise visual images to be the fundamental feature of good poetry, and it is from this "rare fact of communication that you get the root of aesthetic pleasure" (136). The classical poet, for Hulme, always writes with a bounded sense of scale and "never flies away into the circumambient gas"

(120), and thus is best equipped to render visual images in his or her poetry. On the contrary, when depicting the world Hulme thinks that romantic poets let “rhetoric” intrude into their verse, which causes their poetry to render the world inaccurately and with inflated scale.

Hulme’s classicism and romanticism were influential concepts that Eliot utilized in his own writing and teaching on literature. Eliot distills the classical and romantic attitudes in his “Syllabus of a Course of Six Lectures on Modern French Literature” for a series of lectures he gave at Harvard in 1916. Eliot’s first lecture covered the origins of romanticism to illustrate how contemporary French literature and political thought was fast becoming classicist and anti-romantic, and Eliot’s pithy characterization of romanticism was that it “stands for *excess* in any direction” (Schuchard 27), either representing an “escape from the world of fact” or a “devotion to brute fact” (Schuchard 27). In this same syllabus Eliot described classicism as “*form* and *restraint* in art, *discipline* and *authority* in religion, [and] *centralization* in government (either as socialism or monarchy)” (Schuchard 27-28). Eliot’s inclusion of these terms when talking about literature in contemporary France, along with his deep theoretical concerns about the methodology of poetry, his conversion to Anglicanism in 1927, and his skeptical attitude toward democracy all influence his positions on literature, culture, and politics as classical in Hulme’s sense of the term.

Pound, on the other hand, might not have been as much a classicist as Eliot. Given his participation in the *New Freewoman*, an avant-garde feminist publication inspired by the philosophy of Bergson, Nietzsche, and Stirner that eventually became the *Egoist*, Beasley describes Pound as having an individualistic streak. He certainly did not take issue with challenging conventional notions of the literary canon and of what makes good literature. Pound questioned the desire to develop a taste for classic works of literature when he remarks in “The

Serious Artist” that “you are a fool to seek the kind of art you don’t like” (46). But Pound’s individualism and open-mindedness to the merits of different kinds of literature does not alone make him anti-classical. Elsewhere in “The Serious Artist” he considers bad art “that [which] makes false reports” of its subject matter (43), which seems to correspond with Hulme’s rejection of romanticism. Turning again to a scientific metaphor to explain his aesthetic views, Pound compares an inaccurate artist to a scientist who falsifies or bungles a report, whom Pound says “we [should] consider ... as either a criminal or a bad scientist according to the enormity of his offence” (“The Serious Artist” 43). Taste may vary between individuals, since “men differ among themselves as leaves upon trees differ” (“The Serious Artist” 42), but there are still rules with ethical force that artists ought to follow in order to produce good literature. Romanticism’s association with the infinite potential of man and its frequent exaggeration of facts beyond what is strictly considered true must therefore be condemned in Pound’s view, and it would be safer to conclude that Pound is more of a classicist than a romanticist.

Eliot and Pound are very much classical poets under Hulme’s taxonomy. Yet, despite Hulme’s description of classicism as a set of eternal values about human nature which moderns should adopt, interaction with the past, and particularly with the classical world of ancient Greece and Rome, is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for being considered “classical.” Hulme’s identification of classical writers includes “such diverse people as Horace, most of the Elizabethans and the writers of the Augustan age” (Romanticism and Classicism” 119). On the romantic side Hulme identifies “Lamartine, Hugo, parts of Keats, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Swinburne” (“Romanticism and Classicism” 119), who all are traditionally considered romantic poets and novelists as well as liberal political figures. This might lead one to conclude that, just as Hulme’s conception of romanticism corresponds exactly with the scholarly

sense of romanticism, so too should his classicism correspond to the scholarly sense of classicism. However, classicism in Hulme's view does not entail that one need revere actual classical poetry and poetics. Hulme boldly states that he has "no reverence for tradition" when discussing the merits of various forms of verse in "A Lecture on Modern Poetry" (259), and this assertion separates his poetics from that of Eliot and Pound given their interest in verse forms across history. Furthermore, in "Humanism and the Religious Attitude" Hulme states that "[o]ne of the main achievements of the nineteenth century was the elaboration and universal application of the principle of *continuity*. The destruction of this conception is, on the contrary, a pressing necessity of the present" (3).

Hulme's versions of classicism and romanticism have the misfortune of relating to broad eras of literary history that can obscure their actual meaning. Hulme reorganizes these categories of literary aesthetics into attitudes one can have about visual aesthetics in his later writings, converting classicism into the "religious attitude" and romanticism into the "humanist attitude." Both attitudes have essentially the same philosophical and political character as classicism and romanticism respectively. This recasting of his older terms better represents the distinct sets of views each attitude refers to, but the original and more problematic designations remain the ones most often used by writers and critics inspired by Hulme.

Pound says of classicism and romanticism in *The Spirit of Romance* that "both terms are snares, and one must not be confused by them" (3). Clear examples of where these terms would be expected to show up but in fact do not should illustrate the risk of following Hulme's taxonomy. Two groups of examples can illustrate why Hulme's original terminology does not distinguish classicism in the academic's sense from romanticism: there are instances in which his original terms do not correctly categorize classical writers as "classical," and there are instances

in which writers with romantic inclinations may still have an interest in the classical world that Hulme's taxonomy cannot account for.

Classical Romantics and Romantic Classicists

Hulme's classicism does not accurately categorize actual classical literary figures and movements since the ancient world had no static values which all subscribed to. In some cases, however, the classics, Hulme's classicism, and conservative politics overlap. Hulme observes that "[i]f you asked a man of a certain set whether he preferred the classics or the romantics, you could deduce from that what his politics were" ("Romanticism and Classicism" 114).

Conservatism and the appreciation of the ancient world seem to be perfectly compatible in that the study of the classics, under a rather traditionalist point of view, "lend[s] implicit support to politicians and religious leaders who advocate so-called family values, restriction of women to their homes and the requirement of obedience to their husbands, and the dissolution of separation between Christianity and the state" (duBois 4).

Yet looking back at the classical world through the lens of contemporary conservatism, or even through the lens of any contemporary political ideology, may provide an incorrect impression of what the classical world was actually like. For centuries scholars have reinterpreted or repressed aspects of ancient Greek and Roman literature that did not fit into their narratives about the past. The obfuscation of Sappho's sexuality by classicists is one of the most notable examples of historical censorship, as it took several centuries before the homoeroticism of her poetry could receive open scholarly recognition. More generally the complex sexuality that pervades Greek poetry has been censored or overlooked by generations of scholars, whether such sexuality comes in the form of poems about clandestine relations between men and married

women, homosexual relations between men and other adult men, and homosexual relations between adult men and adolescent males. As Page duBois argues in *Trojan Horses* “[t]he idealization of Greek civilization as the foundation of Western culture often requires the omission of such crucial features of Greek social life as the public, comic allusion to sexual acts, or the expression of same-sex desire” (duBois 81). The same could be said of the sexuality in Roman poetry. Roman love elegists wrote about “the tribulations, mostly erotic, of a male poet who figuratively enslaves himself to a single (pseudonymous) mistress, distances himself from the duties associated with public life, and varies his urban *mise en scène* with escapist appeals to other worlds, mythological (Propertius, Ovid) or rural (Tibullus)” (Kenney and Hinds). Just in the realm of sexuality alone one can see how Hulme’s classicism, with its appeals to restraint and repression of base or non-useful human behavior, and the actual practices and beliefs of ancient Greeks and Romans are incompatible.

Furthermore, Hulme’s terms also seem to improperly categorize more contemporary writers with an interest in the classical world. One prominent example of this false categorization is the poetry of Ernest Dowson, an English Decadent poet who possessed a love for Latin poetry but would hardly be considered classical by Hulme. In his poem “Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae,” Latin for “I am not the man I was under the rule of good Cynara,” Dowson describes how he has remained “faithful” to a former lover, Cynara, “in [his] fashion” (27) but throughout alludes to a life of hedonism, drunkenness, and self-debasement. Although he regularly sees a prostitute and finds “the kisses of her bought red mouth [to be] sweet,” he cannot rid himself of his love for Cynara and sees her still in his temporary partner (Dowson 27), a situation which makes him faithful to Cynara only in the fact that he cannot forget her.

While the poem does not require full comprehension of Latin poetry, the poem accrues meaning in the deliberate connection Dowson draws between the narrator's condition and its origins in classical poetry. The title is taken from a section of the Roman poet Horace's *Odes*, in which the speaker "begs Venus to have mercy on him" as he is no longer compelled by Venus' urgings in the way he once was with his past lover Cynara (Murgatroyd 294). Although Horace's poem is one of "ironic self-depreciation" (Murgatroyd 295), a light-hearted reflection on the poet's own love life and his loss of sex drive over time, in the context of Dowson's melancholic debauchery the allusion to Horace "now denotes moral degeneration ... and a decadent overlay to the Latin love poem" (Murgatroyd 295). "Non sum qualis" is a richer poem once the reader understands what Dowson is doing in his referencing of Horace; his engagement with the poetic tradition of the ancients creates new work that re-contextualizes the former work. The way that Dowson incorporates allusions to Latin poetry in his own poetry dovetails neatly with the poetic theory Eliot outlines in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and, given that reference is made to Dowson in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* ("Dowson found harlots cheaper than hotels" (*Selected Works* 66)), Pound may have been inspired by Dowson's complicated interactions with Roman literature. Certainly, Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius* sees Pound, like Dowson, adopting "an ironic persona poem based on the lyrics of the first-century Roman poet" (Hamilton 428). Despite Dowson's commensurability to Eliot's and Pound's poetic theories, his poetry certainly would not be approved of by Hulme for its content.

Classicism without Continuity

Eliot and Pound fit somewhere in Hulme's literary taxonomy, but the question still remains as to what degree they purposefully enmesh themselves in tradition. Perhaps they may

not have been classical in terms of their reverence of maintaining continuity with ancient Greece and Rome. Pound begins his book *The Spirit of Romance* by quipping that “[t]his book is not a philological work” (v), which might be a declaration that Pound has little interest in historical linguistics as a field of study and by extension demonstrating his little interest in the classical world. But here Pound appears to be reacting against a certain academic attitude one might take toward the history of art which finds it “convenient to lay it out anesthetized on the table with dates pasted on here and there” (*Guide to Kulchur* 60). Pound goes on in *The Spirit of Romance* to assert that art is “a fluid moving above or over the minds of men” (vi), not something that can be easily pinned down like a verb conjugation, and Pound also advocated for the creation of “a literary scholarship ... which will weigh Theocritus and Mr Yeats with one balance” (vi). An analogy can be drawn between Pound’s rejection of philology and Nietzsche’s rejection of the same field of study in favor of philosophy. Although Nietzsche studied philology and became the Chair of Classical Philology at the University of Basel at a young age, his philosophy contains a deep skepticism concerning language’s ability to unambiguously represent truths about the world.⁴ Nietzsche’s analysis of classical philosophers and their respective philosophical beliefs is not “philological” in spirit in that he does not hold down philosophical concepts as fixed in time from the moment of their formulation. Similarly, Pound, along with Eliot, can be concerned about the continuation of certain elements of classical culture without treating classical sources

⁴ Nietzsche’s thoughts on language and its relationship with cognition and human experience are difficult to summarize, but Tracy B. Strong’s article “Language and Nihilism: Nietzsche’s Critique of Epistemology” provides an overview of Nietzsche’s belief that “humans are caught both *by* the phantasmic fetishes their language creates, and *in* that world which their language engenders, maintains and is engendered by” (240). Language, to Nietzsche, is a necessary means of situating oneself in a world in constant flux, but the concepts imbedded in a particular language do not impart real knowledge of the world to the speaker.

as dead, and so Pound's rejection of philology does not lead to a rejection of other methods of interacting with the past.

CHAPTER 3: CATEGORIZING FORMS OF MODERNIST LITERARY CRITICISM AND AESTHETICS

For decades the dominant aesthetic view has been that art and literature need not have a moral function. But historically it has been rare for aesthetic evaluations of literary works to be solely concerned with determining whether a work is beautiful and which properties make such a work beautiful. There has been a moral aspect to aesthetic appreciation that conflicts with the generally liberal and open-minded views of contemporary scholars, critics, and observers. Appeals to the “literary merits” of works containing taboo or subversive content has not always served as sufficient justification for the reading public to judge a work without initially reacting with disgust and wholesale rejection.

Several literary works by now-famous and highly-regarded authors were subject to reactionary censorship or lawsuits throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which illustrate how much the politics of writing and publishing has changed. French novelist Gustave Flaubert, along with his editor and printer, was tried in court for *Madame Bovary*'s offensiveness to widely-held moral and religious values after the book was published by the *Revue de Paris*. Historian Christine Haynes argues that Flaubert's trial “reveals that the autonomy of the individual author was still of marginal importance in mid-nineteenth-century political culture, not just in the eyes of government ... but in those of the wider civil society” (2). Flaubert's trial, along with the very similar obscenity trial of Charles Baudelaire after the publication of *Les fleurs du mal* and Oscar Wilde's content revisions of the *The Picture of Dorian Gray* on its republishing as a novel, demonstrate the fact that even in modern literary history concerns about

the moral aspect of literature has frequently taken precedence over considerations of non-moral virtues of literature.

Just as with aesthetic appreciation, literary criticism has seldom taken literary works to be artistic expressions that should be read without considering how they would influence the thoughts and behavior of readers. Literary critic and Marxist theorist Frederic Jameson notes in *Marxism and Form* that “any concrete description of a literary or philosophical phenomenon ... has an ultimate obligation to come to terms with the shape of the individual sentences themselves, to give an account of their origin and formation” (xii). Jameson believes that the form of a literary work, or the way in which a work presents its narrative, setting, and characters by means of language, in part fixes the political principles it conveys to the reader and the practical implications of the reader’s understanding of these principles. Similar themes and subject matters can be shared between literary works, but the ways in which those themes and subject matters are presented by the work have important effects on how a reader thereafter conceives of the world and of what constitutes right and wrong action. In contrast, Harold Bloom is famous for his apolitical stance on literary criticism and has on several occasions declared how he is “very unhappy with any attempt to put the humanities, and literature in particular, in the service of social change” (Coutu 65). Bloom believes that the appreciation and critical evaluation of literature does not require a theoretical lens based in political theory and holds that a “curious amalgam of so-called feminism, Marxism, and French fanciness ... has been progressively destroying the study of literature” (Coutu 65). For Bloom, attempts to analyze literature through theory only serves to obscure the essential goal of the study of literature, which is grasping what literature can convey to readers about the human condition.

If Jameson and Bloom represent two archetypal styles of literary criticism and two corresponding sets of aesthetic principles, then a great deal of modernist writers would fit most closely into Bloom's paradigm of thought. Aestheticism, the notion that the sole and highest aim of art is to be beautiful, was the basis for many modernists' exploration of controversial themes and experimentation with literary form. In his article "Modernism and the Emancipation of Literature from Morality," David Sidorsky argues that the novels of early modernist writers James Joyce, Ford Madox Ford, and Marcel Proust represent a break with ancient literary criticism originating in Plato for their rejection of moral "teleology," or the structuring of narratives so that they provide a distinct moral by their closing. The lack of concern for answering moral questions or demonstrating right action in the works of Joyce, Ford, and Proust constitutes a rejection of the Platonic principle that "the artist should transcend representation and ... find a formal or abstract expression of the paradigms of the true, good, and beautiful" (Sidorsky 138). In contrast to this moral standard Plato believes artists should live by, the three modernists' work is contingent and non-universal by design, as novels like *Ulysses*, *Remembrance of Things Past*, and *Parade's End* each focus on the minutiae of human life and their protagonists' perception of such small details as the primary means of storytelling. The style of their work is a conscious reaction against moral teleology, since there is no moral one receives by reading through each book to the end. Instead, Sidorsky argues that Joyce, Ford, and Proust follow a new and distinct "ethic of artistic vocation" (150), which for these authors entails that their greatest artistic obligation is to represent many facets of human experience and not to prescribe correct behavior.

Modernism and Traditions of Literary Criticism

Sidorsky's argument that Joyce, Ford, and Proust's collective rejection of the Platonic functions of literature and their championing of their artistic vocation to depict human life warts and all can be systematized into a set of opposing traditions of literary criticism. James Seaton's book *Literary Criticism from Plato to Postmodernism* identifies three distinct traditions of literary criticism, the Platonic, the Neoplatonic, and the Aristotelian, all of which originate from the philosophical positions Plato and Aristotle held on literature and literature's influence on the individual and society. Plato's warnings against poetry's ability to misrepresent concepts and reinforce commonly-held but wrongheaded ideas spawned the Platonic critical tradition, which includes any school of literary criticism or aesthetic theory that is suspicious of literature which "reinforce[s] the prejudices and false consciousness of the unenlightened majority" (Seaton 2). Neoplatonic critical schools are similarly skeptical of the thoughts of the unenlightened majority but, unlike Platonic schools, praise literature "as a vehicle for moral and/or spiritual transcendence of conventional common sense" (Seaton 2). In contrast to the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions' skepticism of common sense and concerns about literature's influence on morality, the Aristotelian or "humanistic" tradition "pay[s] due respect (although not unquestioning allegiance) to common sense while turning to literature for insight into human life rather than for knowledge about the gods or for access to a higher spiritual realm" (Seaton 2).

These three definitions, like Hulme's own aesthetic taxonomy, are rather broad and might lead to confusions of their sense, especially when it comes to using humanism. However, Seaton is careful about using these terms to identify meaningful distinctions between writers and their thoughts on literary criticism. Seaton denies that critics should follow any particular tradition too closely, for once literary criticism becomes dogmatic it "has forfeited its role as the tradition

within which the insights of novels, poems, and plays are worked out, made explicit, and their implications for personal lives and society debated” (73). The importance of designating certain writers as Platonic, Neoplatonic, or humanistic is not to box them in or consider them only under the light of that designation, but instead it is to identify similarities not just in different writers’ critical process but also in their respective views on culture, human nature, and importance of tradition.

Seaton’s three traditions of literary criticism and aesthetics can serve as a practical means of understanding the different conceptions of literature and its purposes that Eliot and Pound had in comparison to other modernist writers. Seaton states that “the great majority [of modernist writers] were certain that literary works provided access to a view of the world directly contradictory and vastly superior to the worldview of their non-literary brethren” and accordingly categorizes them into the Neoplatonic tradition (39). These modernists include F. R. Leavis, Herbert Read, Allen Tate, and Philip Rahv, who all differ in their ideological commitments but, in Seaton’s view, share a central belief that writing and reading good literature was a means of enlightenment. However, Sidorsky’s article describes a very different tendency in some modernist writers, and following his argument writers like Joyce, Ford, and Proust would be best placed in the humanistic tradition for their desire to represent life without didacticism or demonstrations of the good, true, and beautiful.

Following Seaton and Sidorsky, it appears as if the majority of modernists could be considered either Neoplatonic or humanistic. But, at first glance, it appears unclear whether Eliot and Pound fall under the Platonic, Neoplatonic, or humanistic traditions. Eliot and Pound look back on the past favorably and find the human element in much ancient and medieval literature, yet the impressions of these poets up till now does not immediately fix what categories they best

fit into. It may seem at first that Eliot and Pound could be considered humanistic writers alongside Joyce, Ford, and Proust. In more recent scholarly works and especially in Ronald Schuhard's *Eliot's Dark Angel* the flesh-and-blood Eliot has been retrieved from his self-fashioned impersonal persona, as access to more of his personal documents has led to a picture of an Eliot who at one point "loved philosophy and art, poetry and drama, minstrel shows and melodramas, college songs and bawdy ballads" (3). Eliot, one of the leading figures of high modernism, at least in his days at Harvard and Oxford appears to have dismissed distinctions of "high" and "low" culture. Similarly, Pound has a regard for the common man when he notes that *Guide to Kulchur* "is written for men who have not been able to afford an university education or for young men, whether or not threatened with universities, who want to know more at the age of fifty than I know today" (6). Pound does not condescend non-members of the literati, but rather invites others to learn and to understand his worldview no matter their own backgrounds. Certainly both authors wrote about sexuality, murder, drug use, and other controversial topics at various points in their literary careers, and this openness to darker subject matters might compel one to believe that Eliot and Pound were largely humanistic in their criticism and aesthetic views.

CHAPTER 4: THE POETICS OF ELIOT AND POUND

Despite the few motivations mentioned previously, both poets were very concerned about how the moral principles of a writer contributed to the aesthetic status of a literary work that would conflict with Seaton's humanism, and so an early conclusion that Eliot and Pound belong to the humanistic tradition should be resisted. What follows is a distillation of both poets' prose on literature, culture, philosophy, and politics which give an impression of their respective poetics, or their theories about how literary works communicate certain emotions and feelings to the reader and their prescriptions for how they write.

Eliot and His Philosophical Influences

Eliot went through many stages of philosophical development throughout and after his years of study at Harvard and Oxford. The major philosophical figures he knew personally included George Santayana, an omnipresent influence on many twentieth-century writers and philosophers, along with Oxford professors F. H. Bradley and Bertrand Russell. The philosophical systems of these latter two figures Eliot spent extensive amounts of time deciphering, but ultimately he rejected both of them in favor of a kind of middle path he called relativism. These systems, though not readily applicable to the study of literature, still influenced Eliot's poetics by serving as theoretical inspirations for poetic impersonality and the objective correlative.

In 1914 Eliot was awarded a prestigious fellowship "to study the work of the eminent British philosopher, F. H. Bradley, and also Aristotelian thought with Harold Joachim" (Harding 9). Bradley served an important role in determining much of the early course of Eliot's philosophical development by providing Eliot with a compelling philosophical system to grapple

with. He and fellow Oxford professor J. M. E. McTaggart jointly developed a brand of idealistic philosophy they called “absolutism,” the doctrine that “all human experience was merely a figment of appearances sponsored by a so-called ‘absolute,’ a transcendental form that, though it was said to engender all of life, was itself incapable of ‘history or progress’” (Blevins 95). At Oxford Eliot wrote several articles both defending and criticizing the many facets of absolutism, and his final years there culminated in his book-length thesis on the philosophical system. Scholar Jeffery Blevins identifies the absolute in some of Eliot’s early poetry including his 1910 poem “Spleen” and his 1914 poem “Afternoon,” which both mediate between the specificity and uniqueness of numerous experiences in daily life and the underlying monotony of all experiences (97).

The burgeoning analytic movement in Oxford seems to also have influenced Eliot’s poetics and poetry. After having grown tired of absolutism and idealistic philosophy, Eliot found a very different philosophical mentor in another Oxford philosopher, Bertrand Russell. Russell succeeded Bradley as Eliot’s greatest philosophical influence at Oxford after his rejection of absolutism, whom Eliot “took ... to be completely opposed to Bradley and Hegel” in his logical and mathematical approach to philosophy (Blevins 97). At the time of Eliot’s interest in the philosopher Russell’s primary theoretical development was logical atomism, or the notion that “the smallest possible bit[s] conceivable by logic” are what compose the world and are all the facts that obtain⁵ (Blevins 98). Particular logical atoms can be understood independently of other atoms and the theory permits of a worldview in which relations between concepts and ideas are indeterminate, spontaneous, and alive, which was not possible under absolutism. Yet Eliot went

⁵ Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* takes as its first few propositions “The world is all that is the case,” “The world is the totality of facts, not of things,” and “The world is determined by the facts, and by their being *all* the facts” (7).

on to drop his support for logical atomism when he found that the formal laws which Russell outlined for the theory were “undercutting true spontaneity” instead of promoting it (Blevins 99).

Eliot’s final rejection of both the philosophies of Bradley and Russell engenders in him a skepticism of the philosophical project of understanding the world and of communication itself that appears to be related to the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Eliot’s note for *The Waste Land* that “*shantih, shantih, shantih*” means “[t]he Peace which passeth understanding” appears to be a reference to Phillipians 4:7 (*The Waste Land* 26), but it is not inconceivable that Eliot also alluded to the problems of language and communication which Wittgenstein analyzed in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Despite never meeting each other, Wittgenstein and Eliot had a mutual friendship with Russell, and all parties were similarly intrigued by the question of how language can represent states of affairs and communicate ideas. Wittgenstein ends the capstone of his early philosophical thought by stating that “[w]hat we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” (151), which strongly resembles Eliot’s peace which passeth understanding in form and content.⁶

The philosophical systems of Bradley and Russell can be traced through some of the most important features of Eliot’s poetics. Though Eliot never really accepted the absolute due to it being a kind of philosophical mysticism, an enduring influence of Bradley’s philosophy on Eliot is the notion of individuals being mere “appearances” of something eternal and universal, which appears to have inspired his impersonal poetics. In escaping from the contingency of one’s emotions the poet can speak to greater feelings than his or her own, which adds a grand metaphysical quality to the process of poetic creation. Despite the difference of metaphysical

⁶ Stephen Farrow’s article “T. S. Eliot’s communicational scepticism: A Wittgensteinian reading of *The Waste Land*” traces further similarities between Eliot and Wittgenstein’s views on language and offers a reading of *The Waste Land* that takes Eliot’s main aim in the poem to be communicating the unsayable.

scale, Russell's logical atomism is eternal in its conception of metaphysics as well and seems to inform Eliot's notion of poetic emotions that have been received from the ancients. Comparing Eliot's scientific conception of poetic innovation from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" to logical atomism, the basic emotions of poetry are ever-present and essentially unrelated exactly like logical atoms are, and the poet synthesizing emotions in new ways mirrors the philosopher drawing connections between unstructured atoms. Additionally, Eliot's description of the objective correlative says little as to what apparent features of a poem are appropriate for conveying poetic emotions, and this could be still another way that logical atoms influence his poetics. Since apparent features of a poem and poetic emotions do not have natural relations between each other, the poet again is the catalyst by which such elements of poetry compose, for otherwise they would have no means to compose. The fact that Eliot's own philosophical system, what he calls "relativism," is an unsystematic mediation between the universal scope of absolutism and the infinitesimal specificity of logical atomism, may be further proof that his collection of poetic concepts including impersonality, basic emotions, and the objective correlative are all informed by his past philosophical explorations.

Eliot's thoughts on literature, culture, literary criticism, and poetics varied over time, and like other influential thinkers it is difficult to establish a canonical "version" of Eliot's opinions. As covered above, Eliot conceived of literary tradition as an author's self-aware attachment to literary history, and this seems to be one of his closest-held aesthetic principles. Eliot's poetics are actually silent on what elements of good poetry are necessary or sufficient despite his later turn to Anglicanism and moral puritanism. From the preceding discussion, and especially the consideration of Wittgenstein's potential influence on his philosophy of language, it seems that Eliot despairs of communicating right action or whatever he means at all. If one is to categorize

Eliot among Seaton's traditions of literary criticism he would be most accurately considered a Platonic critic and writer, given his skepticism about literature's ability to convey anything directly from the author to the reader by means of language.

Pound and the Politics of Literature

It is much more difficult to deny that Pound was a humanist than it was for Eliot. As was explored in Chapter 2, Pound criticized having a prejudice against specific literary traditions and was by no means a defender of literary parochialism. In *ABC of Reading* Pound states that “[p]artisans of particular ideas may value writers who agree with them more than writers who do not[;] they may, and often do, value bad writers of their own party or religion more than good writers of another party or church” (32). The poet's taste certainly did not limit his inspirations to literature only from a particular time and place. Pound studied poetry from many different eras and cultural traditions in order to determine how best to write poetry and is well-known for his translations of medieval Provençal and traditional Chinese poetry into English. The ideogrammic method is amenable to many different poetic traditions and does not appear to have anything to do with the moral content of poetry. There is, however, in Pound's view an obligation to represent the world faithfully and correctly that might be informed by his extremist political positions.

The thought that Pound might be the purest example of a humanistic poet is easily dispelled when delving into Pound's radical views on the connection between culture and politics. Pound's political views, which were radical throughout his life and reached their most extreme expression in his active support of Mussolini and propagandizing on his behalf, cannot be easily separated from his poetics. His politics and his poetics were similarly informed by the

writings of an eclectic group of cultural commentators, ideological historians, economic theory, and idiosyncratic philosophers. In particular, the German ethnologist Leo Frobenius seems to have been the most influential figure for Pound's understanding of the connection between art and society. Pound considers Frobenius to be "a great master of diagnosis" when he recounts a couple of examples of his and his assistant's ability to determine the source of artifacts just from their material composition alone (Sansone and Pound 79). Pound believed that Frobenius "offers us the tools for totalitarian research and a great part of a *method* for the intelligent study of history" in his perceptual techniques and theories about cycles of cultural rise and decline (Sansone and Pound 80). A totalitarian state can, in Pound's view, avoid the decadence of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Western Europe and prevent "usury" from tainting its culture by discerning the causes of cultural decline and preserving the health of the *paideuma*.

The notion of the *paideuma*, or "the dominant or germinal complex of ideas of a given epoch and of a people" (Sansone and Pound 80), does not distinguish between culture as aesthetic works and culture as non-aesthetic concepts like governance and economics. In *Guide to Kulchur*, an expansive handbook written to promote a "New Paideuma," Pound "suggest[s] that finer and future critics of art will be able to tell from the quality of a painting the degree of tolerance or intolerance of usury extant in the age or milieu that produced it" (27). In Pound's view, the health of culture is directly related to economic conditions, and thus Pound's analysis of and antidote to European cultural decline requires not only a totalitarian state but also a totalitarian aesthetics. What Pound exactly means by "totalitarian" in aesthetic terms is unclear, but it could certainly relate to his thoughts on properly representing the facts and the use of the ideogrammic method.

Although Pound's support of fascism is nowhere present in his earlier writings, he appears to have changed little in his aesthetic views between his participation in early modernist movements and his artistic output prior to his arrest in Italy after the fall of the Mussolini government. Pound notes in a 1938 *Broletto* article "that Vorticism was born in London from the determination of Wyndham Lewis, Henri Gaudier (a.k.a. Brzeska) and [himself] to plumb the depths, to find the foundations of a healthy art" (Sansone 81). Despite once forming part of a revolutionary and progressive aesthetic movement, one that was conceived of as a competitor to other contemporary movements like Futurism, Pound looks back on his participation in Vorticism as if he had always desired to preserve the health of art and culture. As early as 1934, four years prior to the publication of *Guide to Kulchur* and its discussions of *paideuma*, Pound asserts the need for a defensive attitude about the well-being of literature and by extension the *paideuma*:

"The man of understanding can no more sit quiet and resigned while his country lets its literature decay, and lets good writing meet with contempt, than a good doctor could sit quiet and contented while some ignorant child was infecting itself with tuberculosis under the impression that it was merely eating jam tarts." (*ABC of Reading* 33)

In *Guide to Kulchur*, when defending his view that Europe was currently in a stage of cultural decline, Pound states that "[a] man does not know his own ADDRESS (in time) until he knows where his time and milieu stand in relation to other times and conditions" (83), which reaffirms his interest in establishing historical continuity and justifies his unfavorable comparison between the decadent and rotting present and the comparatively pristine past. Far from becoming a radical artist as a result of his increasingly radical politics, Pound seems to have begun his artistic career with a set of aesthetic principles concerning cultural preservation

that remained constant throughout, while his criticisms of culture became more and more influenced by the principle of correct presentation of the facts.

For Pound to have discussed over several decades theories about aesthetic creation and perception, which he believes are capable of explaining to artists how to create good art and to observers of art how to analyze and understand a work, one would expect him to have written work with these same theories in mind. Certainly the longer poetic works of Pound locate the poet and his work's place in history and are constructed out of verses apparently following the ideogrammic method. *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, and *The Cantos* each are at times charged with a moralizing fervor, and some lines of these poems read like miniature diagnoses of social, economic, and political ills. Like Eliot, Pound is concerned with fitting into tradition, but unlike Eliot he also finds that identifiable features of art, if rendered properly, clearly communicate the social, economic, and political principles of the artist. Despite this important distinction between the aesthetics of Eliot and Pound, the latter poet would still be best classed as belonging to the Platonic tradition given his self-described totalitarian outlook on literature, which requires that good sense must fight against bad literature for the preservation of the ideal *paideuma*. Protecting the *paideuma* itself must be done by means of good aesthetic principles, including an ideal use of the ideogrammic method and an accurate portrayal of current states of affairs.

This overview of Eliot and Pound's poetics, their respective influences, and both poets' classification as Platonic literary figures should emphasize the distinction between these poets and other modernists. Eliot and Pound share a pessimism and a skepticism about literature's influence on the individual and society, and in their own ways they believed that there are conditions under which a healthy culture can be maintained that require a restriction of

economic, political, and even artistic freedom for individuals. Eliot turned inward after his adoption of Anglicanism and committed to a self-discipline of faith, while Pound turned outward and railed against the corrupting influence of immoral economic systems and cultural degradation.

CHAPTER 5: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ELIOT, POUND, AND CLASSICAL LITERATURE

Eliot and Pound no doubt engaged with the classical world in their poetry. Their imposing intertextuality was turned toward all manner of topics, but there are special connections between Eliot, Pound, and the classical world due to the special emphasis both poets placed on continuity and fitting into literary tradition.

The classical world of ancient Greece and Rome is by no means monolithic in its opinions. To say that there was a long-standing consensus on any issue of culture, politics, or philosophy between Greeks, Romans, and other ancient Mediterranean groups would be to state a falsity that is clearly refuted by historical evidence and modern scholarship. Like all ages and all diverse cultural regions, the classical world was in constant conversation with itself over problems of morality, religion, governance, economics, the rights of laborers, and sex and gender politics, and historical figures can hardly be classified into tropes or archetypes without reducing them to erroneous portrayals of their true beliefs and actions. Generalizations about ancient Greece and Rome, save for the weakest claims about material conditions or differences in culture between ancients and moderns, should be resisted for these reasons.

One such false generalization about the classical world is that ancient Greeks and Romans shared a conception of literary criticism and aesthetic theories about literature. Indeed, the debate between Platonic, Neoplatonic, and humanistic critical traditions began in the classical world and later writers have only inherited these traditions. Seaton identifies the beginning of the humanistic tradition in Aristotle's appraisal of literature as a method for readers to better understand the human condition in his *Poetics*, and many classical authors seem to have

followed Aristotle's reasoning. For many Greek and Roman poets what made action virtuous was to be questioned, and social rules were often broken in their literary works. Some poets, including Lucretius, could alternatively be considered Neoplatonic given their belief that literature could educate the people on the proper way of conceiving the world. In *De Rerum Natura*, his lengthy poem explaining Epicurean philosophy and its related notions of physics and ethics, Lucretius asks Venus "to be [his] associate in this [his] song" (3), requesting for her to placate readers so that they may be most receptive to his message. Lucretius finds it advantageous to communicate his complex philosophical ideas through the medium of poetry since it has the ability to simultaneously educate and entertain its audiences. It is Plato who appears to be the great exception to the discussion of literary criticism and aesthetic principles in the classical world where he proclaims in the *Republic* that the very human and unflattering portrayals of the gods in traditional myths, including Homer's epics, "are not to be admitted into our city, whether they are meant allegorically or literally" (63).

The classical world was not without literary controversy which spilled over into the realm of politics. Particularly in ancient Rome scandals over immoral poetry abounded and were taken very seriously by its rulers. Ovid, the multifaceted writer of the epic *Metamorphoses*, of revealing and often humorous love elegies, and of wisdom literature like the *Ars Amatoria*, was exiled from Rome in 8 CE by Augustus Caesar. The rationale for his exile is still an unresolved issue for classicists and historians, but important factors in Ovid's view include the publication of his *Ars Amatoria* and the book's removal from three Roman libraries (Ovid and Hejduk 31). Though Ovid was probably not banished from Rome solely on account of his immoral views on courtship and adultery as expressed in his poetry, the relevance of his work to the politics of the early Roman Empire cannot be dismissed, and the fact of his close proximity to the Augustan

political elite illustrates the high degree to which Augustus valued and patronized Latin poetry. Ovid's exile represents an exceptional and apparently extralegal case of ancient censorship, but the Roman legal system certainly also permitted for general censorship against obscenity. One entry on the Twelve Tables, the earliest written and publically available register of Roman law, "mandates a punishment of clubbing to death for those who compose songs containing slanderous or insulting lyrics" (Watts 159). Despite promises to protect free speech making it "risky for emperors to be perceived as limiting speech too aggressively" (Watts 161), there was little to no legal basis for free speech throughout all periods of ancient Rome and its emperors have variously arrested, imprisoned, or killed vocal dissenters. Poets, philosophers, and pamphleteers, lacking legal protections for speech and having the weight of the law against them, of necessity had to self-censor their writings in order to escape political persecution and often resorted to tactics like "speaking in a sort of code that only insiders can truly understand" (Watts 162). The politics of censoring speech and publishing appear just as reactionary in the classical world as they were leading up to the beginnings of modernism.

An observation that can be made about the classical world and its literature, in contrast to reductive generalizations about how the ancients thought, is how the majority of Greek and Roman writers built on the foundations of their literary predecessors. Although ancient authors may fall under different traditions of literary criticism from Eliot and Pound, it is true that across traditions classical writers relied largely on received narratives and poetic forms to fashion new poetry. The aforementioned love elegists took the elegiac couplet, a style of verse that alternates between dactylic hexameter and pentameter and "had long been used for consolatory or lament poems" since the 7th century BCE (Martin and Sienkewicz), and turned it toward vivid, exaggerated, and often fictionalized accounts of romance and male submission to female lovers.

Older, entrenched poetic forms suddenly become alive again once returned to with new content. Not only was form reinvigorated by content throughout classical literature, but traditional poetic content slowly metamorphosed and was adapted to suit the needs of particular poets. Vergil continued the epic tradition of Homer with his *Aeneid*, which centers on the life and trials of Trojan Aeneas after the fall of Troy in the *Iliad*. Aeneas would go on to set the foundations for the Roman Empire, which had only just taken shape when Vergil was composing his epic. These, along with many other examples of ancient intertextuality and return to older poetic forms, demonstrate how classical literature was not only self-referential and relied on reinterpreting the past, but also how classical writers consciously maintained a literary continuity over time. A self-referencing web of allusions developed between classical writers who, as Eliot claims when talking about the European literary tradition, established a simultaneous order of literary past and present.

In this comparison between the conception of continuity between the classical world and Eliot and Pound it may seem obvious to conclude that the two modernists are neoclassical, or that both share a desire to revive a dead past for reasons of technical, moral, or cultural superiority. But this would be a deep misconception of their shared thoughts on literature and tradition, for it presumes that the past is already dead and buried and entails Williams' bold claim that Eliot, and by extension Pound, really are extractors of genius. Maintaining continuity does not entail reliving the past or stagnating in tired uses of poetic forms. Returning briefly to Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot denies that there is a teleology to history but insists that the collective unconscious of European literature "is a mind which changes, and that change is a development which abandons nothing *en route*, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen" (*The Sacred*

Wood 42-43). Young poets receive the material of their predecessors and react to it by producing work inspired by such material, and in this process of chronological dialogue both the past and the present of literary history are altered. There is nothing dead for Eliot or Pound to revive, since modern poets who appropriately fit into tradition bear their literary ancestors' influence at all times. The ancients live on in reference and reinterpretation, and Eliot and Pound are only continuing the same process of poetic creation which the ancients themselves participated in.

CONCLUSION

Eliot and Pound, when considering their place in the modernist literary canon, appear to be a rule unto themselves: they are the most radical of modernists and the most conservative in their taste, at once the most difficult modernists to read and the most widely-read and well-known of all high modernist poets. The preceding glimpses into the literary criticism and aesthetic theories of Eliot and Pound and comparisons to those of classical writers reveal fundamental similarities between these two modernist poets and their classical forbearers. Both of these writers, and especially Pound for his influence on the development of significant movements in literary modernism and in editing the works of several early modernists, are examples of how modernism defines an era of simultaneous aesthetic fervor as opposed to an era of simultaneous aesthetic vision. However, the conceptual force of modernism, the ability for the term to gather up and simplify the many different strains and voices it contains, may cause many to view Eliot and Pound as if they too rejected literary tradition and desired to break continuity with the classical world.

Virginia Woolf was associated with Eliot and Pound primarily through their preeminence in Anglo-American modernist literary circles, but, although she found them to be intriguing writers and thinkers, she does not share many of the two poets' fundamental aesthetic views and cultural concerns. Woolf's essay "On Not Knowing Greek" centers on the contention that "between this foreign people [the Greeks] and ourselves there is not only difference of race and tongue but a tremendous breach of tradition" (39). Different material conditions separate ancients and moderns by fixing distinctions in language, culture, and thought, and on account of such great differences Woolf believes that in order "to think of Sophocles here, we must annihilate the smoke and the damp and the thick wet mists" (41). Woolf recognizes that the roots

of important features of modern literature lie in ancient Greek literature, but because of the gulfs of time and place which separated her from classical Greece and also Rome, the power of its literature does not enrapture her. She favorably compares the characters of the *Canterbury Tales* to the classical works that inspired them, as she calls the Greek archetypes which informed Chaucer “the originals, [while] Chaucer’s [are] the varieties of the human species” (44). The language of the Greeks, filled with unfamiliar declensions, foreign conjugations, and alien tones, along with the literature that was first written in that language, is only a distant relation to her modern English idiom.

Woolf, together with modernist poets like William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, and still others, fashioned new literary voices for themselves. These modernists played with narrative, verse, and subject matter in ways that strayed far from established norms of storytelling and metrical composition. Much the same can be said of Eliot and Pound, but their conceptions of what they were doing could not have been more opposed. The former group of modernists were less concerned about what preceded their work. Eliot and Pound recognized what had indeed changed between the classical world and their contemporary world and chose to write poetry that reflected their current conditions. All the while they fostered a continuity with literary history that extended right into ancient Greece and Rome, both respecting the fact that they were yet another stage of literary development that did not silence the past but only kept it alive.

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