

## Purpose

Multiple authors within the high Modernist literary movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century cultivated open fascinations and flirtations with fascism in their literary works and in public commentary. Although a contested term, most scholars agree that fascism is best described as a hyper-nationalist sociopolitical philosophy highly stratifying society around the conventional morality of a society and the control of an autocratic leader, and that fascism came to historical prominence first under Italian dictator Benito Mussolini and then under Nazi Fuhrer Adolf Hitler.<sup>1</sup> Due to the correlation in time periods between the rise of Modernism after the First World War and the rise of Mussolini in 1922, Modernist writers were presented with fascism as a contemporary political context for their work. However, rather than rejecting fascism, as some artists did, several prominent Modernists, including Ezra Pound, Knut Hamsun and Gertrude Stein, openly aligned themselves with fascist politics.<sup>2</sup> Many of these writers have been reexamined recently due to both the rise of proto-fascism in the West and the massively influential nature of their work on contemporary authors of today. Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyze the work of these high Modernists alongside contemporary literature to determine if similar historical contexts of fascism, pandemic and social unrest produce similar political orientations in literature.

## Project Background

After relocating to Fascist Italy in 1924, preeminent Modernist poet Ezra Pound relocated the epicenter of his literary movement within the borders of a socially totalitarian nation, drastically changing the mood and subject matter of his work and influencing other Modernist authors in the direction of right wing authoritarianism.<sup>3</sup> Within his *Cantos*, Pound exhibits a growing fascination with racial “solidarity,” political strongarming and, in his view, the success of stratified bigotry within Mussolini’s regime.<sup>4</sup> Further, Pound explicitly wrote for fascist publications and composed propaganda on behalf of Mussolini’s government directly in favor of fascism.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism: 1914-1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995). <sup>2</sup> Paul Morrison, *The Poetics of Fascism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Paul de Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc, 1996.) <sup>3</sup> David Barnes, “Fascist Aesthetics: Ezra Pound’s Cultural Negotiations in 1930s Italy,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 34, no. 1 (2010), pp. 19–35. <sup>4</sup> Andrea Rinaldi and Matthew Feldman, “‘Penny-Wise ...’: Ezra Pound’s Posthumous Legacy to Fascism.” *Sanglap: Journal of Literary and Cultural Inquiry*, 1, no. 2 (2015): pp. 27+. <sup>5</sup> Matthew Feldman. *Ezra Pound’s Fascist Propaganda, 1935-45* (New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2013).

Later, Gertrude Stein, a proto-feminist writer, came to prominence as one of the more influential Modernist women, due especially to her acclaimed work *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. However, her relationship and affiliation with the fascist Vichy government in France caused her politics to come into question when later examinations were made. Her work in favor of and in support of the Vichy government was similar in motivation and application to Pound's fascination with Mussolini's Italy.<sup>6</sup>

Yet high Modernist fascism was not limited to authors originally from the United States. Knut Hamsun, Norwegian modernist and recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1920, openly and publicly identified with Nazism in particular and actively supported Hitler's Third Reich, leading to a later treason charge. He wrote numerous propaganda articles as part of his collaboration with Goebbels, and sent his Noble Prize in Literature to Goebbels himself.<sup>7</sup>

Given the apparent removal of fascism from the Western and global stage after 1945, this historical context for modernism dissipated and postmodern literature, a development of modernism that challenged certain aspects of its predecessor, gained popularity. However, in the modern day, it is undeniable that, globally, fascism has made a resurgence, most notably realized in leaders and groups, like Viktor Orban of Hungary, the Polish Law and Justice Party, and the "Proud Boys" and the "Oath Keepers" in the United States. Thus, it is the purpose of this study to examine if similar historical contexts provoke similar literary responses. Do the foremost poets and authors of contemporary literature embrace this neo-fascism like some of their predecessors, or do they reject it in their work and personal writings?

## **Project Methods**

The primary method of this study will be simple: engaging with and analyzing texts of the high Modernists alongside present-day contemporary Western literature after 2000, with a special emphasis on literature composed after the year 2016, in the attempt to surmise their intentions and messaging. I plan to read each of the following texts and analyze 1) their stylistic features respective to the literary movements the authors belong to, and 2) the author's analysis on fascism in each respective time period. These works have been selected for their artistic merit, critical acclaim, commercial success, and/or political content.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Will, *Unlikely Collaboration: Gertrude Stein, Bernard Fajó, and the Vichy Dilemma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) <sup>7</sup>Peter Sjølyst-Jackson, *Troubling Legacies: Migration, Modernism and Fascism in the Case of Knut Hamsun* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2011)

## Works to be Examined

*This reading list is a work in progress and may be modified during the project for research purposes.*

*Cantos*, Ezra Pound

*Selected Poems*, Ezra Pound

*Wars I Have Seen*, Gertrude Stein

*The Cultural Life of Modern America*, Knut Hamsun

*The Golden House*, Salman Rushdie

*The Power*, Naomi Alderman

*The Hill We Climb and Other Poems*, Amanda Gorman

*The Problem of the Many*, Timothy Donnelly

*Can't and Won't: Stories*, Lydia Davis

*Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, Rajiv Joseph

*The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Frederic Jameson *Modernism and*

*Totalitarianism: Rethinking the Intellectual Sources of Nazism and Stalinism, 1945 to the Present*,

Richard Shorten

Various scholarly articles, including the following:

Sherry, Vincent. *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism*, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1993.

Roberts, David. "Fascism, Modernism and the Quest for an Alternative Modernity." *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 43, no. 1, Taylor & Francis Group, Feb. 2009, pp. 91–102, doi:10.1080/00313220802636098.

Hewitt, Andrew. *Political Inversions : Homosexuality, Fascism, & the Modernist Imaginary* . Stanford University Press, 1996.

Antliff, Mark. "Fascism, Modernism, and Modernity." *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 84, no. 1, 2002, pp. 148-169. *ProQuest*, <https://www-proquest-com.proxy.campbell.edu/scholarly-journals/fascism-modernism-modernity/docview/222950928/se-2?accountid=146941>.

Griffin, Roger. "Modernity, modernism, and fascism. A "mazeway resynthesis"." *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 15 no. 1, 2008, p. 9-24. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/mod.2008.0011.

### **Project Timeline**

I plan to split this project into four phases. The first phase will consist of my reading and digesting the primary works of the high Modernists. The second phase will consist of my reading the scholarship available on their work. The third phase will consist of my reading and digesting the contemporary works listed. The fourth phase will consist of undertaking an attempt at comparing the similarities of historical contexts and unraveling stylistic similarities between the high Modernist literature examined and the contemporary literature examined.

I plan for phase one to last from May 17 through May 27, for phase two to last from May 27 through June 17, for phase three to last from June 17 through June 30, and for phase four to last from June 30 to July 8, upon which my findings will be presented.

### **Project Budget**

The only two categories of expenses for this research project are outlined below.

#### Expense 1: Texts

A conservative estimate of the total cost for texts needed, not including shipping and handling costs, is \$250.

#### **Expense 2: Visit to the Yale University Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library**

The Beinecke Library at Yale University contains the Ezra Pound Papers, a notable collection of original manuscripts and writings of Ezra Pound which include his poetic, literary and political musings. Visiting the Pound Papers at the Beinecke Library will provide helpful insight as to the original intentions of Pound by examining the primary texts. Flights to New Haven, CT from Raleigh, NC average around \$175 round trip. Hotel stays in New Haven, CT average around \$75 per night conservatively. Conservatively

estimating, costs for transportation and food can be estimated at \$30 per day.

Total budget: \$870 (assuming 4-day visit to Yale with 3 nights in a hotel)

### Bibliography

Barnes, David. "Fascist Aesthetics: Ezra Pound's Cultural Negotiations in 1930s Italy." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 34, no. 1 (2010): pp. 19–35, doi:10.2979/JML.2010.34.1.19. Feldman,

Matthew. *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-45*. New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2013.

Morrison, Paul. *The Poetics of Fascism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Paul de Man*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1996.

Payne, Stanley G. *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

Rinaldi, Andrea, and Matthew Feldman. "'Penny-Wise ...': Ezra Pound's Posthumous Legacy to Fascism." *Sanglap : Journal of Literary and Cultural Inquiry*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2015): pp. 27+. Sjølyst-

Jackson, Peter. *Troubling Legacies: Migration, Modernism and Fascism in the Case of Knut Hamsun*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2011.

Will, Barbara. *Unlikely Collaboration: Gertrude Stein, Bernard Faÿ, and the Vichy Dilemma*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.