A Natural History of Genius: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Totalitarianism

Yasaman Naraghi

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Reading Committee:

Leroy Searle, Chair

Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen

Douglas Collins

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Abstract

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Yasaman Naraghi

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Professor Leroy Searle

Departments of English and Comparative Literature

The eighteenth-century concept of 'genius' evolved to strip ambivalent and communal qualities to prioritize the 'man of genius' over the merits of his work. *A Natural History of Genius: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Totalitarianism* shows how the resulting imitative quality of genius problematizes the political realm, as a charismatic figure in shaping the formation of the state induces an imitation of his ideologies. The focal texts, literary and philosophical, foreground the resulting tendencies toward totalitarianism. By shifting the emphasis to the intellectual work and away from the individual man, my argument enables a more supple and subtle critique of aesthetics and ethics in specific relation to totalitarianism.

The introduction provides an overview of the historical, philological, and philosophical development of genius as a concept, paying close attention to the eighteenth-

century debates around the function of genius. I trace how genius is stripped of its ambivalence in order to mark a chosen individual endowed with certain transcendental powers unknown and inaccessible to ordinary men. In other words, this introduction focuses on how genius becomes an embodiment of spirit and how this impacts our capacity for moral judgments.

In the first chapter, "The Grotesque Genius: Moral Judgments and Normative Categories," I provide an analysis of Thomas Mann's *Mario and the Magician* (1929) in order to expand on themes of nationalism-cum-totalitarianism and the role of genius in creating totalitarian structures. This chapter is concerned with the imitative quality of genius and its influence on crowd psychology that limit freedom for making moral judgments. Furthermore, there is a correlation between genius and the grotesque which is discussed through the titular magician of Mann's novella, Cipolla, for the purpose of thinking through what escapes normative categories.

Michel Tournier's *The Ogre* (1970) is the subject of the second chapter, "The Ambivalent Grotesque: Genius and the Problem of Signification." This chapter emphasizes the importance of ambivalence in making moral judgments by drawing on the previous chapter's argument relating genius and the grotesque. This chapter will thus consider how signs and symbols are read and misinterpreted; it focuses on the qualities we identify in order to make judgments as well as the ramifications of dismissing ambivalence in favor of singular (and easily digestible) meanings.

The third chapter, "Acts of Responsibility: Not the Thought but Thinking Itself," discusses Hannah Arendt's work regarding moral judgments and personal responsibility. Much of this dissertation deals with the ethical and moral consequences of imitation (and more specifically, the imitation of the man of genius) and Arendt allows for such discussion in the context of political states. As suggested by the title of the chapter, Arendt's concept of

thinking is central to the ethical and moral questions around the imitation of a political leader's will as an extension of the state's will.

Throughout this dissertation, I use the male pronoun to refer to genius. I would very much like to participate in using gender neutral pronouns in literary analysis so as to not contribute to the assumption of authorship as male. Unfortunately, however, the use of male pronouns is a deliberate choice that highlights a key aspect of genius. Genius is male.

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Acknowledgements

The image of academia is often of the solitary scholar toiling away in cavernous libraries; this is an image that betrays the communal aspects of thinking and writing. I owe a tremendous gratitude to my community, without whom I would not have been able to survive graduate school. Looking back at my academic journey so far, I am grateful for what I have learned and acquired as a scholar and a person being in the world. However, there has been much that I have lost in order to continue on this path I set for myself. I have been incredibly fortunate to have a community who mitigated those losses; a community that has not only contributed to my intellectual growth but has also supported and inspired my emotional intelligence.

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For my grandfather, babajoon, who inspired my understanding of

the political and moral implications of literature

Introduction

Genius, Ambivalence, and Moral Judgements in Totalitarianism

« Ni vu ni connu
Hasard ou génie ? »[1]
-*Le Sylphe*, Paul Valéry

How do we define genius and to what or whom do we afford this category? The term genius, today, is a husk of its own potential, negating its own complicated and rich genealogy. This dissertation will consider the philological and philosophical genealogy of genius in order to map out the move towards totalitarianism. The point of intersection between genius and totalitarianism occurs in the eighteenth century when the concept of genius was stripped of its ambivalent and communal qualities in favor of a singular man of genius. This reconceptualization of genius in the eighteenth century has contributed to systems whose logic inevitably promote a movement towards nationalism and further into totalitarianism. One of the reasons why I am interested in tracing genius in order to understand the emergence of totalitarianism is because it allows us to see that there is a philosophical tradition to totalitarianism. And if we take the example of the Third Reich as the model of totalitarianism, we can not only see the philosophical influences of totalitarianism but also the role of the German university (through the idea of the intellectual) in defending and upholding a totalitarian state.

We can trace the origins of genius back to Greek, Roman, and Arabic antiquities. Although there is disagreement in direct relation between Greek, Roman, and Arabic "genius," there are shared qualities that definitely link them together. In Roman and Greek antiquity, each person was born with their own genius, akin to an attendant spirit. In ancient Rome, for example, each individual was attended upon or guarded by his genius, which,

[1] "Unseen unknown / Chance or genius?"

although not identical to the individual, informs his personality. Genius in this context was also understood as the protector of family as it was believed to ensure reproduction. But genius was not only reserved to the human. Places and objects could also have a tutelary spirit known as genius loci. According to these definitions of genius, the locus of genius was always external to the person (or thing) whereas, according to the eighteenth-century reformulation, genius is embodied *within* the individual who possesses it either as a natural quality or a divine inspiration pervading their person. Because genius informed the character of an individual, it meant that it has a certain responsibility for a person's innate ability. This, in turn, develops into genius as remarkable even though less than remarkable abilities are also attributed to genius. From this, we can see how genius became synonymous with intelligence and talent. A significant aspect of genius in Greek and Roman antiquity is its externality to the individual. Another notable aspect of pre-18th century genius is its fluidity and ambivalence.

Genius' capacity for ambivalence can be seen in pre-Islamic Arabic mythology and folklore through the figure of djinn. However, as Islam spread through not only Arabia but surrounding environment djinni began to be understood as demonic, thus removing its ambivalent characteristics. In the Qu'ran, specifically, djinn is portrayed as evil in moralistic terms. Pre-Islamic djinn, however, were not determined in moralistic terms of evil and good. The German scholar of pre-Islamic and Islamic folklore, Joseph Henninger, in "Beliefs in Spirits among the pre-Islamic Arabs," states, "*Jinn* are not 'evil' spirits in the moralistic sense, which can be found in the Biblical religions as well as Islam, but are morally neutral. They are helpful or harmful according to whim, depending on whether they are friendly or hostile to a person, and this why people are reluctant to have any dealings with them" (*Magic and Divination in Early Islam* 35). In other words, the djinn's disposition towards a negative or positive force was determined through context and with whom they came into contact.

This means that there must be a judgment made about the djinni: can you trust it or will it be monstrous? Thus, the person is accountable for the consequences of their judgment.

Henninger also points out an aspect of the pre-Islamic djinn that parallels that found in Greek and Roman antiquity. "There was an idea," Henninger points out, "that every human has a Doppelganger among the *Jinn*, maybe even a belief in a personal guardian spirit, but most certainly one finds the belief that some very favoured human beings can have close and friendly relationships with *Jinn*" (*Magic and Divination in Early Islam* 33). He goes on to state, "the point here being that the *jinn* have secret knowledge, some of which they impart. The poet (sha'ir) and the musician were assumed to be favoured with similar inspiration, which contributed to the great esteem in which poets were held in pre-Islamic Arabia and to the faith in the immanent power of the poet's words, his curse and his satire against the enemy" (*Magic and Divination in Early Islam* 33-4). Similar to how genius became synonymous with intelligence and talent in Roman antiquity, the pre-Islamic djinn also carried with it a belief of higher knowledge that is available to only a few individuals.[2] It is important to note that there is still ambivalence in this higher knowledge insofar as it is not strictly constructive.

Djinn, however, does not maintain its ambivalence and becomes fixed in its identity through Islam. The main reason for this is that an ambivalent djinn poses danger to monotheism. The ambivalent djinn inherently negates the clear boundaries of good and evil so necessary to the Islamic monotheism. In the Qu'ran, then, djinn is written in moralistic terms as associated with the demonic world. This move from pre-Islamic to Islamic understanding of djinn can also be observed in the eighteenth-century reformulation of genius; albeit instead of becoming evil, genius becomes good.

[2] Inspiration: the poet becoming inspired by the spirits or the divine.

Not only does genius become good, it also becomes original. In his 1759 work, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, Edward Young situates and formalizes genius as an individual man instead of a quality that could be achieved or is communally accessible.[3] In other words, genius becomes a celebrated and privileged figure of originality who does not follow the imitative discourse of ordinary men but creates models for ordinary men to imitate and follow. One example of this original genius is William Shakespeare, whose canonical body of work has inspired many imitations.

As Jonathan Bates points out, in his essay "Shakespeare and Original Genius," what makes Shakespeare not only a man of genius but an original genius[4] can be attributed to his supernatural characters such as Caliban, Ariel, and the fairies of *A Misdsummer Night's Dream*, because they are "an affront to the creed of mimesis" and "the English rejection of Neo-Classical theory" (*Genius* 79). The primary quality of man of genius is that he himself does not follow models but instead sets up models to be imitated.[5] Shakespeare's conception of characters such as Ariel and Caliban – because they cannot be found in nature – create a rupture in the common discourse that allows for new ways of composition.

Furthermore, Shakespeare's genius is closely associated with his status as a national author. Because of his body of work that has not only transcended his time but also the borders of his home, Shakespeare has been credited with composing a cohesive national identity. In other words, he has solidified the English ethos that can be globally legible. The

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[3] This is not to say that Young was the first to propose such a definition of genius; I'm inferring that he played a significant role in the historical development of genius by codifying it. Longinus, whose concept of sublimity is echoed in Young, similarly attributes what one might call genius to an individual who has a natural predilection to a lofty cast of mind. "[T]rue eloquence," he writes in *On the Sublime*, "can be found only in those whose spirit is generous and aspiring. For those whose whole lives are wasted in paltry and illiberal thoughts and habits cannot possibly produce any work worthy of the lasting reverence of mankind […] Hence sublime thoughts belong properly to the loftiest minds" (15-6).

[4] Original genius refers to an artist whose creation is divorced from any form or influence of its predecessors.

[5] This is not to say that Shakespeare conceived of his plays from a point of nothingness. There is evidence of plays similar to his in circulation in the non-western world prior to his time.

Germans, in particular, defined Shakespeare as a genius through this aspect. But it was not just the Germans who were looking at English literature as forming and elevating a national identity. In his introduction to *History of English Literature*, Hippolyte Taine explains his examination of English literature through its totality, "I had to find a people with a grand and complete literature, and this is rare: there are few nations who have, during their whole existence, really thought and written. Among the ancients, the Latin literature is worth nothing at the outset, then borrowed and imitative. Among the moderns, German literature is almost wanting for two centuries" (*Critical Theory* 619). In the same breath, Taine disparages German literature as scattered and in dire need of cohesion. He later on goes to say that the English have "[brought] to light great political, religious, and literary works, and by develop[ed] the recondite mechanism whereby the Saxon barbarian has been transformed into the Englishman of today" (*Critical Theory* 620).

The Germans' fascination with Shakespeare as the emblem of a national identity is key to this dissertation's study of genius as it links genius with nationalism and, ultimately, totalitarianism. The process of German unification into a nation state has had many key moments such as the treaty of Westphalia and the founding of the German Empire in 1871 that accelerated the move towards nation statehood. Prior to 1871, there was no cohesive German state but multiple sovereign states that were organized by Napoleon into the German Confederation in 1814.[6] One of the challenges of the unification of Germany was the lack of a cohesive and consistent national identity. There were multiple religions, multiple ethnicities, multiple dialects, etc. that comprised the German states. For a nation state to succeed and survive, there has to be a consensus on a singular national ethos. In the case of Germany, we see this fully realized during the Third Reich. However, it is important to note

[6] This is an example of a moment that can explain the historical tension between Germans and the French.

that there were not only material conditions that led to the fatal nationalism of the Third Reich but that there were also literary, artistic, and philosophical conditions. A key figure that promoted nationalism through literature was the German Enlightenment philosopher, Johann Gottfried Herder.

Herder advocated for a national literature under which German-speaking states could be assumed and elevated to have a unifying nature and begin the process of nation state building. In order to do so, he was particularly interested in examining Shakespeare's importance to Englishness. Of Shakespeare, Herder says, "'He therefore brought together the estates and individuals, the people and idioms, the kings and fools, fools and kings, to form one glorious whole! He found no such simple spirit of history, plot, and action; he took history as he found it, and with his creative spirit he combined the most diverse material into a wondrous whole" (*Shakespeare* 29-30). Herder recognized in Shakespeare the ability of the unification of a manifold into a whole that is consistent and seamlessly integrated. Shakespeare, thus, achieved in his body of work what Herder wanted the German states to achieve in their character.

In "Goethe on Genius," Michael Beddow states, "Herder derived a programme for establishing a German national literature which made assimilation of a foreign model not only unnecessary but actually harmful" (*Genius* 99). "Herder," he goes on to say, "pointed to the poetry of the Old Testament, to Homer, Pindar, Shakespeare (and of course, Ossian) not as models to imitate but as instances of what emerged when all imitation was shunned" (*Genius* 99). Herder saw in his student, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a writer well qualified to stand in this line of succession. In essence, Herder saw Goethe as a man of genius – an

original – who could produce a national literature that could be in turn imitated by others for the purpose of creating and espousing a cohesive national identity.[7]

What Herder saw as genius that shunned all imitation was a pure and uninhibited creative power free of any rules of neo-classicism. In this regard, Herder's conception of genius was that it was unlearned and gave into his passions rather than his reason, which is the basis for the short lived proto-Romantic German art movement of *Strum und Drang* (Storm and Drive).

At the same time as Herder's proselytization of genius, Immanuel Kant embarks on a project of regulating genius and giving it boundaries. John H. Zammito in *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment* (1992) plainly explains that Kant viewed the popular understanding of genius as unbound creative power as an affront to Enlightenment, "[t]he project of Enlightenment itself appeared to be at stake" (8). According to Zammito, "For Kant, the 'cult of genius' was already an issue by the late 1760s, before the *Strum und Drang* had in fact emerged. He was already predisposed to reject it, before it had even begun to intrude on his cultural world, as it would in time" (34). Kant saw that if genius is to be unlearned and boundless, it will, then, lead to genius as enthusiastic. It was critical for Kant to distance genius from enthusiasms and place it as a faculty of the mind. For Kant, the enthusiastic genius meant a return to religious enthusiasm which threatens Enlightenment's call for "the courage to use your own understanding". More specifically, this kind of genius could lead to dogmatic thinking that had for a long time, according to Kant, divorced the mind from its own understanding.

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[7] Goethe, however, rebelled against his mentor, Herder, and turned his attention to promoting world literature (Weltliteratur) over Herder's proposed national literature. It should be noted that Goethe's world literature is not absolutely broad in scope, merely broader than a national literature, and should not be understood in terms of global literature.

Kant was an outlier in his criticism of genius' unbridle creative power. In *Kant's Concept of Genius: Its Origin and Function in the Third Critique*, Paul W. Bruno writes, "Kant attempted to find the limits of genius in an atmosphere that increasingly only approached genius in one way, and that was to celebrate its endless creative possibilities" (6). His attempt at regulating genius shows that he understood the menace of giving authority and force to genius. However, genius does not figure prominently in his body of work and he only addresses genius in relation to taste and determining judgments, "For the **judging** of beautiful objects, as such, **taste** is required; but for beautiful art itself, i.e., for **producing** such objects, **genius** is required" (*Power of Judgment* 189).

Kant in his third and final critique, *The Critique of Power of Judgment*, defines genius as "the talent (natural gift) that gives the rule to art. Since the talent, as an inborn productive faculty of the artist, itself belongs to nature, this could also be expressed thus: **Genius** is the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) **through which** nature gives the rule to art" (186). He goes on to appoint originality as the primary attribute of genius followed by exemplarity and nature. Originality, simply, refers to the capacity to bring to being something that is not an imitation of a predecessor. Exemplarity, on the other hand, refers to genius' as a guide; one who provides a course or method but not the exact directions. Kant explains the last attribute, nature, as the indefinable steps of the work of genius, "hence the author of a product that he owes to his genius does not know himself how the ideas for it come to him, and also does not have it in his power to think up such things at will or according to plan, and to communicate to others precepts that would put them in a position to produce similar products" (187). With nature, Kant removes genius from the realm of conventional science. According to him, works of genius are always artistic works in that the artist cannot detail step by step his process of creation but a scientist is able to articulate each step in the

formation of a scientific idea. In this case, genius has the ability to create beautiful art but cannot explain *how* beautiful art is created.

Another way Kant regulates genius is through cultivation and education, "Genius can only provide rich **material** for products of art; its elaboration and **form** require a talent that has been academically trained, in order to make a use of it that can stand up to the power of judgment" (*Power of Judgment* 189). Here, Kant clearly rejects the idea of an unlearned genius and further distances himself from Herder and others seeking to treat genius as driven by enthusiasm. For him, a work of genius can only exist when an artist uses his learning to give form to what his genius wants to give form. Not only does the introduction of a formal education into genius is a move against the unlearned genius but it is also necessary to Kant's project of positioning genius as a faculty of mind. The faculties of the mind are essential to Kant's reconciliation of the transcendental with the empirical. This can be extended to explain his inclination to seek a way of reconciling the innate nature of genius with formal education.

Although Kant and Herder disagreed regarding the nature of genius, the distinction Kant makes between imitation and succession parallels Herder's messier assertion that genius shuns all imitation. In *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant writes,

> **Succession**, related to a precedent, not imitation, is the correct expression for any influence that the products of an exemplary author can have on others, which means no more than to create from the same sources from which the latter created, and to learn from one's predecessor only the manner of conducting oneself in so doing. But among all the faculties and talents, taste is precisely the one which, because its judgment is not determinable by means of concepts and precepts, is most in need of the examples of what in the progress of culture has longest enjoyed approval if it is

> not quickly to fall back into barbarism and sink back into the crudity of its first attempts. (164)[8]

Besides the distinction between succession and imitation, which is key to how genius becomes dangerous, Kant makes several crucial distinctions that relate to how the eighteenth century re-conceptualized genius. One of these is the distinction between "creat[ing] from the same sources" of a predecessor and learning from "one's predecessor only the manner of conducting oneself" which highlights that to understand and reproduce a moment of genius is to follow *how* and *why* a work is produced instead of following its content. In shaping a national literature, Herder understood genius as emulating the manner of their predecessors instead of an outright imitation of their work. This important distinction, however, breaks down when it comes to ordinary men and works of genius. As Kant maintains that "the products of an exemplary author" influences succession and not imitation, Herder maintains it is the man of genius who does not imitate but succeeds other men of genius.

Kant ends by stressing that cultural progress requires exemplary moments that could be succeeded by other exemplary moments and makes it clear that this is not possible through imitation; a sentiment also found in Herder. Earlier in the same section, Kant sets up this premise through "method":

> There is no use of our powers at all, however free it might be, and even of reason (which must draw all its judgments from the common source *a priori*), which, if every

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[8] There is a larger issue at hand here regarding the aesthetic idea which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For further discussion of aesthetic ideas see Kant's section 49 of *The Critique of Aesthetic Power of Judgment*, "In a word, the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, associated with a given concept, which is combined with such a manifold of partial representations in the free use of the imagination that no expression designating a determinate concept can be found for it, which therefore allows the addition to a concept of much that is un- nameable, the feeling of which animates the cognitive faculties and combines spirit with the mere letter of language" (194).

> subject always had to begin entirely from the raw predisposition of his own nature, would not fall into mistaken attempts if others had not preceded him with their own, not in order to make their successors into mere imitators, but rather by means of their method to put others on the right path for seeking out the principles in themselves and thus for following their own, often better, course. (163-4)

"[M]eans of their method" is a clear separation from mere imitation and instead provides a way of following, which goes back to the second attribute of genius – exemplarity. Kant, in multiple occasions, emphasizes manner and method in the context of genius. This emphasis ties together the two parts of the power of judgment: aesthetic judgment and teleological judgment. It can be argued that what Kant is doing by the emphasis on method is a setup to purposiveness because one cannot have path without knowing or having the purpose or end. Purposiveness as it relates to art, the only product of genius, denotes an intention or design in its realization. This, then, relates to the third attribute of genius, nature, insofar as nature gives the rule to art and, thus, realizes the intention.

Although a brief topic in Kant's extensive body of work, his treatment of genius is quite important to its history in that he raises the question of what happens to genius if and when it is unmediated. Genius in Kant's work is still an innate power; however, as a cognitive power, it is mediated through judgment. As is the concern of this dissertation, Kant's position on genius serves as a warning of what could actually happen if genius is not mediated and is given unrestrained productive freedom.[9] Herder in the unmediated and

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[9] Jonathan Edwards in a 1743 letter to the Reverend Thomas Prince of Northampton, Massachusetts warns of enthusiasms during the Great Awakening, "the work continued more pure till we were infected from abroad: our people hearing of, and some of them seeing, the work in other places, where there was greater visible commotion than here, and the outward appearances were more extraordinary, were ready to think that the work in those places far excelled what was amongst us, and their eyes were dazzled with the high profession and great show that some made, who came hither from other places. That those people went so far beyond them in raptures and violent emotions of the affections, and a vehement zeal, and what they call boldness for Christ, our people were ready to think was owing to far greater attainments in grace, and intimacy with heaven: they looked little in their own eyes in comparison with

unlearned genius saw the benefits of a creative power unfettered to any rules and established structures that could conceive of a national literature capable of unifying a diverse people into a singular nationhood.

As mentioned earlier, the reconceptualization of genius in the eighteenth century has set up systems whose logic inevitably promotes a movement towards nationalism and further into totalitarianism. Genius as the mark of a chosen few is, thus, a polemic against democracy in the political state. There is a twofold manner in which genius is an instrumental figure of the political state. First, genius as an artist and a thinker is the catalyst for the creation of a national identity. Herder's encouragement of Goethe in producing a national literature – one that derives from folktale in order to establish an extensive history – is an example of this genius.

Second, in the process of nation state building that begins the process towards totalitarianism, the political leader is seen and represented as a genius who is to be imitated and followed. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an anti-Nazi German theologian, in his radio speech "The Fuhrer and the Individual in the Younger Generation," concludes that the totalitarian leader stands for the responsibility and ego of his followers, which in turn, means that his followers act according to the leader's ego. "The individual," Bonhoeffer points out, "is totally dissolved; he becomes a tool in the hands of the leader; the individual is not responsible; it is the leader who is responsible. In his faith in the leader, the individual surrenders ultimate responsibility to the leader" (*The Bonhoeffer Reader* 366).

Basically, in a totalitarian structure, these two manifestations of genius – artistic and political – are engaged with each other insofar as the success of the political leader hinges on the success of a national myth that is espoused through literature and the arts. In other words,

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them, and were ready to submit themselves to them, and yield themselves up to their conduct, taking it for granted, that every thing was right that they said and did".

starting in the eighteenth-century, genius begins to have political and moral implications with, in many cases, catastrophic consequences. In essence, there is a problem with genius because we have singularized it. This move to singularize and embody genius can be attributed to the problem of spirit. The question, however, is not how we conceptualize spirit but how we conceptualize ambivalence. Do we even have the capacity to conceptualize and comprehend ambivalence? Does ambivalence itself allow for a conceptualization of it? This is an important distinction to make because the problem is not spirit in itself but its quality of ambivalence and how ambivalence is reduced into singularity.

There are two crucial moves we can follow that codifies genius as an individual endowed with superior abilities in the eighteenth century. First, genius loses its ambivalent qualities and becomes fixed in its identity. Second, genius' externality, as seen in Greek and Roman antiquity, is internalized. These two changes in genius, then, leads to the man of genius. Genius as reduced to a single form and internalized into a man complicates moral judgments and, in some cases, removes the opportunity for moral judgments.

This eighteenth-century configuration of genius prompts a new way of considering productions – be it artistic or political – where the man of genius is of far more interest than the content of his productions. In totalitarian regimes, this manifests itself in the leader who is the sole guardian of the state. In a sense he is heavily abstracted from any political office and, thus, as a guardian of the state, it is his will that is followed without any consideration for the moral implications of said will. Bonhoeffer, in 1933 one day after Hitler becomes the chancellor of Germany, notes this point in his radio speech, "Naturally, there have always been leaders. Where there is community there is leadership. However, here we are interested only in the particular form that the idea of the leader took in the young generation, and here is a first characteristic: previously, leadership had found its expression in teachers, statesmen, fathers, that is, in the given social structure and offices, but now the leader has

become a completely autonomous form. The leader has become totally divorced from an office; he is essentially and only leader" (*The Bonhoeffer Reader* 363). Bonhoeffer was clearly referring to Hitler as the essential and only leader but he was also theorizing the fundamental quality of a totalitarian leader.[10]

This leader is to be imitated precisely because he is understood as a man of originality that will set up new models of being and thinking for ordinary men to follow. The consequences of merely imitating the man of genius or the totalitarian leader is a failure to make moral judgments based on the work or actions of said men because what these men demand is an absolute conviction in their personal capacity instead of the ethics of their actions.

Failure of genius is due to a misunderstanding of what it means; it is a reduction of its original ambivalence. Genius, as prescribed by the eighteenth-century, demands to be imitated. In other words, it asks for a suspension of thinking as does the totalitarian leader. Hannah Arendt, in *The Life of the Mind*, concisely sums up the sentiment of what actually is in danger when there is a demand of imitation. "There are no dangerous thoughts;" she states, "thinking itself is dangerous" (176).

Chapter Overview

This dissertation is composed of three main chapters looking at a constellation of literary and philosophical texts produced in the twentieth century that interrogates the imitation of a national form in order to reveal totalitarian tendencies. Furthermore, through this constellation, I hope to make a case against the idea of genius as codified in the eighteenth century by highlighting the dangers of imitating a man of genius since the reconceptualization of genius shifts the focus of inquiry from the production of the man and

[10] A further discussion of the totalitarian leader as the essential and only leader in the context of masses is discussed in the first chapter on Thomas Mann's *Mario and the Magician.*

places it onto the man itself. This is problematic insofar as it risks failure to critically evaluate the moral ramifications of what the genius produces. To this end, the texts at the center of my dissertation witness the rise of fascism in twentieth century Europe and examine the relationship between ordinary men and the few privileged men they imitate and follow.

In the first chapter, "The Grotesque Genius: Moral Judgments and Normative Categories," I examine the interconnectivity of genius and the grotesque by looking at Thomas Mann's 1929 novella, *Mario and the Magician*. Mann's novella is a formative text for this project insofar as it provides a concrete literary foundation from which themes of nationalism-cum-totalitarianism, genius, and grotesqueness will be expanded and further put in dialogue with each other. Mann's novella also allows for a discussion of crowd and group psychology, hypnosis, and fascination that aims to explicate the attraction demanded by one who is deemed man of genius. By taking into consideration socio-psychological works of the late-19th and early-20th centuries by Gabriel Tarde, Gustave Le Bon, and Sigmund Freud, this chapter will make a connection between the study of imitation in socio-political formations with aesthetic imitation of a genius as heralded by Young in his *Conjectures*, "Imitate; but imitate not the *Composition*, but the *Man*" (11). Both of these instances of imitation demand an original and charismatic figure whom the imitators can view as one who has been chosen[11] to act as a model of imitation.

Cipolla, the magician of *Mario and the Magician*, exemplifies such model of imitation and hyperbolizes it by gaining imitators through hypnosis. Cipolla's magic show is immediately a political act due to the unnamed and foreign narrator's depiction of the growing nationalism in Italy and the situating of the magic show as an allegory to such growing fervor as well as Cipolla's incitation of Benito Mussolini and Italy's potential of

[11] The divine undertones of claiming one has been *chosen* are present in this case.

regaining the "greater glory" once possessed by the Roman Empire.[12] In essence, Cipolla is positioned as the man whose intellectual and spiritual capacity not only surpasses everyone else's but endows him with an inherent and unquestioned ability to lead and reform the structural context he has entered. Thus, it can be argued that Cipolla is a genius even though he is depicted as one who should be feared instead of celebrated.

Theorists such as Georges Bataille and Hannah Arendt motion towards theories of genius when they speak of leaders such as Mussolini and Hitler but refrain from positioning these individuals as men of genius and instead state that they falsely portrayed themselves as men of genius. Arendt, in a footnote in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, speaks of Hitler as fascinating but is careful to mention that he is not fascinating by nature but is merely capable of promoting himself as such:

> Fascination is a social phenomenon, and the fascination Hitler exercised over his environment must be understood in terms of the particular company he kept. Society is always prone to accept a person offhand for what he pretends to be, so that a crackpot posing as a genius always has a certain chance to be believed. In modern society, with its characteristic lack of discerning judgment, this tendency is strengthened, so that someone who not only holds opinions but also presents them in a tone of unshakable conviction will not so easily forfeit his prestige, no matter how many times he has been demonstrably wrong. (305)

I would like to suggest that Arendt's judgment of Hitler as "a crackpot posing as a genius" is an evasive conjecture and would like to argue that this statement is made from a moral standpoint which understands genius as a virtuous quality and does not take into consideration the capacity of genius to establish and act as a model of imitation. To this end,

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[12] It has been noted by numerous scholars that Mann modeled Cipolla's rhetoric after Mussolini's public speeches.

these fascist leaders did not pose as men of genius but were men of genius especially when the magnitude of their program and the mobilization of their ideology are concerned.[13] What perhaps is the apprehension in calling totalitarian leaders geniuses stems from an impulse to understand genius as someone who is productively *good*, which I would like to argue is not the function of genius. If we follow that it is, regarding genius, the man rather than the composition one should imitate, it has the potential to make us imperceptive to the violence present in the composition and, thus, reductive in our moral judgment.[14]

The second chapter, "The Ambivalent Grotesque: Genius and the Problem of Signification," draws on the previous chapter's study of genius and the grotesque in order to make a case for the importance of ambivalence in arriving at moral judgments. *The Ogre*'s referential and myth-producing Abel Tiffauges becomes fascinated with the German soul and the man, Hitler, whose political program hinges upon the ideological amplification of a purely German soul. Abel's fascination with Hitler and the German soul is particularly of interest since he is captured in France and brought to Germany as a war prisoner. Abel's belief of and trust in the genius of the German soul allows him to occupy an instrumental role in the advancement and propagation of the Nazi ideology.

In her controversial text, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt frames Eichmann as the banality of evil; a man who makes evil banal, on one hand, because he is merely fulfilling his duty and, on the other, because he misunderstood Kant's categorical imperatives. Arendt's evaluation of Eichmann and the introduction of banality of evil has shaped and influenced representations of the perpetrator in literature and art by locating him in the quotidian; Tournier's *The Ogre* suggests this banality of evil but complicates it by conflating the

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[13] In another footnote, Arendt states, "Mussolini was probably the first party leader who consciously rejected a formal program and replaced it with inspired leadership and action alone. Behind this act lay the notion that the actuality of the moment itself was the chief element of inspiration, which would only be hampered by a party program" (*The Origins of Totalitarianism 325*).

[14] A moral schema will be set up in this chapter in line with Arendt's philosophy.

perpetrator and the victim into the single character of Abel. Thus, in this chapter, I will examine Abel's precarious position between being instrumental in furthering the Nazi ideology while being enslaved by the Nazis as the "other" who does not have a stake in the German soul. I will explore the tension between victim and perpetrator embodied by Abel and conclude that this tension is a move towards an ambivalent grotesque instead of a banal evil.

The category of an ambivalent grotesque will, then, allow for a discussion concerning the problem of signification. The novel's narrative as a whole is preoccupied with a twinning that destabilizes meaning and produces contrary propositions. This chapter will thus consider how signs and symbols are read and misinterpreted; it focuses on the qualities we identify in order to make judgments as well as the ramifications of dismissing ambivalence in favor of singular (and easily digestible) meanings. Not only is the problem of signification expounded through the narrative structure's destabilization of meaning but it is also seen through Abel's system of logic.

In the first part of the novel, which is composed of diary entries, Abel creates a system of logic through which he will make moral judgments. However, what he fails to recognize is that his system actually distances him from the capacity to make moral judgments. What he has created, in fact, leads him to completely misinterpret depravity as morally good.

The third chapter entitled "Acts of Responsibility: Not the Thought but Thinking Itself" will focus on the works of Hannah Arendt. Throughout my dissertation, the ethical and moral consequences of imitation (and more specifically, the imitation of a man) are highlighted in order to pose the question of how one knows what or whom to imitate. For this reason, Arendt's work is crucial to bringing together the themes of this dissertation since much of her work is concerned with moral judgments and responsibility. As evident by the

title, this chapter will consider Arendt's understanding of thinking as reflective judgment that links together aesthetic experience with ideological frameworks. The main texts that compose this chapter are *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), *The Human Condition* (1958), *Between Past and Future* (1961), *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), and *Responsibility and Judgment* (2003); all of which, to some degree, have tried to reconcile the rise and success of fascism as well as address the role of moral responsibility under totalitarian regimes.

Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is undoubtedly one of the most comprehensive studies of totalitarianism that not only covers material conditions but also the ideological conditions for the rise of totalitarianism. This chapter parses out the relationship and distinction between ideology and idea presented by Arendt in this text in order to show how the abstraction of ideology from its idea parallels the abstraction of genius from the content of his work as well as show how these abstractions become problematic when moral judgments are considered.

Furthermore, this chapter moves to think about Arendt's notion of personal responsibility and its relationship to the capacity to think. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt notes Eichmann's inability to think which led her to the notion of banality of evil. According to her, Eichmann's trial proved that evil was not necessarily an ominous and monstrous force present in public imagination, but that evil could be committed by ordinary men who merely imitated the will of the state – or, rather, imitated the will of the totalitarian leader.

This chapter concludes with Arendt's account of the problem of genius, in *The Human Condition*, as the degradation of man in the context of commercialism. She argues that the problem of genius can be rectified through focusing on craftsmanship instead of the aura of the artist. This chapter links Arendt's account of the problem of genius with her analysis of the failure of ideological frameworks for the purpose of looking at how we

determine that what we imitate is morally and ethically correct, which is ultimately the main motive behind this dissertation.

Chapter 1

The Grotesque Genius: Moral Judgments and Normative Categories

"The Age demanded an image
Of its accelerated grimace,
Something for the modern stage"
-*Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, Ezra Pound

Thomas Mann's 1929 novella, *Mario and the Magician*, was published at a time of rising fascism in Europe. By the time of its publication in Italy particularly, which is also the setting of the novella, Benito Mussolini had made substantial gains towards installing a Fascist government after being appointed prime minister by King Victor Emmanuel III in 1922. And in Germany, The National Socialist German Worker's Party (commonly known as the Nazi Party) led by Adolf Hitler, who often at the beginning stages of the party cited Italian fascism as a commendable model, was steadily moving towards seizing power. Mann himself was a vocal opponent of the Nazi party and the intensifying nationalism that was capturing not only Germany but most of Europe. He wrote extensively against the depravity of fascism in his diaries as well as published essays. So it is no surprise that his premonitions regarding fascism is the subject of many of his literary works such as *Doctor Faustus* (1947), *Lotte in Weimar: The Beloved Returns* (1939), *Disorder and Early Sorrow* (1925), and *Mario and the Magician*.

Before the atrocities of World War II, Mann's biggest criticism of Fascist movements was their ability to fascinate and charm the masses away from reason. In a 1933 diary entry, Mann criticizes the gains of the Nazi party on the basis that it lacked a revolutionary spirit:

> How strange that no one in Germany feels my outrage and disgust at the truly swinish methods by which this 'people's movement' won its victory! […] Great revolutions, with their excess of terror and passion, generally inspire sympathy, compassion, and awe in the rest of the world. That was and is the case with the Russian Revolution,

> just as it was with the French Revolution, before which no living soul in the world could remain unmoved. What is wrong with this 'German' one, which has isolated the country, bringing down upon it nothing but derision and loathing. (*The Thomas Mann Diaries* 143)

For Mann, the Fascist movement – unlike the French and Russian revolutions that have been cited as moving history forward – would reverse the progress of history into barbarism. Furthermore, Mann extols the intellectualism that was not only involve in the French and Russian revolutions but that also arose from them. The Fascist movements, for him, were inherently anti-intellectual evident in the expulsion of intellectuals within a Fascist state.

The themes of fascination and anti-intellectualism that Mann observed in Fascist movements are central to *Mario and the Magician*. The novella follows a family of unknown European origin[15] as they vacation at an Italian resort town. Throughout their visit, there is a nationalistic tension that mars their vacation. The narrator continuously describes seemingly innocuous situations that quickly escalate into nationalistic fervor; all leaving his two children who do not understand Italian baffled,

> There were quarrels over flags, disputes about authority and precedence. Grownups joined in, not so much to pacify as to render judgment and enunciate principles. Phrases were dropped about the greatness and dignity of Italy, solemn phrases that spoilt the fun. We saw our two little ones retreat, puzzled and hurt, and were put to it to explain the situation. These people, we told them, were just passing through a certain stage, something rather like an illness, perhaps; not very pleasant, but probably unavoidable. (*Mario and the Magician* 140-1)

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[15] Although it has been suggested that it is a German family, the anonymity of the family is significant in the reading of the text as it provides a commentary on individuality and group psychology.

Mann conceptualizes a narrator who very much believes himself as merely a witness of a sickness and completely immune to becoming infected himself. He continuously uses language that distances him from the action where in fact, in many cases, he is an active participant. In the instance quoted above, for example, the dispute involves the narrator and his daughter, thus, the judgment is rendered unto him. However, the language works to remove him from the dispute. Furthermore, the narrator consistently pathologizes this Italian nationalism in order to suggest that it is unique to a population that does not share his eschatological intellectualism. This can be seen when he explains nationalism as a passing stage and illness to his children.

The motif of illness as a metaphor for heightened nationalism is carried throughout the novella. In one scene, however, there is a reversal and instead of the people of Torre di Venere being metaphorically infected, the narrator's youngest has the whooping cough which is used as a catalyst to separate the family from the rest of hotel guests, most specifically, a princess from Rome:

> The doctor appeared, and behaved like a faithful and honest servant of science. He examined the child and gave his opinion: the disease was quite over, no danger of contagion was present. We drew a long breath and considered the incident closed – until the manager announced that despite the doctor's verdict it would still be necessary for us to give up our rooms and retire to the *dépendance*. (*Mario and the Magician 136-7*)

The narrator very clearly sets up the rationality of the doctor against the irrationality of the manager who privileges his Italian guests due to a nationalistic allegiance. Describing the doctor as "a faithful and honest servant of science" highlights the hotel staff's outright disregard of facts in favor of unfounded opinions. This is not the first instance that this foreign family has been the subject of segregation from the Italian guest. In an early scene,

they are refused to dine on the hotel's veranda as they were informed "that the cosy nook outside was reserved for the clients of the hotel: *ai nostri client*" (135).

The family's stay at Torre di Venere is marked by segregation. They are immediately read as foreigners and, thus, consistently met with derision and disregard. The narrator explains the treatment they receive as an illness that is no longer contagious but requires patience to pass. What the narrator is saying in essence is that this rise of nationalism is not serious but is merely a passing phase. A similar commentary is made through the way the narrator explains away the threat of Cipolla: it is merely theatrics; a stage play that is timed and a final curtain is always expected to fall.

Since the narrator is reflecting back on his family's vacation, Cipolla is immediately positioned as a grotesque figure in the first lines of the novella when the narrator describes him as "that dreadful being who seemed to incorporate, in so fateful and so humanly impressive a way, all the peculiar evilness of the situation as a whole" (*Mario and the Magician* 133). It is with the time and space away from Torre di Venere that the narrator makes the explicit connection that the arch of Cipolla's seemingly show of entertainment is indicative of a "peculiar evilness" that is spreading across Europe. However, it is not the narrator that points to the grotesqueness of Cipolla; the magician himself, as soon as he takes the stage, points to it:

> My calling is hard and my health not of the best. I have a little physical defect which prevented me from doing my bit in the war for the greater glory of the Fatherland. It is perforce with my mental and spiritual parts that I conquer life – which after all only means conquering oneself. And I flatter myself that my achievements have aroused interest and respect among the educated public. (*Mario and the Magician* 151)

There is a twofold reason for Cipolla to open with a note about his physical defects. First, it subverts the relationship between the audience and the grotesque performer.[16] By pointing to his grotesqueness, Cipolla immediately removes the potential to be mocked for it because he has named it. Second, he correlates his mental and spiritual superiority to the inferiority of his body, which allows him to make the argument that his intellectual superiority over the audience is only possible due to his grotesqueness.

Cipolla claiming that he has gained the respect of the educated public is a clever way for him to suggest that if he does not gain the respect of this particular audience, then, they are not educated thus are intellectually incapable of understanding his true intellectual power. He even, later on, evokes Mussolini as an admirer of his, solidifying himself as not only a performer of great repute but one whose work contributes to what he calls the "greater glory of the Fatherland". As a matter of fact, throughout his performance, Cipolla uses language of nationalism that parallel the language Mussolini used in his speeches. Cipolla is ultimately analogous to Mussolini and his magic show, then, is a microcosm of Mussolini's Fascist Italy.

In making Cipolla and his show structurally parallel Mussolini and Fascist Italy respectively, Mann outlines how the Fascist state requires a leader whose will can be and is imitated by the masses. Fascism, as a political movement, endorses and seeks the mobilization of masses for the sake of nationalism. Etymologically (and this is more pronounced in the case of Italian Fascism), Fascism is derived from the Latin "fascis" meaning "bundle" or "band". In ancient Rome, fasces were a symbol of authority and law. It was usually represented in image as a bundle of sticks with an axe blade, which stood for strength through unity. In this instance, crowd mentality or the unity of the masses is inherent

[16] The relationship of between the audience and grotesque performer will be discussed further later in this chapter during the discussion of the ambivalent nature of the grotesque.

in the image. However, in ancient Rome as well as Italian Fascism, there is a single authoritative figure who holds and controls the fasces or the masses. Any 20th century Fascist structure, be it Mussolini's Fascist Italy or Hitler's Third Reich, is a totalitarian structure that develops around a single individual and is ultimately defined by that very individual. Inversely, the form of the government he represents perpetually defines the authoritative individual. Mussolini is essentially synonymous with Italian Fascism and the success of Fascism in Italy was in part due to the identification of its citizens with a man who they perceived as an inspired individual. This is not necessary to say that the followers of Fascism saw themselves as inspired individuals but rather that they identified with an inspired figure as their ideal.

Sigmund Freud expands on identification of the masses with a single leader in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of Ego* (1921).[17] Freud clarifies that each individual member of a crowd identifies with the leader, which results in an emotional bond. Identification, according to Freud and as a psychoanalytic term, is "the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person" (*Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* 60). He articulates this point through the Oedipus complex in which a young boy develops a typical (as opposed to a sexual) identification with his father since he views his father as his own (ego) ideal.[18] This step of identifying with the father is replicated in the psychology of crowds wherein the father is replaced by a religious, military, or political leader. We can see this psychology

[17] Freud's psychoanalytic treatment of crowd mentality and formation heavily relies on Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1896) who in turn derives his psychological study of crowds from Gabriel Tarde's social psychology of group mentality and the study of imitation in social formations. Le Bon, similar to Freud, views the intellect of the crowd as lower than that of the individual. Le Bon and Freud both describe the crowd as uniting through an emotional bond that also sustains it. Le Bon, however, juxtaposes the sentimentality of a crowd with its lack of judgment and incapacity to reason. Le Bon, free from the pressure of legitimizing psychoanalysis as a scientific method, more precisely explains the psychology of crowds through hypnosis.

[18] Ego ideal refers to the ideal self to which the ego aspires. When members of a group position the leader as their ego ideal, it ostensibly means that the leader has realized the ideal self.

operating in Fascism, which relies heavily on crowd mentality and the congregation of individuals as a cohesive force around a single leader.

What is categorized as crowd mentality is crucial to the success of Cipolla's show. He achieves a uniformed crowd mentality through hypnotizing individuals at different stages of the show until he achieves a crowd that without resistance bends to his will. The mounting progression to crowd mentality is reflected in the narration in that, at the beginning of the show, the individual members of the audience are more marked and as the as show progresses, the audience is increasingly referred to as a unified mass. Freud explains that the intellectual capacity of a crowd is far lower than the individual, which is essential to the maintenance of the leader's superiority. In the case of *Mario and the Magician*, the lowered intellectual capacity of the crowd bars the audience from comprehending how their individual freedom and will is being gradually suppressed by Cipolla.

In one of his tricks, prior to his dangerous tricks involving hypnosis, Cipolla tells a volunteered participant member of the audience that he does not have any freedom of the will and, thus, any act of resistance on his part will be for naught, "As for the result, your resistance will not alter it in the least. Freedom exists, and also the will exists; but freedom of the will does not exist, for a will that aims at its own freedom aims at the unknown. You are free to draw or not to draw. But if you draw, you will draw the right cards – the more certainly, the more willfully obstinate your behaviour" (*Mario and the Magician* 160). What Cipolla reveals in his distinction between freedom and the will is the tenuous nature of these categories. They exist as ideals which build the mythos of freedom of the will; however, they have no concrete place in social contexts. Cipolla is hinting at contracts that may be unconsciously agreed upon in a society. The option of drawing or not drawing the card is analogous to choosing to participate or not participate in a society. But as soon as choosing to

participate, the individual will can no longer exercise freedom since it is at the mercy of the limits of participation.

As the show continues so does Cipolla's musings on freedom of power of the will. And as the show's stakes continue to rise so does Cipolla's totalitarian tendencies. In one instance, he outlines the symbiotic relationship between a leader and his followers:

> The capacity of self-surrender, he said, for becoming a tool, for the most unconditional and utter self-abnegation, was but the reverse side of that other power to will and to command. Commanding and obeying formed together one single principle, one indissoluble unity; he who knew how to obey knew also how to command, and conversely; the one idea was comprehended in the other, as people and leader were comprehended in one another. (*Mario and the Magician* 162)

Traces of Freud's group psychology is present in the last lines of what Cipolla is saying.[19] The leader and his followers are "comprehended in one another" in that the leader serves as the followers' ego ideal.

Mann's conceptualization of Cipolla's show as moving gradually from innocuous arithmetic tricks to hypnosis that becomes fatal is how he saw the escalation of fascist tactics. During Cipolla's last act of hypnosis, the narrator observes, "It is likely that not willing is not a practicable state of mind; *not* to want to do something may be in the long run a mental content impossible to subsist on. Between not willing a certain thing and not willing at all – in other words, yielding to another person's will – there may lie too small a space for the idea of freedom to squeeze into" (*Mario and the Magician* 171). The narrator is witnessing a young man slowly being hypnotized by Cipolla. At first the man's limb movements are trying to resist Cipolla's commands, which in effect just produces an awkward movement resulting

[19] Mann was not only familiar with the work of Freud but the two men knew each other and were in correspondence with each other.

from the combination of resistance and surrender. The young man for his own comfort, ultimately, surrenders to Cipolla's will. What the narrator observes as "a mental content impossible to subsist on" is hinting at a certain futility in individual resistance.

The young man is one of several audience members that Cipolla has hypnotized; each of them is beckoned towards the stage in order to compose a troupe of dancers. At one point, Cipolla makes it clear to the audience that the dancers are merely empty vessels through which his desires move, "At the same time he advised the audience that no fatigue was involved in such activities, however long they went on, since it was not the automatons up there who danced, but himself" (*Mario and the Magician* 171). Mann's use of "automatons" paired with other terms such as "military somnambulism" (170) are indicative of his conviction that fascist ideologies render the masses mere objects of obedience.

In a speech that he delivered in Berlin on October 17th, 1930, entitled "An Appeal to Reason," Mann elaborates on the enthusiastic nature of fascism:

> This fantastic state of mind, of a humanity that has outrun its ideas, is matched by a political scene in the grotesque style, with Salvation Army methods, hallelujahs and bell-ringing and dervishlike repetition of monotonous catchwords, until everybody foams at the mouth. Fanaticism turns into a means of salvation, enthusiasm into epileptic ecstasy, politics become an opiate for the masses, a proletarian eschatology; and reason veils her face. (*Order of the Day* 57)

Enthusiasm and fanaticism, according to Mann, are wholly anti-intellectual, thus, a politics that participates in enthusiasm is not based on reason and demands its citizens to surrender their own reason. The problem with enthusiasm, both generally and within this excerpt, is the claims to divine authority in the absence of reason.[20] Mann's use of terms such as "Salvation

[20] John Locke in the fourth volume of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* speaks to the problem of enthusiasm, "Immediate *Revelation* being a much easier Way for Men to establish their Opinions, and regulate their Conduct, than the tedious and not always successful Labour of strict

Army," "hallelujahs," and "dervishlike" clearly refer to the idea of being possessed or filled with the divine. And as, according to Karl Marx, "religion is the opium of the people," politics steeped in enthusiasm and fanaticism "become[s] an opiate for the masses" that numbs the masses into submission or, worse, numbs their capacity for reason but fills them with unaccountable fervor.

Besides hypnosis, another way enthusiasm functions in *Mario and the Magician* is through the narrator's children. The children are the catalyst for the family to attend Cipolla's show as they expected an evening of visually compelling magic tricks instead of the rhetorically dense show conceived by Cipolla. Although the children cannot understand the majority of what Cipolla is doing on stage, they still join the audience in applauding him and laugh as the audience laughs, "The children listened well pleased. They understood not at all, but the sound of the voices made them hold their breath. […] They expressly found it 'lovely'" (*Mario and the Magician* 155). The children merely imitate what others are doing as "they [join] with their clumsy little hands in every round of applause" (172). Mann interestingly positions these children as analogous to citizens charmed into the fascist movement.

As soon as they enter the theatre, the children are passive participants who only serve to amplify Cipolla's importance. They do not recognize or even understand why Cipolla is entertaining or remarkable but they do recognize that the rest of the audience finds the magician remarkable. Thus they imitate the audience to, first, feel a sense of belonging and, second, because they believe they are bearing witness to something remarkable even if they

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Reasoning, it is no Wonder that some have been very apt to pretend to Revelation, and to persuade themselves that they are under the peculiar Guidance of Heaven in their Actions and Opinions, especially in those of them which they cannot account for by the ordinary Methods of Knowledge, and Principles of Reason" (218). The problem of enthusiasm very clearly is that it is diametrically opposite to reason and thinking. In other words, it does not allow for moral judgments derived from the act of thinking itself. This is also precisely what Kant warns against regarding genius: that if genius is to be enthusiastic, then we are faced with problems around moral judgments.

cannot articulate or identify what makes it so. In a way, the children's fascination with and reaction to Cipolla is uniquely dangerous because they are not merely submitting to Cipolla but are rather following in accord with the affect of the crowd. The children, in effect, represent a section of the populace that are not invested in the ideologies espoused by fascism but rather imitate the reactions to these ideologies in order to, on one hand, mask their own ignorance of events at hand and to, on the other hand, appear as part of the community without investing in its politics.

An additional function of the children in this novella is for the narrator to maintain the narrative that he himself was not susceptible to Cipolla's act. The children are, then, used so he can maintain the illusion of being a man of reason immune to the disease that has infected Torre di Venere. Prior to the magic show, any tension caused by nationalism is framed by his children. Very early on in the novella, the narrator says, "Gradually we realized the political implications and understood that we were in the presence of a national idea. The beach, in fact, was alive with patriotic children – a phenomenon as unnatural as it was depressing. Children are a human species and a society apart, a nation of their own, so to speak" (*Mario and the Magician* 140). Just as he positions himself neutral in buying into nationalism, he also does so regarding his children compared to the Italian children who have been infected by a "national idea".

The narrator, more importantly, uses his children as an excuse to continue staying at the magic show even though the children are asleep for the majority of the show and only wake up to participate in the admiration of Cipolla. There are, however, indications that he himself can be seduced by Cipolla's powers and is not the disinterested observer that he wishes to portray, "I remember that involuntarily I made with my lips the sound that Cipolla's whip had made when it cut the air" (*Mario and the Magician* 150). Although Cipolla makes concessions in admitting that his body involuntarily reacted to parts of the act,

he is careful to set himself apart from the rest of the audience by highlighting his discerning disposition, "So much I do know: that the longer and more circumstantial tests, which got the most applause, impressed me less than some of the small ones which passed quickly over" (*Mario and the Magician* 167).

In the small and quick tests lies the nefarious nature of Cipolla's act. Some of what Cipolla does on stage is not understood as part of the act by the majority of the audience but the narrator points out that the smallest and most innocuous of Cipolla's behavior or movements on the stage are deliberate and essential to making the audience compliant to his will. Not only does Cipolla pause a lot during his show to drink or smoke on the stage, he is also late to start the show. These seemingly non-diegetic moves are actually distractions that divert the audience's attention away from the gravity of Cipolla, but also point to the quiet manner fascism moves towards a violent eruption that consumes whole nations.

Cipolla makes use of two props, the cognac that makes him into a tragic and pitiful character and the whip that exercises his power over the audience:

> Two main features were constant in all the experiments: the liquor glass and the claw-handed riding-whip. The first was always invoked to add fuel to his demoniac fires; without it, apparently, they might have burned out. On this score we might even have felt pity for the man; but the whistle of his scourge, the insulting symbol of his domination, before which we all cowered, drowned out every sensation save a dazed and outbraved submission to his power. (*Mario and the Magician* 166-7)

Although the narrator views the liquor glass as a demonic element of Cipolla's act, other members of the audience are heard to pity him because he seems to have a drinking problem. In a way, his drinking lessens the power of his will because the audience witness a man that is at the mercy of cognac in order to be able to continue with his show. His drinking signals a

certain incompetence to which his whip responds. These two props contribute to Cipolla's ambivalence insofar as they make him at once powerless and powerful.

As a grotesque figure, Cipolla is inherently an ambivalent character; first in the way the narrator describes him and second in the way he describes himself to the audience. The grotesque violates categories in that it escapes any fixed qualities and, in many cases, embodies seemingly contradictory qualities. Mikhail Bakhtin in his introduction to *Rabelais and His World* theorizes the grotesque as images that "remain ambivalent and contradictory; they are ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of 'classic' aesthetics, that is, the aesthetics of the ready-made and the completed. […] They are contrary to the classic images of the finished, completed man, cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development" (25). According to this definition, Cipolla is an epitome of the grotesque. As a matter of fact, at the beginning of his show, he is confronted by and juxtaposed to an attractive young man, "One might have assumed that the *giovanotto* was merely the chosen butt of Cipolla's customary professional sallies, had not the very pointed witticisms betrayed a genuine antagonism. No one looking at the physical parts of the two men need have been at a loss for the explanation, even if the deformed man had not constantly played on the other's supposed success with the fair sex" (*Mario and the Magician* 151). The interactions between the young man and Cipolla serve to highlight how repulsive the magician is in relation to a virile and sexually appealing youth.[21]

Bakhtin goes on to say that "the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the body itself goes out to meet the world" (*Rabelais and His World*

[21] Sexuality and sexually charged moments figure greatly in the novella. There are implications of homosexuality regarding several characters that lend themselves well to the concept of ambivalence.

26). What Bakhtin qualifies as body parts that are open to the world are the gastro-intestinal system and sexual organs. The grotesque body, then, is depicted as consuming, defecating, engaged in sexual acts, and/or related to any stage of reproduction. Cipolla is constantly seen smoking and consuming; however, he only inhales and takes in and uses his audience's bodies in acts of letting out such as releasing gas. The base bodily functions embodied by the grotesque is related to the idea of folk. It grounds the people (folk) to the corporeal world and unites them under a shared identity. In Bakhtin's words, this form of the grotesque "directly relate[s] to folk culture and thus belong[s] to all the people" (*Rabelais and His World* 37). Cipolla simultaneously identifies with the folk of the crowd and distinguishes himself from them, which is established not only through his rhetoric but also through how he is conceived to represent different stages of the grotesque figure.

Cipolla in many ways represents the grotesque marked by ambivalence but he also shifts into the Romantic grotesque which, contrary to the communality of the ambivalent grotesque, is "marked by a vivid sense of isolation" (*Rabelais and His World* 37). This in itself is ambivalent in that Cipolla's grotesqueness does not hold to a single category. The Romantic grotesque carries with it the spiritual basis of Romanticism; instead of being related to the body, it is identified with the mind and ego. According to Bakhtin, the Romantic grotesque introduces man to a world of uncanny, "All that is ordinary, commonplace, belonging to everyday life, and recognized by all suddenly becomes meaningless, dubious, and hostile. Our own world becomes an alien world. Something frightening is revealed in that which was habitual and secure" (*Rabelais and His World* 39). The progression of the magic show depicts the development of the grotesque from an ambivalent force that connects the folk to the world into an expression of terror.

The second half of Cipolla's show is terrifying to an extent that only the magician's death can release the audience. The first half of the show ends with an applause "like a

patriotic demonstration" (*Mario and the Magician* 164), which is crucial to the terrifying success of the second act. Likening the applause to a "a patriotic demonstration" suggests an allegiance formed between Cipolla and his audience; however, it is not an allegiance based in reason. Since patriotism and nationalism have already been established, in the novella, as outbreaks of passion that go against reason, an applause that is akin to "a patriotic demonstration" shows an enthusiastic audience that cannot comprehend the underlying ideologies of Cipolla's rhetoric and tricks. In effect, Cipolla's first act gave rise to an enthusiastic audience that will be more compliable during his second act.

As previously mentioned, the second half of Cipolla's show is fraught with tricks involving hypnosis. At one point, there are several members of the audience dancing on stage seemingly unaware of what they are made to do. Several times during this section of his show, Cipolla mentions that he is the one who is mentally and physically exhausted and not the dancers on stage for he is the one who is controlling every minute bodily movement. The dancers are, in effect, filled with the will of Cipolla and have lost control of themselves to the point that they are not conscious of what is transpiring. The problem of enthusiasm, as highlighted by the dancers, is the risk of following the will and command of someone who escapes moral judgments. This is also precisely the problem of genius: how can we be certain of the morality of the figure we are to imitate and follow?

The peculiarity of Cipolla, however, is that although as readers we can judge him to be monstrous, the general members of the audience fail to make any definite judgments of him. Even the titular character, Mario, who eventually kills Cipolla cannot truly understand the nature of the magician and is only able to escape the confusion by shooting him dead. Leading up to his death, Cipolla draws Mario into a scene of seduction. According to the narrator, Mario is hypnotized and believes Cipolla to be his beloved, thus, he moves his body involuntarily towards the magician as if he were to kiss him:

> It had grown very still in the room. That was a monstrous moment, grotesque and thrilling, the moment of Mario's bliss. In that evil span of time, crowded with a sense of illusiveness of all joy, one sound became audible, and that not quite at once, but on the instant of the melancholy and ribald meeting between Mario's lips and the repulsive flesh which thrust itself forward for his caress. It was the sound of a laugh, from the *giovanotto* on our left. It broke into the dramatic suspense of the moment, coarse, mocking, and yet – or I must have been grossly mistaken – with an undertone of compassion for the poor bewildered, victimized creature. (*Mario and The Magician* 177)

This passage refers back to the opening lines of the novella through the repetition of terms such as "monstrous," "grotesque," and "evil span of time". The usage of "evil span of time," in particular, modifies "the peculiar evilness of the situation as a whole" (*Mario and the Magician* 133) at the beginning which further connects Cipolla's act to Europe's situation as a whole. It is striking that the narrator refers to this moment in Cipolla's show as evil as it is not the trick itself that makes it evil but what it suggests about a predisposition towards docility.

Mario, according to the narrator's account, is always on the periphery of the crowd, both literally and metaphorically. During the show, he is standing to the side in the back of the room observing the show. He does not seem to be fazed by Cipolla's tricks which sets him up as someone who could successfully resist the magician, which is, perhaps, why the narrator finds Cipolla's hold over Mario peculiar and calls it "a monstrous moment".[22] There is a monstrosity to Cipolla's ability at influencing even the most disaffected of his audience. Mario does ultimately prove to be the one to break free of the magician's will and exert his

[22] It should be noted that the narrator also calls this moment monstrous because of its underlying expression of homosexuality. The novella includes other indications of homosexual tendencies that fit well with the idea of ambivalence.

own; however, he does not break free of the magician's will on his own. Instead, he is freed by a mediating force: the giovanotto's laughter. Laughter itself is a crucial concept that has been greatly influenced by the development and transformation of the grotesque (and genius). The nature of laughter changed with the Romantic grotesque from a regenerative and joyful expression to one of resistance. The giovanotto's laughter, thus, is an expression of resistance that causes Mario to shoot Cipolla, "There was instant silence. Even the dancers came to a full stop and stared about, struck dumb. Cipolla bounded from his seat" (*Mario and the Magician* 178).[23]

As the reader might feel a sense of relief at the death of Cipolla, the general members of the audience do not necessarily think of Mario's act as liberating them from a peculiar evilness, "People flung themselves on Mario in a mob, to disarm him, to take away the weapon that hung from his fingers" (*Mario and the Magician* 178). In a way, Cipolla's ambivalence continues into death as the audience still cannot comprehend the gravity of the magician's powers, which makes them villainize Mario. The narrator, on the other hand, views Mario's action as an act of liberation, "Was that the end, [the children] wanted to know, that they might go in peace? Yes, we assured them, that was the end. An end of horror, a fatal end. And yet a liberation – for I could not, and I cannot, but find it so!" (*Mario and the Magician* 178). Unfortunately, the same could not be said of Europe as the 1930s saw fascism strengthening its grip and the early 1940s proved a much more fatal end with the escalation of World War II and the Holocaust. This has given *Mario and the Magician* a prophetic status as Cipolla, more terrifyingly, parallels and foreshadows Hitler, the paragon of a fascist leader who surpassed Mussolini in his violent ends.

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[23] There is some ambiguity around Mario's involvement in the act of shooting Cipolla. Earlier the magician explains that the hypnotized dancers feel no fatigue because he is controlling their movements and is, thus, the fatigued one. According to this, it has been argued that Cipolla willed Mario to pull the trigger.

For a novella that was published in 1929, the Italian context of *Mario and the Magician* is quite apropos. By 1929, Mussolini had solidified himself as a dictator through a campaign of limiting the parliament's power to the point that he was no longer accountable to the parliament and the parliament had absolutely no reach over him. As the 1920s were triumphant for Italian Fascism, it was not so for the German Nazi party. Around the time Mussolini was working towards establishing a dictatorship, Hitler was imprisoned following the failure of the Beer Hall Putsch.[24] It was not until the crash of the American stock market in 1929 and its subsequent effect on Germany that the Nazi party began to strengthen their base supporters and hoist Hitler to power in the 1930s. By all accounts, in 1920s, Germany witnessed pathetic attempts on the part of fascism, so it is no surprise that Mann conceives of a narrator who sees himself as immune to the infection of nationalism and understands fascist ideologies as a passing phase with little impact.

In his personal writings, prior to Hitler's appointment to chancellor, Mann seemed adamant that the German public would never fall for the trappings of fascism. In his 1930 speech "An Appeal to Reason," he shows confidence in German people's intellectual fortitude to resist Nazism,

> Can a people old and ripe and highly cultured, with many demands on life, with a long emotional and intellectual experience behind it; a people who possess a classical literature which is lofty and cosmopolitan, a romantic literature of the profoundest and most subtle; who have Goethe, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and in their blood the noble malady of the *Tristan* music – can such a people conform, even after ten thousand banishings and purificatory executions to the wish image of a primitive, pure-blooded,

[24] In November 1923, inspired by Mussolini's "March on Rome" the previous year, the Nazi party with Hitler as their leader staged a coup in Bavaria known as the Beer Hall Putsch. However, the coup was unsuccessful as the Nazi party could not secure the support of the state police and army. Within two day, Hitler was arrested for charges of treason.

> blue-eyed simplicity, artless in mind and heart, that smiles and submits and claps its heels together. (*Order of the Day* 58-9)

There is an irony in Mann basing his confidence in an anti-fascist Germany in Goethe, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Wagner since Nazism also used these figures to create a myth of the German folk. The Nazis interpreted *Tristan* music as espousing a national hero in Teutonic form. Hitler has cited Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, amongst other German philosophers, as foundational to his ideological system. This example provides a compelling commentary on the nature of texts and how they are read, which will be further discussed in the following chapter, "The Ambivalent Grotesque: Genius and the Problem of Signification".

As Mann finds German classical and romantic literature antithetical to fascism, the fascists appropriate them to advance a mythology; a mythology that can compel the masses into submission. In a journal entry reflecting on Georges Sorel's study on violence, Mann acknowledges the worth of myth to politics, "Interesting that [Sorel] should have anticipated many elements of fascism, for instance the idea of the 'mythos,' the political fiction that captivates the masses though flying in the face of truth and common sense" (*The Thomas Mann Diaries* 254).[25] But it is, perhaps, much more interesting that the myth of volk (folk) espoused by Nazism can find its origins in the same texts that leads Mann to the myth of "a people old and ripe and highly cultured". Mann wrote this particular entry in 1936 and was specifically referencing the political fiction of Nazi Germany; however, Mann was familiar with Sorel's seminal work, *Reflections on Violence*, published in 1908 whose discussion of

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[25] Georges Sorel's *Reflections on Violence* (1908) most specifically focuses on class struggle and the revolutionary potential of the proletariat through outlining not only the necessary but also the positive aspect of violence. In this work, he outlines the relationship of the masses to a mythos, "These artificial worlds generally disappear from our minds without leaving any trace in our memory; but when the masses are deeply moved it then becomes possible to describe a picture which constitutes a social myth" (27).

myth was undoubtedly an influence on *Mario and the Magician*. We can see this influence particularly in the aforementioned scenes of the beach and hotel where the mobilizing capacity of a national myth unfolds.

Sorel, in his book, maps out the role of myth as mobilizing the masses in revolutionary moments,

> Experience shows that the *framing of the future in some indeterminate time* may, when it is done in a certain way, be very effective and have few inconveniences; this happens when it is a question of myths, in which are found all the strongest inclinations of a people, of a party or of a class, inclinations which recur to the mind with the insistence of instincts in all the circumstances of life, and which give an aspect of complete reality to the hopes of immediate action upon which the reform of the will is founded. (*Reflections on Violence* 115)

The way Sorel discusses myth is that it is irrefutable because it rests on instincts instead of reason. What's more, it rests on the instincts of the masses whose fervor outweighs any logical intervention. The role of myth in "the reform of the will" to which he refers can be more strikingly seen in Cipolla's act. As Sorel defines it, myth is a narrative that provides the framework for imagining a new future based on references to the past. An important aspect of a myth is a hero; not only is the hero the central figure of a myth but he is also the keeper of it. Cipolla is the hero of his own myth, meaning that he is actively constructing the narrative which centralizes him as an intellectually and spiritually superior figure others should imitate and follow.

The success of a national myth heavily hinges on the transcendent quality of its hero, which Cipolla proves through his ambivalence. His historical counterparts, Mussolini and Hitler, legitimize their heroic status by claiming themselves the spirit or the spiritual guide of their respective national myths. Hitler, for example, instituted himself as the volkgeist of

Germany as necessitated by the German public themselves, "My precursor here was Sieburg, who spoke on Germany and explained that the Germans require metaphysical validation for leadership; claimed Hitler feels he has been appointed by God" (*The Thomas Mann Diaries* 196). Although Mann understands this metaphysical validation of the leader, he rejects its legitimacy on the grounds that it cannot be verified through reason. However, in *Mario and the Magician*, he shows that reason loses its ground when the masses are convinced by the myth of the leader. Dietrich Bonhoeffer best explains this phenomenon in his 1933 radio speech, "The Fuhrer and the Individual in the Younger Generation,"

> The Spirit of the people – it is imagined – brings the leader out from its metaphysical depths and raises him to great heights. This leader, arising from the collective power of the people, now appears in the light as the one awaited by the people, the longed-for fulfillment of the meaning and power of the life of the Volk. Thus the originally prosaic idea of political authority is transformed into the political-messianic idea of leader that we see today. (*The Bonhoeffer Reader* 366)

A key element of fascist structures or totalitarianism is its absolute leader who is not merely a political leader but also a spiritual one. In a sense, the spiritual leader of a political state has access to the past and future which puts him in the favorable position of mediating the present.[26] What is important to note is the material, ideological, and political conditions that allow for the rise and acceptance of this kind of messianic leader.

In *Mario and the Magician*, Cipolla is immediately related to the overall condition of Europe at the time when the narrator states, "that dreadful being who seemed to incorporate, in so fateful and so humanly impressive a way, all the peculiar evilness of the situation as a whole" (133). Europe, following World War I, suffered a certain identity crisis that facilitated

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[26] Genius as reconfigured in the eighteenth century operates similarly; genius is given the capacity to transgress the present and reconcile the past and the future in the present.

the possible spread of a "peculiar evilness". World War I and its legacy, in many respects, expedited Europe's fall into fascism. Materially, the war led to an European economic decline that was exacerbated by the 1929 crash of the U.S. stock market. The war and its aftermath, ideologically, created a generation in want of a narrative explaining the circumstances of the war. In addition, the dismantling of empires contributed to anxious national identities. These material and ideological conditions create a lacuna that could be filled by the promise of national prosperity and a steady national identity. Bonhoeffer explains this as the yearning for a new order of things to mitigate the chaos of World War I's legacy:

> The masses and lifeless objects appeared to have emerged from this collapse as victors. In neither, however, was the younger generation able to find the foothold that could help sustain their lives in this chaos. A sense of the individual and the sense of true community seemed to have been completely destroyed. An individualistically formed autonomous personality and an idea separated from the reality of the [sic] life went bankrupt. It was out of this crisis that an impassioned call arose for new authority, new ties, for community. (*The Bonhoeffer Reader* 362)

Bonhoeffer's analysis of Hitler's rise to power insinuates an enthusiastic moment ripe for a leader who appeals to the need for a stable community and identity. Mann depicts this kind of leader with Cipolla; however, based on his narrator and private papers of the time of the publication of the novella, he seemed certain that the same fate would not befall Germany. The events of the 1930s and early 1940s intensify the eeriness and anxiety of the novella as Cipolla can be read as an archetype of Hitler.

The issue that, then, arises is if fascisms is an Italian problem on which the narrator of *Mario and the Magician* insists or is it a German problem as realized by the Third Reich or, as seen in my next chapter, can it also be a French problem? Is it, as the narrator claims, a

passing illness that is not contagious? There is a fallacy in thinking that fascist tendencies can be ascribed to specific nations or nationalities; a fallacy which Mann's narrator commits by sneering at the Italians' embrace of fascism without recognizing the proclivity for the same within himself or his own countrymen.

There is a sense of anxiety in Mann's novella, one that is established by the uneasy nature of the family's stay in Torre di Venere as well as the narrator's inability to specify or name the particularity of the evilness or the monstrosity that pervades their visit. An anxiety that is augmented for a reader familiar with the events of World War II. The narrator's foregrounding of the fatal conclusion of Cipolla's show makes the novella even more uncomfortable for a post-WWII reader since this reader can recognize that the liberation the narrator claims at the end will be but momentary. More importantly, what the reader can recognize is that what is intimated by the whole situation in Torre di Venere is not an isolated breakout of a disease from which one is ultimately liberated but that it is emblematic of more monstrous events to come that grip Europe.

The anxious mood that comes through the narrator's inability to specify what it is that is monstrous with not only Cipolla but also with the small resort town suggests the failure of rational discourse in determining the true nature of things. Thomas Mann, according to his letters and diaries, was steadfast in believing that rational discourse would prevent the rise of German fascism, failing to recognize its quiet pervasiveness in capturing the German imagination even though he detailed a similar move in *Mario and the Magician*.

Conclusion

In his work on the Carnivalesque, Bakhtin explains the grotesque as an envoy of historical awareness, "The grotesque images with their relation to changing time and their ambivalence become the means for the artistic and ideological expression of a mighty awareness of history and historic change which appeared during the Renaissance" (*Rabelais*

and His World 25). It is easy to understand Cipolla in this vein since his ambivalence reveals something fundamental not only about the changing political landscape of the time but also reveals the extent to which the implications of this changing political landscape are obscured.

The grotesqueness of Cipolla allows for more than an embodiment of historical changes; it also allows for a critique of normative categories and judgments. The grotesque violates fixed categories in both its pre-Romantic and Romantic manifestations. This is in part due to how it is always placed in relation to the normative insofar as something is understood as grotesque because it deviates from the normal and the normative. Cipolla achieves this deviation in a twofold manner: first, his physical body is described as deformed, thus, deviating from what is considered a normal physical form; second, the audience is unsure of what to make of his magic show and they cannot assign an evaluative judgment to his tricks.[27]

The difficulty of assigning evaluative judgments destabilizes the expectations that there are established standards according to which we make judgments without thinking through how these standards came to be. The destabilization of standards and norms not only applies to the grotesque but is also the mark of genius. Genius, either in pre or post Enlightenment, violates categories and standards but does so differently based on its temporal position (pre or post eighteenth century) – a difference that coincides with the shift in the perception of the grotesque image from pre-Romantic to Romantic era, which establishes a connection between genius and the grotesque.

In the case of genius, the example of the djinn demonstrates how a genius still bearing ambivalence evades normative categories and requires a more rigorous reflective process without the help of any standards in order to arrive at any sort of evaluative judgment. Even

[27] The point of magic is an illusion, it is displaying a form of power that may not be rationally explicable but is aesthetically available.

when an evaluative judgment is achieved, it is not guaranteed to stay unfluctuating since the ambivalent genius is consistent in not belonging to any fixed categories. The post-Enlightenment genius at first evades normative categories but ultimately succumbs to them through the designation of 'man of genius'. This manifestation of genius is capable of moments of rupture when new standards and models are established for others to imitate; therefore, they are not bound to previous standards through which evaluative judgments are made. However, the emergence of man of genius demands that whichever model he produces to be judged as good, which is ultimately the problem with genius stripped of its ambivalence. The man of genius, similar to Cipolla, deprives the individual of the capacity to fully reflect on and think through scenarios in order to make moral judgments.

Chapter 2

The Ambivalent Grotesque: Genius and the Problem of Signification

"Ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich"[28]
- *Duineser Elegien*, Rainer Maria Rilke

Michel Tournier's *The Ogre*[29] opens with the epigraph, "To find something interesting, you merely have to look at it long enough." This Gustave Flaubert quote perfectly encapsulates the reading experience of the novel, which is not to say that *The Ogre* is not of immediate interest but that it requires the reader to look long enough in order to be able to read it through the multitude of the texts and myths the structure of the novel follows. There are two main references through which *The Ogre* should be read: the *Life of St. Christopher* and Goethe's "The Erl King" (referenced in the original French title of the novel, *Le roi des aulnes*). However, these two references are stratified with each containing further intertextual references, such as Barbe Blue, the Pied Piper, the Tollund man, James Curwood's *The Golden Snare*, and many more. On one level, the Erl King and St. Christopher serve as models for the main character to follow and, more accurately, follow in a manner that leads to a fatal misunderstanding. On another level, these intertextual references reveal the problem of signification: how do we interpret signs and, more importantly, how do we make moral judgments based on our interpretations? This problem of signification as it bleeds into our capacity for both normative and moral judgments parallels the problem of genius. Tournier's novel, thus, allows us a path through which we can reintroduce ambivalence to genius by looking at how it is and can be misunderstood.

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[28] "Every angel is terrifying"

[29] Tournier in his autobiography, *The Wind Spirit* (1977), discusses his family's German connections (the Tourniers lived in Germany prior to WWII) and how these connections gave them an understanding of Nazism not marred by propaganda, most specifically Vichy propaganda, "Having witnessed the birth of Nazism, we had been vaccinated against its blandishments" (58). He attributes this biographical point of information to the genesis of *The Ogre*.

Map of *The Ogre*'s Movement

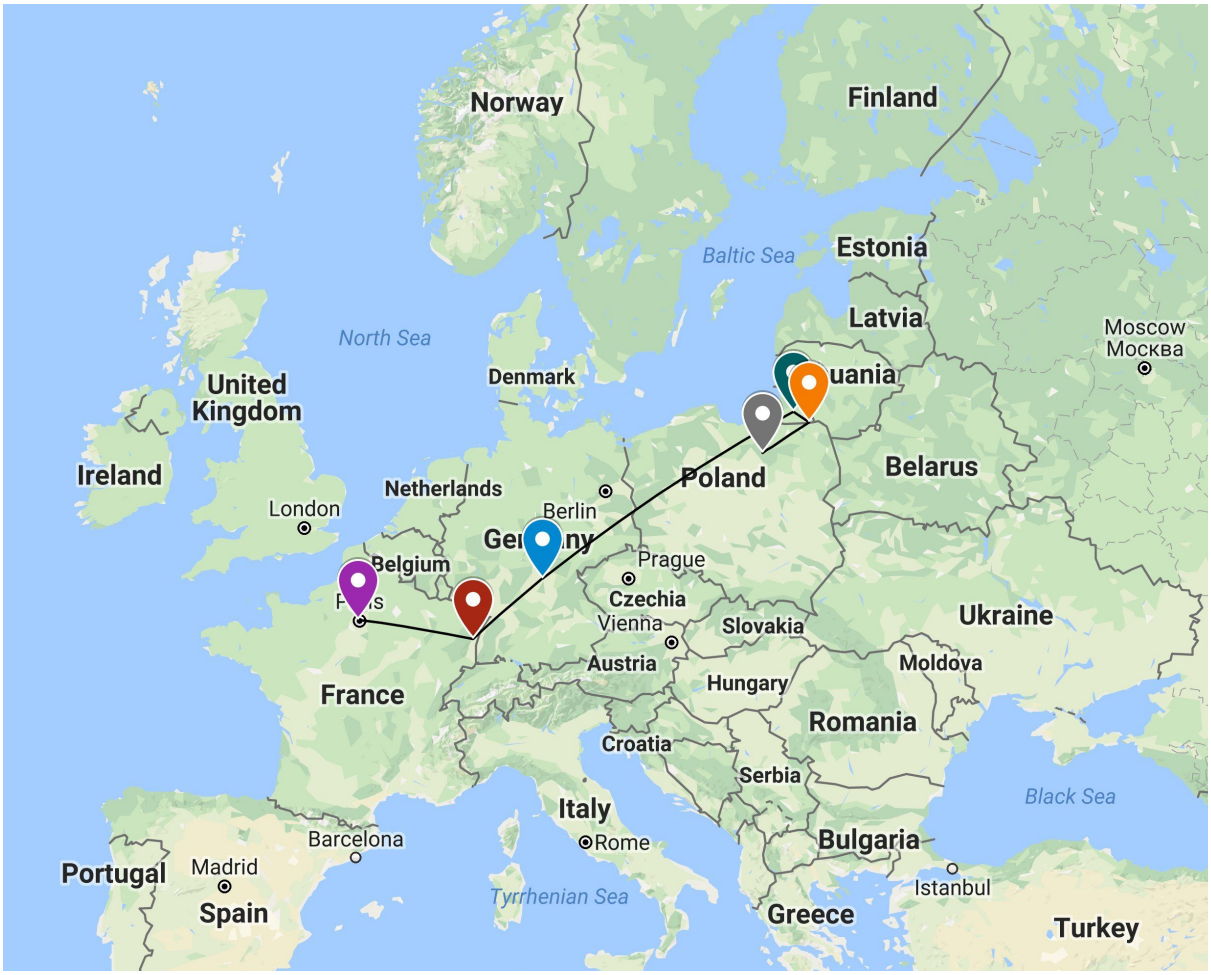

Figure 1

The Ogre, published in 1970, traces Abel Tiffauges' – a name allusive to a valiant and murderous French past –[30] movements throughout East Prussia during World War II. He, interestingly, moves progressively towards Russia as the German forces retreat and the Russians advance westward and is, thus, amongst the first few to encounter the Russian troops. Tournier switches between Abel's first person narration – Abel keeps a diary entitled "Sinister Writings" to which we have access – and a third person narration that follows his peculiar journey. I argue that this journey is peculiar not only because Abel is moving eastward while the German forces are retreating westward but also because his journey is marked by errors and misunderstandings that propel him towards the same evil against which he warns in his "Sinister Writings" – albeit unbeknownst to him.

Abel becomes a prisoner of war at the outset of WWII. However, he is soon found to be a valuable instrument of war to the Germans, which allows him to move freely and with a certain degree of agency as a prisoner of war. His value to the Germans not only stems from his willingness to carry out actions without questioning the motives of the Reich but also because of his practical skills such as mechanical and husbandry skills that hide him in plain sight. He understands his own motives, which are radically incompatible with those of the Reich, as that which matters and the duties given to him seem innocuous enough that he does not question their profound implications.

The insistence on the validity of his motives that overshadow those of the Reich is explained at the outset of the novel. "Well, yes, I do think there's something magical about me," writes Abel, "I do think there's a secret collusion, deep down, connecting what happens

[30] Tiffauges is a commune in the Loire region of France. One of its attractions is the medieval Chateau de Tiffauges, which was the former residence of Gilles de Rais. During the Hundred Years War, Gilles de Rais fought alongside Joan of Arc and was known to be a valiant army commander. However, he is notorious as a child rapist and murderer. It is believed that he had raped and murdered upward of 200 children at Chateau de Tiffauges. Gilles de Rais has been attributed as the source of Charles Perrault's fairy tale, *Barbe bleue.* Gilles de Rais' connection to Catholicism through Joan of Arc as well as his infamy as a child murderer are supposed to be incited through Abel Tiffauges' name.

to me with what happens in general, and enabling my particular history to bend the course of things in its own direction" (*The Ogre* 3). First, it is difficult to ignore the echoes of Hegel's world historical man (Volkgeister) in this opening; however, Abel is not positioned as a model of the world historical man but as a perversion of it, a distortion to which Abel himself would not object and would instead embrace.[31] He is a perversion of the world historical man in that he believes that it is his particular history that will change the course of things instead of viewing himself as an agent of history. To a certain degree, Abel is conflating the world historical man with the world spirit (Weltgeist). Positioning himself as such is Abel's first mistake that leads to his complicity in Nazism.

Second, this secret collusion within Abel can be connected to the imitative consequence of genius. Genius, in this sense, sets up models for others or, rather, ordinary, men to follow. The universalization that occurs when Abel's particular history bends the course of things (and one can confidently assume that he means the course of all things) parallels how genius, as a particular, affects the course of things. It is interesting that Abel views this magical something as a collusion, ostensibly excusing his actions as something that will be misinterpreted by others – a point of irony since it is he that misinterprets.

Abel's belief of possessing magical qualities that will bend the course of history stems from an event in his childhood. Due to the punishments that he had to endure in an all-boys school in Beauvais, called St. Christopher's, he wishes the school to burn which it does. Abel interprets this as the first evidence of his magical powers. Thus, this leads Abel to create an ideological as well as a mythological system whose method and logic induce in him a severe fascination with the Third Reich and the German soul; a system which he continues to

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[31] It should also be noted that Hegel is devoid of irony in thinking of the world historical man whereas Tournier is pointing to and emphasizing the irony of thinking oneself as the world historical man. The philosophical works that are discussed in the first chapter treat genius, the world historical man, etc. un-ironically which gets us to the dilemma I'm describing here; the novels, however, reintroduce irony and emphasize it for the reader.

develop as he carries out the order of the Reich. However, he also creates a system that inevitably leads him to misunderstand the project and moral content of the Third Reich.

Abel's Ideo-mythological System

Due to an accident in his garage that injures his right hand, Abel writes his "Sinister Writings" with his left one which is one of the reasons as to why he calls his writings sinister, Latin for left. He concludes his first entry by a warning of some sort, "I've just read over what I've written. My name is Abel Tiffauges, I run a garage in the Place de la Porte des Ternes, and *I'm not crazy*. What I've just written should be taken completely seriously. So? So the essential function of the future will be to demonstrate, or more precisely to illustrate, the *seriousness* of the above" (*The Ogre* 4). Abel continuously refers to a future that will prove him to be an augur of truth, one that will confirm his importance to the order of history and refute those who thought him crazy to believe himself an agent of history. What the future in the novel proves, however, is his docility and inability to interpret signs around him.

What Abel fears others might construe as crazy is his insistence on being an eternal monster whose legacy is the world itself:

> If you don't want to be a monster, you've got to be like your fellow creatures, in conformity with the species, the image of your relations. Or else have progeny that make you the first link in the chain of a new species. For monsters do not reproduce […] And here I link up with my eternity again, for with me eternity takes the place of both relatives and progeny. Old as the world, and as immortal, I can have none but putative parents and adopted children. (*The Ogre* 4)

Abel refers to himself as a monster in part because of his large stature, a physical marker that has made him a point of curiosity for others. As a matter of fact, he explains the etymology of monster as the Old French 'monstre' meaning to be shown and exhibited; an interesting point since the true etymology of monster dates back to the Latin 'monstrum' meaning, amongst

other definitions, an omen or warning, which is more apropos to how Abel describes himself. But to him, what is important about being seen as a monster is how it differentiates him from the rest of humanity; it also allows him to deny any ancestry that would challenge his immortality.

Immortality, eternity, and a-temporality are significant to Abel's mythological system. For one, there has to be a special aspect to him to warrant a mythology. He imagines himself as a catalyst of historical change and, for that, he has to present himself as having access to history in a way that mere human beings do not. As a matter in fact, he decisively understands this as his true nature. For another, his eternal quality allows a parallel to the Doctrine of Incarnation. He does not, however, reserve the quality of eternity for himself and describes his childhood friend, Nestor[32] – who died at the age of twelve due to a school fire – as also having this quality:

> But all that would have been nothing if he had not been Nestor. Looking back, I ask myself questions about him that never came into my mind when I was his friend. He was a monstrous creature with something genius and something magic about him […] One word emerges clearly amid all the uncertainties, and I shall not keep it back. It is the word "intemporal." I have spoken of eternity with reference to myself. So it is not surprising that Nestor, from whom I undoubtedly derive, should like me, escape the measure of time. (*The Ogre* 18-9)

Similar to the narrator in Thomas Mann's *Mario and the Magician* who cannot concretely assess the nature of Cipolla, Abel calls Nestor "a monstrous creature" in order to indicate

[32] Tournier is very deliberate with the allusions of his characters' names. As such, each character's name's reference reveals a fundamental function of that character. Nestor, in Greek mythology, is the king of Pylos; a sage whose advice to others is couched in tales of his own heroic past. Nestor could also refer to Nestorius who reconciled the humanly and divine nature of Christ, which became a doctrine known as Nestorianism. Nestorius also referred to the Virgin Mary as Christotokos (Christ-bearer), which, in the context of *The Ogre*, parallels St. Christopher, the Christ-bearer.

how Nestor does not fit in any normative category. Unlike Mann's narrator, Abel does not equate monstrous with evil and instead thinks of monstrous as a positive force and a positive agent of history. Nestor is invaluable to Abel's ideo-mythological because, as his name indicates, he serves as a guide of Abel's actions and thoughts. As a matter of fact, Abel attributes the "Sinister Writings" to Nestor and believes that Nestor speaks through his left hand, thus, the system he believes the system he is creating in the "Sinister Writings" is Nestor's. However, placing himself and Nestor outside the "measure of time" not only joins them eternally but also makes them different aspects of a singular entity: emanations of a spirit that are outside time but affect history to which Abel incessantly refers. "From that memorable day onward," Abel claims, "I might have stopped considering that fate as an inexorable and a priori hostile concatenation and recognized, as I've been led to do since, that it might admit of a certain complicity with my own personal history – in short, that something of Tiffauges might enter into the course of events in general" (*The Ogre* 27).

One of the signs that Abel interprets as the importance of his personal history to world history is his first name:

> Abel was a keeper of sheep, Cain a tiller of the ground. That is, the first was a nomad and the second a sedentary. The quarrel of Cain and Abel has gone on from generation to generation, from the beginning of time down to our own day, as the atavistic opposition between nomads and sedentaries, or more exactly as the persistent persecution of the first by the second. And this hatred is far from extinct. It survives in the infamous and degrading regulations imposed on the gypsies, treated as if they were criminals, and flaunts itself on the outskirts of villages with the sign telling them to "move on." (*The Ogre* 31)

The connection to the Book of Genesis allows Abel to think of himself as participating in the beginning of the world. This is vital to him believing himself as an inexplicable part of

historical change in a twofold manner. First, he is one of the first two sons of Adam and Eve so as one of the world's first progenies, he is tasked with composing worldly behavior that will ensure humanity's return to paradise. Second, he is allegedly the subject of the world's first murder which introduces another curse and sin to the human race, thus, making the original Abel – and by associations *The Ogre*'s Abel – responsible for a mode of behavior in human history. Besides the connection to the Book of Genesis, *The Ogre*'s Abel is preoccupied with the murder of the original Abel because it distinguishes between two modes of living and punishes one over the other. The distinction between the nomadic and sedentary life is important to note insofar as it foreshadows the Nazi treatment of Jews as well as foreshadowing Abel's uninformed nomadic tendencies. What is contradictory, though, is that Abel's nomadic tendencies throughout the novel aid in the persecution of historically nomadic races such as the Roma people and the Jews; a point which he does not learn about until the end of the novel.

The reference to the biblical Abel is one of the first moments of foreshadowing the actions of Nazi Germany. In the same vain that Abel condemns the persecution of nomadic people, he expresses beliefs that resemble Nazi Germany's policies that paved the way for the execution of the so-called nomadic races, "What we need is a nice tyrant to abolish, with a stroke of the pen, certificates, identity cards, passports, police records, registrations and documents of all kinds, all that nightmare of paper whose usefulness, if any, is out of all proportion to the work and trouble it gives" (*The Ogre* 37). What's interesting here is that at the same time as Abel is writing this entry, in 1938, there is already a tyrant who has been doing just that. However, what Abel actually means by abolishing papers is to abolish nations themselves because the idea of nationality itself dehumanizes nomadic people, "For to live without papers is to live like a beast. People who have no nationality or who are illegitimate know only a paper reality" (*The Ogre* 37). Unfortunately, Abel fails to recognize that the

process of delegitimizing citizens through denial of papers is a step towards expulsion and persecution.

In his "Sinister Writings," Abel expresses ideas that are simultaneously contradictory to and affirmative of the ideological basis of Nazism, which highlights the problem of signification by demonstrating the facility with which the meaning of an idea can shift to its polar opposite. Interestingly, Abel himself understands this since a key point of his ideological system treats the idea of benign-malign inversion as a universal phenomenon that dialectically distorts and restores values in the context of making moral judgments, "Benign inversion consists in re-establishing the meaning of the values that malign inversion has previously overturned. Satan, master of the world, aided by his cohorts of rulers, judges, prelates, generals and policemen, holds up a mirror to the face of God. As a result, right becomes left, left becomes right, good is called evil and evil is called good" (The Ogre 74).

What is compelling about the benign-malign inversion is that it does not invert the thing itself but rather inverts the interpretation, judgment, or value of it. For example, an apple remains an apple but through the inversions of which Abel speaks, it can be interpreted either as an instrument of good or the instrument of evil. In effect, what Abel is creating is a binary system of logic, one that he believes will help him make precise normative judgments but one that ultimately fails him in making moral judgments. Malign inversion is a distortion: what is good gets interpreted as evil, what is illegal becomes sanctioned by the state, the victim becomes perpetrator and so forth. Benign inversion, according to Abel, corrects what malign inversion has perverted and, then, reinstates some sort of order to what has been malignantly inverted. In other words, benign inversion is restorative. In theory, Abel is the individual who has the capacity to invert benignly and who will critically analyze and morally respond to the Third Reich and the Nazi ideology. Tournier, however, subverts this expectation and instead gives us a character who misreads his own ideological system. Abel's

absolute trust in his own thinking misdirects him and does not allow him to see that what he is doing is counter to his own thinking.

In essence, Abel continuously and consistently misinterprets every sign and symbol he encounters and inverts their original meaning, a move against which he himself warns. The culmination of these misinterpretations endears him to the Third Reich because he has, simply, inverted the morals of Nazism. He reads evil as good deed in preservation of children and, thus, cannot correctly evaluate the consequences and implications of his actions. Tournier's novel, however, is an exercise in ambivalence. Not only does Abel Tiffauges discuss contradictions in tangent – thus making them contraries – but the narrative as a whole is also preoccupied with a twinning that destabilizes meaning.

This twinning that destabilizes meaning is brought to light towards the end of the novel through the character of Ephraim, a young Jewish boy recently freed from Auschwitz. Tournier by this point has created a constellation of signs and images that, for Abel, read as comfort and euphoria while the same signs and images, for Ephraim, mean persecution, internment, and death. However, before meeting Ephraim, Abel is convinced that Germany allows him an escape from ambivalence and a refuge in clear and fixed definitions:

> In this way he was given the answer to the question he'd been asking himself ever since he crossed the Rhine. Now he knew what it was he had come to seek so far to the northeast: in the cold and penetrating hyperborean light, all symbols shone with unparalleled brilliance. Unlike the oceanic land of France, shrouded in mists, its lines blurred by receding shades, continental Germany, more harsh and rudimentary, was the country of strong, simplified, stylized drawing, easily read and remembered. (*The Ogre* 179)

Germany provides Abel the opportunity to simply act without repercussions of an action being misconstrued; an opportunity that he was not afforded in France. In fact, his arrival to

Germany was due to the French misinterpretation of his actions. Before the outbreak of war, Abel was accused of raping a young girl when, in reality, he was preventing the rape of the girl. The French authorities, however, mistake the presence of photographs of school children in Abel's apartment as evidence of him being a pedophile. Although, Abel has shown a disquieting fascination with young children stemming from his fixation with Nestor, his childhood friend, he is not violent towards them. His fascination with children, though, is not appropriate behavior according to societal norms, which lead to the French police to misunderstand his photographs and writing as anything but an innocent – albeit creepy – practice.

Despite the fact that he is incarcerated because of a misinterpretation, Abel is steadfast in continuing with his fascination with children – with the caveat that he will only focus on boys,

> I try to derive some lesson from my misadventure with Martine. I still adore children, but with the exception now of little girls. To begin with, what is a little girl? Sometimes a little boy manqué, as they say; more often still, a little woman. A real little girl doesn't exist […] It's all a mirage of symmetry. Nature cannot resist the solicitings of symmetry. Because adults are either men or women, Nature thinks it necessary for children to be either little boys or little girls. But a little girl is like a fake window – something belonging to the same order of deception as men's nipples or the second funnel on some big ships. I have been the victim of a mirage. *That's* the explanation of my being here. (*The Ogre* 127-8)

His "misadventure with Martine" is just another episode in Abel's life that allows him to grow his ideological system. It is also another episode that gives him more fodder to become more engrossed with Nazi Germany when he observes how the cultivation of young boys is essential to the strength of Germany. While traveling through Nazi Germany, he rarely comes

across any young girls and is eventually employed as a lackey of an all boy's Nazi youth school, which he later interprets as retribution for his false incarceration.

In his entries during his imprisonment, he alludes to his eternal magical powers again as perhaps a justification of his imprisonment, "I mustn't hide from myself the fact that all these men who hate me through a misunderstanding would hate me a thousand times more if they really did understand me, if they *knew*. But then again if they knew me *perfectly*, they would love me infinitely. Like God, who does know me perfectly" (*The Ogre* 126). It is very important to Abel's ideo-mythological system to incessantly differentiate himself from ordinary men in order to write his nature as inseparable from history itself. It is also interesting that he distinguishes between knowing him and knowing him perfectly. Merely knowing him would incite fear and hate because, according to Abel, his nature is not easily comprehensible. In that sense, he is seen as a grotesque image that cannot be put into any normative category.[33] But if they knew him perfectly, then they would understand that what makes him grotesque-like and what is unpalatable about him is what makes him an agent of history, or in his own words, what makes his history "[bend] the course of things." Of course, in line with Abel's ideo-mythological system, only god can know him perfectly since god is not only the sole figure who can love him infinitely, but also it is only the omnipresence of god that can know his infinite nature. Ultimately, aligning himself with the divine and historical change is a way for him to justify why he is an outcast and why he is persecuted by the French. It is also why he aligns himself with Nazi Germany because, for the majority of war, he understood Nazi Germany as a vehicle of historical change. Unfortunately, he failed to fully apprehend the moral content of Nazi ideology and how it was in strife with his morality.

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[33] The previous chapter on *Mario and the Magician* discusses more in depth the grotesque image and normative categories.

The Failure of Abel's Ideo-mythological System

When Abel is first enlisted into the army, he is taught that the victor of the war will be the side that can best decipher codes, "They gradually strengthened him in the idea that the war was nothing but a confrontation of ciphers and signs, a purely audiovisual tussle where the only possible risk was obscurity or misinterpretation. It might seem that no one was better prepared than he for the problems of transmission, reception and deciphering" (*The Ogre* 136). Here is a thought that emboldens Abel and confirms to him that there is a historical purpose to his existence. Earlier, in his "Sinister Writings," he writes, "Signs and the deciphering of signs. What signs? And what did their deciphering reveal? If I could answer that question my whole life would be changed, and not only my life but also – I dare write it because I know no one will ever read these lines – the course of history" (*The Ogre* 21). The war finally provides him the opportunity to answer his first questions. He is finally given signs that he takes upon himself to decipher. Unfortunately, he deciphers these signs in a way that is disturbing to the reader.

As Abel moves from being a soldier to a prisoner of war to serving the Germans, he has to make sense of signs and images that already have a horrific meaning for the reader since the reader of this novel is assumed to be familiar with the history of World War II and the Holocaust. So as readers, we are put in a position of pitying Abel and, due to our distance from the events of the novel, we can be confident in saying that we would have not misunderstood situations as gravely as Abel did. However, this itself is pitiful because our confidence as readers betrays our lack of understanding of how we make moral judgments. The problem that Abel's case raises relates to what happens when something that is morally reprehensible is immediately experienced as something pleasant. Abel, by all means, is comfortable and has enjoyable and life-affirming experiences serving the Nazis; so how is he actually be expected to make sound moral judgments? One of the experiences he has as a

prisoner of war is his encounter with a blind Elk with which he identifies and, thus, begins to take care of it:

> Thus the fauna of East Prussia had just sent Tiffauges its first representative: a half-fabulous beast that seemed to emerge from the great Hercynian forests of prehistory. Tiffauges lay awake till dawn; the visit had brought back to him the strange conviction he'd always had of possessing immemorial origins, of having roots that went back into the deepest mists of time. (*The Ogre* 176)

The blind Elk, as a representative of East Prussia, is evidence for Abel that his eternal origin will fulfill his task as an agent of history amongst the Germans, serving their particular Teutonic ideology. His experiences in Germany are affirmative of the nature he believes himself to possess, which accounts for his failure in making sound moral judgments.

Abel's misinterpretation of the moral content of Nazi Germany is ultimately revealed through the character of Ephraim, a young Jewish boy who escaped from Auschwitz and found his way to the Kaltenborn – a Nazi youth school where Abel works.[34] Through Ephraim "[Abel] discovered that under the Germany exalted and polarized by the war there lay a network of concentration camps forming a subterranean world with none but accidental connections with the superficial world of the living" (*The Ogre* 353). Ephraim shows Abel that the same signs and images that brought him comfort were malicious in nature for the young boy:

> [Ephraim] spoke in Yiddish mixed with words of Hebrew, Lithuanian and Polish: Tiffauges could understand only those of German origin. But they had unlimited time and inexhaustible patience for getting to understand one another, and when the boy turned toward him his thin scabby face with its huge dark eyes, Tiffauges listened

[34] The name Ephraim alludes to one of the lost tribes of Israel.

> with all his ears, with all his being, for he could see an edifice rising that reflected his own with terrifying fidelity, and reversed all its signs. (*The Ogre* 352-3)

Some of these signs that were reversed include the name Canada given to two different structures: one being Abel's refuge, the other the warehouse for confiscated property at Auschwitz; the hair that Abel collected fondly from the Nazi youth school and wanted weaved into a coat or stuffed in a pillow and the hair of the persecuted Jewish people who were weaved into blankets and coats for the Nazi army; the showers in which Abel could observe the young boys and the showers at Auschwitz that were a pretense for the gas chambers; the Dobermans that fondly protect the grounds of Kalternborn and the reverse that sniff and hunt down Jews for the purpose of deportation to death camps.

Ephraim systematically inverts every sign that was affirmative of Abel's experience serving the Nazis, "Tiffauges couldn't accept without a murmur this horrible metamorphosis of all that had been for him most intimate and happy" (*The Ogre* 354). The first sign that is inverted for Abel is 'Canada', the term that Abel gave to the cabin visited by the blind Elk, "When Ephraim first uttered the word 'Canada' Tiffauges realized that the great malign inversion had just been proclaimed. Canada had been a province of his own personal dream, the refuge of his Nestorian childhood and of the first months of his Prussian captivity" (*The Ogre* 354).[35] Both Abel and Auschwitz's internees assigned the name Canada to these buildings because Canada represented freedom and abundance. However, in the context of Auschwitz, it meant an abstract form of or a fantasy of freedom whereas, for Abel, the cabin was a place of real freedom where he was compensated for a life of mistreatment.

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[35] Abel gives the cabin the name Canada because of James Oliver Curwood's novel, *The Golden Snare* (1921), which takes place across the Canadian tundra. In *The Ogre*, Nestor is infatuated with this novel which, in turn, entices Abel. *The Golden Snare* follows the hunt for Bram Johnson, depicted as a savage man accompanied by a pack of wolves; Johnson's pre-historic disposition is mirrored by Abel. However, as *The Golden Snare* is concerned with the rescue of an ideal woman, *The Ogre* is concerned with the rescue of and preservation of young boys, at the ideal age of twelve.

There is one specific instance that is twinned and inverted which is crucial to Abel's apprehension of the inversion of evil he himself has done. This is the procuring of young Teutonic boys to join Kalternborn and, most specifically, his fascination with a specific set of twins, Haro and Haio. To give a bit of context to this part of the novel, Abel due to his considerable size and grotesque presence is tasked with recruiting – or rather kidnapping – young boys who are deemed to carry the Teutonic spirit and bringing them back to Kalternborn, a military training school for Nazi youth.[36] Abel is all too glad to carry out this task as he admits to having a fascination with youth – most specifically young boys around the age of 12. He believes that he is predestined to be like St. Christopher – the Christ bearer – and that his greatest joy is bound up with bearing a child on his shoulders. He calls this specific action euphoria as in phoria, to carry or to bear. Thus, when he is given the duty of selecting and carrying young boys to Kalternborn, he is more than willing to comply even though these boys are trained and are sent to the front lines as canon fodder. Abel, of course, does not recognize the actual purpose for which he brings these young boys to Kalternborn. He understands Kalternborn as a place of preservation – meaning the preservation of youth – which allows him to freely observe the movements and routines of the most ideal Teutonic forms – for although these boys are canon fodder, the school is a curation of the most ideal Teutonic youth as it is also a laboratory for eugenic research.

Abel's fascination with the twins, Haro and Haio, is linked with his fascination of the measurements that are taken of and the experiments that are done to them. These experiments are of course designed – and I use this term loosely – to get at the essence of the Teutonic form and, most importantly, to devise a method through which the generation and regeneration of this form could be expedited. Viewing this as an extension of the larger goal

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[36] Under Vichy France, Service du Travail Obligatoire (STO) shipped young French men to work in German factories. Tournier himself was in the position to be enlisted by the STO.

of preserving youth, Abel only sees this as good and never questions the intentions and the ramifications of such experiments or even ideology. He does not question these because he is fulfilling the mythology he has set up for himself, one within which he positions himself as a supernatural being "whose history bends the course of things," more specifically, it bends the course of things towards innocence and the morally good. Thus, he can assure himself that his every action is for the morally good and the preservation of innocence. This is ironic, since he himself, at the beginning of the novel had foreshadowed the horror (and evil as he calls it) of these experiments in his "Sinister Writings":

> Purity is the malign inversion of innocence, Satan has turned this spontaneous and as it were native saintliness into a caricature that resembles him and is the converse of its original. Purity is horror of life, hatred of man, morbid passion for the void. A chemically pure body has undergone barbaric treatment in order to arrive at that state, which is absolutely against nature. A man hagridden by the demon of purity sows ruin and death around him. Religious purification, political purges, preservation of racial purity – there are numerous variations on this atrocious theme, but all issue with monotonous regularity in countless crimes whose favorite instrument is fire, symbol of purity and symbol of hell. (*The Ogre* 75)

It takes three years and the appearance of Ephraim for Abel to realize that he himself predicated the atrocities committed by the Third Reich but that his judgment had failed him to recognize it as such. And he arrives at this recognition as Ephraim explains the medical experiments done not just on twins but also pregnant women and children in the concentration camps for the purposes of racial cleansing:

> He knew of the existence of B section, where Dr. Mengele, he told Tiffauges, was passionately interested in the phenomenon of twins and watched the arrival of fresh batches of prisoners in order to select for his own use any pairs of twin brothers or

> sisters among them. It was of major importance to be able to make a simultaneous autopsy of dead twins, and chance alone practically never offered the opportunity. The hand of Dr. Mengele remedied the deficiency of chance. (*The Ogre* 356)

It is through Ephraim's description of twins in the concentration camps that Abel recognizes that the daily medical examinations of Haro and Haio at Kalternborn were for the purposes of racial purity; the very thought he was and is opposed to. This is a point of ambivalence in the novel in that a singular ideology can create contradictory outcomes:

> Thus, through Ephraim's long confessions, Tiffauges, steeped in horror, saw an infernal city remorselessly building up which corresponded stone by stone to the phoric city he himself had dreamed of at Kaltenborn. Canada, the weaving of the hair, the roll calls, the Dobermans, the researches into the phenomena of twins and atmospheric densities, and above all, above all, the mock shower rooms – all his inventions, all his discoveries were reflected in the horrible mirror, inverted and raised to hellish incandescence. He still had to learn that the two peoples the SS persecuted and whose extinction they were working for were the Jews and the gypsies. Here he encountered once more the immemorial hatred of the sedentary races for the nomads, now carried to its paroxysm. Jews and gypsies, wanderer sons of Abel, the brothers he felt so close to in heart and soul, were falling in thousands at Auschwitz beneath the blows of a Cain who was booted, helmeted, and scientifically organized. The Tiffaugean deduction of the death camps had been achieved. (*The Ogre* 357)[37]

[37] As mentioned in a previous footnote, Abel chose to call the cabin he found Canada because of Curwood's novel, *The Golden Snare*. His relationship to the pack of Dobermans, to a certain degree, mirror Bram Johnson's relationship to his pack of wolves in *The Golden Snare*. Furthermore, the title of the novel refers to a snare made out of the golden hair of a woman, which is another motif from Curwood's novel that is present in *The Ogre.* In Tournier's novel, however, Abel is captivated by the golden hair of the boys at Kaltenborn.

Ephraim's account of concentration camps shows Abel that during the time he was enamored with the way the Germans were conducting their affairs, that they were also persecuting nomadic people, those of the tribe of Abel. In his "Sinister Writings," he clearly calls for the protection of nomadic folks, specifically the Roma and Jewish people. Ephraim's account, then, horrifies Abel by revealing his complicity in the persecution of the nomadic people. At this point in the novel, not only does Abel realize that he misinterpreted individual signs but that he also did so in contradiction with his own system evident in him associating the Nazis with Cain. However, his solution to rectifying his complicity in a system so wholly opposed to his, is to revert back to his initial desire to preserve and carry Ephraim to safety and incites Saint Christopher and the Erlking as his predecessors whose legacy he will follow by protecting Ephraim – albeit he also misunderstands the content of the tales of Saint Christopher and the Erlking.

An Imitative Structure

As mentioned earlier, *The Ogre* is meant to be read in the context of or from the lens of other texts. Two of the major references and texts that *The Ogre*'s structure parallels are "The Life of St. Christopher" and Goethe's "The Erl-King". Abel's fascination with euphoria, the joy of carrying children, naturally draws him to Saint Christopher and the Erlking, two figures who are known for carrying children. Being drawn to these figures makes Abel conceive of himself as another version of Saint Christopher and the Erlking whose purpose is to be a carrier of children. He, however, focuses on the conclusions of the tales of Saint Christopher and the Erlking where a child is carried and fails to glean the implications of the texts themselves.

Abel imitates Saint Christopher without recognizing the ambivalence of Christopher himself. Saint Christopher was not merely the carrier of the child Christ but a servant in search of the most powerful master. In his search of this master, Saint Christopher serves

earthly kings and the devil himself before Christ. Prior to becoming a saint, his name was Reprobus, which in Latin means rejected or false. In other words, before he becomes a saint, he is denoted as a reprobate, a key piece that would have allowed Abel a more nuanced reading of the story of Saint Christopher.

Jacobus de Voraigne's *The Golden Legend: Lives of the Saints* describes Christopher as an eighteen foot tall man in search of the most powerful ruler in the world:

> Christopher, a Canaanite, was a man of prodious size, being twelve cubits in height, and fearful of aspect. According to certain authors who have written down his deeds, he was in the service of the king of the Canaanites, when the idea came to him that he should go in search of the most powerful king on earth, and should enter his service. (377-8)

As a prisoner of war, Abel quickly makes up his mind to serve Germany as he saw greatness and strength in the Germans. Throughout the war, similar to Saint Christopher, Abel serves one faction of the Nazi army after another in order to ascend to the sergeancy of the most powerful faction, as he deems, faction of the army. What Abel fails to understand is that his imitation of Saint Christopher entails imitating serving the devil as well as Christ. Abel's disgust with France leads him to aggrandize the Germans. He is right to think of the Germans as the most powerful since at the time of his first contact with them, his battalion has surrendered. In this moment the Germans have triumphed over the French which leads Abel to, in a sense, defect from the French army and slowly integrate himself within the Germans. Abel witnesses a fear in the French at the sight of the German forces which is analogous to the fear Christopher observes in the king he serves:

> 'If thou dearest the Devil harm thee, he must be more puissant than thou! Therefore am I thwarted in my hope, for I thought to be in the service of the most powerful king

on earth. So now farewell, for I shall seek out the Devil, and take him for my lord and give myself into his service!' (*The Golden Legend* 378)

It is important to note that the devil appears to Christopher as a knight described as the most cruel and horrible. This, at least, should foreshadow for Abel who he is actually serving since his interaction with the Germans is primarily in a military sense. He first serves German soldiers as a prisoner of war before moving to Remington, where he becomes the groundkeeper for Hermann Goering. How can we but not characterize Goering as cruel and horrible, one of the highest ranking Nazi official and military leader to be tried for crimes against humanity at Nuremberg.[38] And, finally, Abel serves the most cruel and horrible, Hitler, in Kalternborn.

What draws Abel to Hitler is his fascination with young children. He learns that every year for Hitler's birthday, the Germans gift him a whole generation of young boys and girls who are admitted to the prestigious Nazi youth schools. For boys, this specifically means being trained for military service. For Abel, these schools comprise the most precious collection of young boys and his service to Hitler as a recruiter grants him access to this collection that he so greatly covets. Similar to Christopher who merely wants to be in the service of the most powerful man without questioning the character and motives of those whom he serves, Abel does not give much attention to why these schools exist as well as for what Hitler advocates.

As is noted in "The Life of St. Christopher," "Christopher rejoiced, and bound himself forever to the Devil" (*The Golden Legend* 378) and Abel follows by binding himself to Hitler with as much ardor as Christopher. What leads both Christopher and Abel to serve false idols is due to the immediacy through which their desires are met. Christopher's sole

[38] Goering was so proud in his military service that he requested to be executed as a soldier, a request which was denied by the Court.

goal is to serve the most powerful and the most powerful is whom he deems powerful at the moment. He is uncritical of the quality of the man he serves as long as they satisfy his one criteria. Abel operates similarly in that his immediate desire takes precedence over the moral bankruptcy of the Third Reich.

The Ogre logically follows the structure of the Life of St. Christopher to the point that an understanding of St. Christopher's life predicts the final scene of the novel. There are, however, two deviations from the Saint's life that revel the *hamartia* of Abel. Christopher intentionally departs the devil in search of Christ whereas Abel is abandoned by the Nazis, "'This Christ,' answered Christopher, 'must therefore be greater and more puissant than thou; and once more I have labored in vain, for I have not yet found the most powerful king on earth! Farewell then, for I go to seek Christ!" (*The Golden Legend* 378). Until the very end, Christopher is seeking the most powerful master. Abel, however, is visited by his salvation, Ephraim, and is told of the false masters he had served. In other words, Christopher actively pursues his desires while Abel, somewhat, passively lets the course of events to guide the pursuit of his desires.

The second and most important difference is in the fate of Abel and Christopher and their respective children. While Christopher safely transports the child Christ across the river, Abel and Ephraim sink into a peat bog; despite this, the narratives read very similarly. In the case of Saint Christopher, he "took the child upon his shoulders, and taking up his staff, set out through the water. But little by little the water rose, and the child became heavier than a leaden weight; and the farther he went, the higher rose the water, and the heavier grew the child, until Christopher was so sorely tried that he thought he would founder in the waves" (*The Golden Legend* 379). *The Ogre*, correspondingly, ends with a sinking:

> Gradually the ground grew spongy, and he had to make an effort at every step to overcome the suction. Then his hands encountered the trunks and branches of a little

> wood, and he recognized the black alders of the marshes. He tried to stop and turn back, but an irresistible force bore down on his shoulders. The deeper his feet sank into the waterlogged swamp the more he felt the boy – so thin and diaphanous – weighing down on him like a lump of lead. On he went, and still the mud rose around his legs, and the load that was crushing him grew heavier with every step. He had to make a superhuman effort now to overcome the vicious resistance grinding in his belly and breast, but he persevered, knowing all was as it should be. When he turned to look up for the last time at Ephraim, all he saw was a six-pointed star turning slowly against the black sky. (*The Ogre* 370)[39]

Both texts focus on the growing heaviness of their respective child and, in both texts, there is a movement of the child weighing his carrier down while the water and mud rise. Although, Abel and Ephraim do not survive the crossing, the last image of the novel points to a messianic quality to Ephraim concurrent with Christ as the messiah. The death of Abel and Ephraim as well as the similarity in the narrative structure suggests not just a rewriting of the St. Christopher story but a marriage between the saint and the ever present ErlKing, evident in the reference to black alders which is evocative of the residence of the ErlKing.

Goethe's "The ErlKing" similar to the life of Saint Christopher is dramatically misread by Abel. There are two ways major way that the poem and legend are misread. For one, the child is not carried by the Erlking himself. Abel epitomizes the Erlking, the figure, as the carrier of the child even though the child is carried by his father. The Erlking, in the

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[39] In the beginning of the novel, Abel expresses his wish to carry a star which foreshadows the ending, "Whatever I may bear in the future, with whatever precious and sacred burden my shoulders are laden and blessed, my triumphal end will be, God willing, to walk the earth carrying on my shoulders a star brighter and more golden than that of the Magi" (*The Ogre* 82). Interestingly, in this section, Abel is referring to Atlas, whose punishment has been at times inaccurately portrayed as carrying earth for eternity but whose actual punishment was to carry the celestial spheres. Although, Abel has a penchant for misappropriating myths, he is, in this case, correct to refer to a celestial entity in regard to Atlas.

poem, is a disembodied voice beckoning the sickly boy to come to him and his realm. Abel is incapable of metaphoric understanding (as a matter in fact, metaphors are central to what he hates about the French), meaning when he speaks of euphoria as the joy of carrying a child, he is referring to the literal and physical act of carrying a child with no metaphoric trace. Thus, the Erlking for Abel very literally is carrying the boy.

Secondly, Abel reads the Erlking as the savior of children instead of the harbinger of death. More importantly, Abel does not consider the terror of the child and his cries to his father to save him from the Erlking. In Goethe's poem, which is the version of Erlking referenced and reproduced in the novel, the child is clearly distressed to encounter the Erlking, "'My son, wherefore seek'st thou thy face thus to hide?' / Look, father, the Erl-King is close by our side!'" and "'My father, my father, he seizes me fast, / For sorely the Erl-King has hurt me at last.'"

In the poem, it is the father who carries the child and who finds the child dead in his arms. So once again, Abel has not only misread the poem but also conflated important aspects of it. He does not recognize the father as the carrier and caretaker who wishes safety for his child; instead he interprets the Erlking as the savior of the child.

On one hand, the Erlking is diametrically opposed to Abel's image of himself. On another, the Erlking is the most appropriate metaphor for Abel. Abel is very physical and sees his physicality as the vehicle through which children can be saved. But he eventually leads every child he "saved" to death, thus, bringing him much closer to Erlking as the omen of death.

Although Abel, in the capacity of the Erlking, does not succeed in saving the children, he does succeed in preserving the youth. He idolizes boys of twelve years of age and hopes for their eternal youth since any year older thrusts them out of their innocence and makes

them susceptible to the corruptions of the world. In essence, the Erlking embodied by Abel is arresting the aging process of these children by preserving them in death.

This sentiment of preserving the youth in death is seen in Nazi Germany, as well as other totalitarian regimes. There are countless propaganda material that call for the preservation and cultivation of the youth. However, what these material do not make explicit is that this call is for the sake of assembling an army that would fight for the ideologies of the adults.

Conclusion

So what happened that led to Abel's judgment to fail to correctly decipher the signs and symbols which he encountered? What exactly is it about his own ideological system that could be at once in accord and opposed to the Nazi ideology? The way we might be able to account for this ambivalence is through temptation and the taboo nature of perversions. The war and the Third Reich allowed Abel to give in to and practice his perversions – these include his fascination with young boys and the desire to carry them without any legal or ethical consequences, whereas pre-WWII France criminalized him. In a sense, Abel was normalized insofar his perversions were not construed as transgressions but were rather instrumentalized in the Third Reich. Not only were Abel's perversions normalized in the Third Reich but Abel also saw a normalization of perversion – or temptation – in the Third Reich.

What this novel allows us to do is think through how we read text, by extension it allows us to recognize the ideological apparatuses through which we navigate society. How do we gain entrance into a text? Or rather, what are the questions we ask that allow us into a text, the questions that could show us the frameworks within which we operate? What are the qualities we identify in order to make judgments, as well as the ramifications of dismissing ambivalence in favor of singular (and easily digestible) meanings?

Hannah Arendt, the 20th century German philosopher who escaped the captivity of a Nazi labor camp, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* writes,

> And just as the law in civilized countries assumes that the voice of conscience tells everybody 'Thou shalt not kill,' even though man's natural desires and inclinations may at times be murderous, so the law of Hitler's land demanded that the voice of conscience tell everybody: 'Though shalt kill,' although the organizers of the massacres knew full well that murder is against the normal desires and inclinations of most people. Evil in the Third Reich had lost the quality by which most people recognize it – the quality of temptation. (150)

Arendt's definition of evil in the Third Reich is precisely what Tournier is positioning as the malign inversion of evil through which evil becomes good for the benefit of racial purity.

What's more, *The Ogre* is a compelling commentary on the complicity of the French in the rise and acceptance of totalitarianism. Tournier himself wrote extensively on the immediate and profound amnesia experienced by the French regarding the German occupation.[40] Post-WWII France has had a contentious relationship with its own fascist past; fetishizing the French Resistance has been at the expense of the continuation of Pétainism well beyond the Nuremberg trials. Immediately after the war, many Collaborationists were convicted either by the public[41] or by the government. Philippe Pétain, the former prime minister and architect of Vichy France, was tried and convicted of treason in 1945. These convictions seemingly severed the ties between Vichy France and the Fourth Republic. However, other key figures responsible in the formation of Vichy France were not brought to court until the 1980s and were instead reinstated as officials of the newly minted Republic.

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[40] As a young man, he lived in occupied France. He began criticizing how the French represented the occupation years as soon as the war was over.

[41] Most are familiar with photos of French women with shaved heads being paraded around towns in order to mark and shame them as Collaborationists.

Maurice Papon, the senior police official of Vichy regime responsible for the deportation of Jews to concentration camps, continued his career by serving as the perfect of police in various French colonies before becoming the perfect of police in Paris in 1958. He was not convicted of crimes against humanity until 1998.

Papon, in particular, is an interesting case. As the perfect of Paris Police, he ordered the massacre of Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) Algerians on October 17, 1961, a decade and half after the initial convictions of Vichy regime leaders. In October 1961, the FLN, a pro-independence Algerian party, called for a mass demonstration in Paris to oppose the curfew that was ordered against Algerians and French Muslims. At the direction of Papon, the police opened fire on the demonstrators, drowning some in the Seine. In addition, it is reported that many were taken in police custody and later executed in the yards of the Perfecture of Paris.

Similar to a lack of recognition in their complicity in the Holocaust, the massacre was not officially recognized until 1998, three years after France officially recognized its role in the Holocaust. On July 16, 1995, Jacque Chirac, the then President, opened his Véldrome d'hiver Roundup commemoration speech with a nod towards France's misconception of its role in the Holocaust, "Il est, dans la vie d'une nation, des moments qui blessent la mémoire, et l'idée que l'on se fait de son pays" (qtd. in *Le Figaro*). He continued by naming the French State itself as responsible, "Oui, la follie criminelle de l'occupant a été secondée par des Francais, par l'Etat Francais" (qtd. in *Le Figaro*).

What makes Papon interesting in particular is that he is a figure of continuation that not only participated but contributed to France's two major racial executions of the 20th century – two events that were denied by the French government and rewritten in the French psyche. In their chapter, "'Une Journee Portee Disparu': The Paris Massacre of 1961 and Memory," Jim House and Neil MacMaster describe Papon as an "'exemplary' of the

technocratic high functionary who not only survived every change of regime, but amalgamated the efficient techniques of collaborationist policing under Vichy (identification and deportation) with those of colonial repression, mass resettlement and 'anti-terrorist' strategies honed in the colonial theater" (270). Papon illustrates a France seemingly at odds with its own liberal foundation; a France that performs historical amnesia in order to reconcile its actions with its ideals. *The Ogre*, however, shows us that there is no need for such reconciliation because the ideals that shape the French identity are perfectly compatible with their role in historical atrocities.

The importance of Catholicism in shaping Abel and his ideological system can be also seen in the shaping of the French fascist state. In other words, Catholicism and how it functions in French society provided the conditions under which a fascist state specific to France and Frenchness is possible – a fascist state that would be possible independent of German occupation, although the occupation accelerated its formation. Ultimately, the French fascist state, unlike the German or even the Italian one, derives from and depends on Catholicism. John Hellman discusses the intersection of Catholicism and the French fascist state in his book, *The Knight-Monks of Vichy France*, by examining a prestigious school, similar to that of *The Ogre*'s Kalternborn. Similar to the training of the youth we see in Germany, reflected in history and the fictional Kalternborn,[42] France (after the collapse of the Third Republic) placed an importance on the training of its youth as the agents of the totalitarian National Revolution. Hellman writes,

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[42] In *The Ogre*, Tournier explains the daily ritual of boys at Kaltenborn, "The day began at six forty-five with electric bells pealing furiously through the little dormitories. Then red jerseys started rushing down the stairs and into the main courtyard, where there was a morning workout. Meanwhile the shower room, where one group was followed by another every five minutes, steamed like a witches' kitchen. At eight everyone gathered on the glacis in uniform to salute the colors" (246). Tournier's account of the morning ritual is similar to Hellman's account of daily rituals at Uriage, "Daily life at Uriage had some striking features. Everyone was roused by a trumpet at seven in the morning, and there were five minutes to gather in shorts in front of Chateau Bayard […] For twenty minutes, there were exercises of various kinds, then jogging and running at full speed…" (*Knight-Monks of Vichy France* 71-2).

> Various innovative economic, social, and pedagogical projects sprang up in religious circles […]. There were also dreams of a new knighthood, a chivalrous order of the young, who would exercise leadership, embody and spread these ideals: shock troops, as it were, of the spirit. The Uriage school and most of the other leadership schools at Vichy grew directly out of these idealistic ventures for, in the early stages at least, Vichy often meant "Catholics in power," and many of the National Revolution's ideals seemed close to those the Catholics had been nurturing through the 1920s and 1930s (if not since the mid-nineteenth century). (*Knight-Monks of Vichy France* 6)

Hellman does not shy away from indicting French Catholics in the expulsion of thousands from public life, which led to their persecution:

> The emphasis in the first Vichy […] was on hierarchy and exclusion: it was an effort to promote 'affirmative action' for people of old-stock Catholic background, to assure their 'proper' representation in publishing, journalism, the schools and universities, the medical profession, and so on, against the 'others' who were thought to have infiltrated the country and high-profile positions. This project […] slid into more and more radical forms of exclusion – beginning with foreigners and Communists and then moving on to native-born Freemasons and Jews – and moved from bureaucratic measures to manhandling and violence. (*Knight-Monks of Vichy France* 241-2)

Of course, after the war, there was a clear perpetrator in the Germans regarding crimes against humanity and France, writ large, could be free of being synonymous with the horrors of the Holocaust. But Hellman shows that the Vichy state operated independent of Nazi Germany in systematically excluding from public life those who were not deemed to fit with an idea of Frenchness: "there had been a distinctive proto-fascist French ideology and that the so-called progressive Catholics of the Esprit and Uriage School groups had nurtured it" (*Knight-Monks of Vichy France* 248).

In his autobiography, *The Wind Spirit*, Tournier explains how his parents' years living in Germany prior to the Third Reich and his own childhood in German-occupied France inspired *The Ogre*. In a sense, Tournier is making a commentary on the compatibility of a certain political ideology of France with that of the Third Reich. Hellman, in the afterword of *Knight-Monks of Vichy France*, maintains that, "France had produced its own ideologically committed fascists. But even today there is still great reluctance to admit that mainstream French Catholicism nurtured the fierce anti-Communist and anti-Semitic brutality of a Paul Touvier or the early Vichy sympathies of Francois Mitterrand" (248). Similar to Hellman, Tournier, through Abel Tiffauges, is asserting that fascism is not necessarily contained to one single period or nation but that it is an ideological system particular to its respective nation.

Chapter 3

Acts of Responsibility: Not the Thought but Thinking Itself

"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity."
-*The Second Coming*, W.B. Yeats

In *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt writes, "There are no dangerous thoughts; thinking itself is dangerous" (176). This seemingly simple proposition is the basis for the capacity of exercising personal responsibility and judgment in events of political evil. During the Eichmann trials, Arendt was fascinated by Eichmann's lack of thinking during his defense, "Whether writing his memoirs in Argentina or in Jerusalem, whether speaking to the police examiner or to the court, what he said was always the same, expressed in the same words. The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with his inability to *think*" (*Eichmann in Jerusalem* 49). His inability to think, according to Arendt, made Eichmann the perfect subject of the Nazi machinery, carrying out orders and reiterating maxims and clichés without thinking *through* their systematic implications. Her time reporting on the trial brings Arendt to the conclusion that thoughts themselves are not inherently dangerous to the stability of totalitarian regimes like that of Nazi Germany; but what poses the biggest ideological threat is the ability to think through and reflect upon the content of what is one asked to believe and follow.

In the context of a totalitarian regime, the thought of the leader is the only thought that is to be imitated, followed, and reproduced, so any individual and independent act of thinking is discouraged. What the leader of such regimes demands mirrors that of the post-Enlightenment genius stripped of its ambivalence. As mentioned in the introduction, genius stripped of its ambivalence no longer asks for a thorough reflection of the content of the work

of genius. In other words, the post-eighteenth-century genius demands imitation without criticism. This is precisely how and why the revision of genius as an embodiment of spirit[43] as well as the totalitarian leader threaten the capacity for individual responsibility and reflective moral judgments.

Ideas and Ideology in Totalitarian Regimes

Arendt's massively popular book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, originally published in 1951, is a comprehensive and systemic study of the rise and inner mechanics of Nazism and Stalinism, 20th century's two major totalitarian regimes. As evident by its name, totalitarianism refers to an authoritative political regime that not only controls every aspect of public and private life but also consolidates power in a manner which does not allow for any institutional oversight of the leader's rule. Arendt articulates the distinction between totalitarianism and other forms of authoritative or tyrannical regimes as the cultivation of all public and private action for the sake of the state:

> Equality of condition among their subjects has been one of the foremost concerns of despotism and tyrannies since ancient times, yet such equalization is not sufficient for totalitarian rule because it leaves more or less intact certain nonpolitical communal bonds between the subjects, such as family ties and common cultural interests. If totalitarianism takes its own claim seriously, it must come to the point where it has "to finish once and for all with the neutrality of chess," that is, with the autonomous

[43] As mentioned in the introduction, Herder promoted a concept of genius who was unlearned but inspired to which Kant objected. Herder's version of genius as an exceptional man embodying a creative spirit is seen in Romanticism through the emphasis on the spirit/mind. The revision of genius into the embodiment of spirit follows a similar timeline to that of the revision of the grotesque; the Romantic concept of the grotesque stripped it of its ambivalent and regenerative qualities. However, the Romantic grotesque also became a counternarrative to the Enlightenment's rationalism by representing a world that is alien and terrifying to man. Mikhail Bakhtin calls the Romantic grotesque "an important manifestation of world literature. To a certain degree it was a reaction against the elements of classicism which characterized the self-importance of the Enlightenment. It was a reaction against the cold rationalism, against official, formalistic, and logical authoritarianism; it was a rejection of that which is finished and completed, of the didactic and utilitarian spirit of the Enlighteners with their narrow and artificial optimism" (*Rabelais and His World* 37).

> existence of any activity whatsoever. The lovers of "chess for the sake of chess," aptly compared by their liquidator with the lovers of "art for art's sake," are not yet absolutely atomized elements in a mass society whose completely heterogeneous uniformity is one of the primary conditions for totalitarianism. From the point of view of totalitarian rulers, a society devoted to chess for the sake of chess is only a degree different and less dangerous than a class of farmers for the sake of farming. Himmler quite aptly defined the SS member as the new type of man who under no circumstances will ever do "a thing for its own sake." (*The Origins of Totalitarianism 322*)

According to Arendt, totalitarianism's desire to center all aspects of life for the sake of the state stems from an insecurity around individual action, as minute as it might be, that can be enjoyed independent of the state.[44] If any allowance is given to an activity for its own sake, then there is the possibility that individuals would seize the feeling of autonomy and see a possibility beyond the totalitarian state. Moreover, since the state is synonymous with the leader in totalitarianism, any action that is not for the sake of the state suggests a deviation from the leader, "Totalitarian movements are mass organizations of atomized isolated individuals. Compared with all other parties and movements, their most conspicuous external characteristic is their demand for total, unrestricted, unconditional, and unalterable loyalty of the individual member" (*The Origins of Totalitarianism 323*).

The state secures this "unrestricted, unconditional, and unalterable loyalty" by dissolving the socially stratified classes into the masses. Arendt explains that 'the masses' is a mediation between the elite and the mob:

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[44] Here Arendt is creating a binary, which limits her analysis. In this binary, there is either individual action *within* or *without* the state. However, what is not addressed is that individuals inherently live in a collective and thus any individual action is informed by and informs the collective.

> Yet it is here if anywhere that a valid criterion may be found for distinguishing the elite from the mob in the pretotalitarian atmosphere. What the mob wanted, and what Goebbels expressed with great precision, was access to history even at the price of destruction. Goebbels' sincere conviction that "the greatest happiness that a contemporary can experience today" is either to be a genius or serve one, was typical of the mob but neither of the masses nor the sympathizing elite. The latter, on the contrary, took anonymity seriously to the point of seriously denying the existence of genius; all the art theories of the twenties tried desperately to prove that the excellent is the product of skill, craftsmanship, logic, and the realization of the potentialities of the material. The mob, and not the elite, was charmed by the "radiant power of fame" and accepted enthusiastically the genius idolatry of the late bourgeois world. In this the mob of the twentieth century followed faithfully the pattern of earlier parvenus who also had discovered the fact that bourgeois society would rather open its doors to the fascinating "abnormal," the genius, the homosexual, or the Jew, than to simple merit. The elite's contempt for the genius and its yearning for anonymity was still witness of a spirit which neither the masses nor the mob were in a position to understand, and which, in the words of Robespierre, strove to assert the grandeur of man against the pettiness of the great. (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 332)

It is interesting that although she quotes Goebbels' "sincere conviction" regarding genius, Arendt is very adamant as to not attribute any aspect of genius to totalitarian regimes. According to her, only the mob (whose intellectual capacity is lower than that of the individual or even the masses) craves any queer element of society, including the genius. The totalitarian state's desire is to eliminate any element of society that they deem as queer or other in order to minimize dissent. However, although these elements are eliminated and discouraged *within* the totalitarian state, the leader is not bound by these restrictions and is,

frequently, the sole transgressor. In other words, the only genius welcomed in the totalitarian state is the leader since he develops the framework of what is allowed in the state and what and how the citizens are to act or, rather, imitate him. Returning to Eichmann, he did not have the ability to think precisely because, as a subject and worker of the Nazi regime, he was to act within the framework that was already set up. Thus, he did not need to think as all that was required of him was imitation.

Due to the totalizing power of these regimes, "The inhabitants of a totalitarian country are thrown into and caught in the process of nature or history for the sake of accelerating its movement; as such, they can only be executioners or victims of its inherent law" (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 468). According to Arendt, totalitarian regimes create a binary for their inhabitants: they are either victims or perpetrators, and there is no room for an ambivalent or apathetic citizen. Citizens that claim that they merely lived under Nazi rule and were not complicit in the atrocities of the regime were not neutral and were, in fact, executers of the will of the state through their supposed neutrality. This binary is possible through how totalitarian regimes lay claim to history and nature. Since their aim is the acceleration of historical and natural processes, the inhabitants of these regimes must unify as a cohesive and singular entity and any dissenting figure which is a threat to this unity becomes a victim of not the totalitarian regime but of nature and history. That is to say, there is a course to nature as well as history and that the totalitarian regime aids in and expedites their movement. In essence, the totalitarian state is merely an agent of history and, as such, is fulfilling a preordained course of things.

Accordingly, the ideological framework espoused by a totalitarian state follows that it is its duty to accelerate historical and natural processes by any means possible – in the case of Nazism, through violent means that were systematic, efficient, and scientific. In *The Origins*

of Totalitarianism, Arendt parses out the relationship between ideology and idea in order to show the totalitarian state's interest in the functionality of an ideology over the content of it:

> An ideology is quite literally what its name indicates: it is the logic of an idea. Its subject matter is history, to which the "idea" is applied; the result of this application is not a body of statements about something that *is*, but the unfolding of a process which is in constant change. The ideology treats the course of events as though it followed the same "law" as the logical exposition of its "idea." Ideologies pretend to know the mysteries of the whole historical process – the secrets of the past, the intricacies of the present, the uncertainties of the future – because of the logic inherent in their respective ideas. (469)

Arendt explains that an idea, which is the content of an ideology, is not necessarily the purpose of an ideology nor does it determine the success of it. Thus, an ideology's merit is tied with how an idea is codified and carried out. An ideological system, then, is not concerned with the value of its idea but the process through which that idea moves and is disseminated.[45] Arendt goes on to explain that "[i]deologies are never interested in the miracle of being;"

> They are historical, concerned with becoming and perishing, with the rise and fall of cultures, even if they try to explain history by some "law of nature." The word "race" in racism does not signify any genuine curiosity about the human races as a field for scientific exploration, but is the "idea" by which the movement of history is explained as one consistent process. (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 469)

The disentangling of idea from ideology shows how what Arendt calls ideological thinking is divorced from the phenomenological reality, meaning it is not concerned with the direct

[45] Arendt's account of the nature of ideologies is demonstrated in Michel Tournier's *The Ogre*, which is discussed in the previous chapter.

experiences of being and is focused on a quasi-metaphysical or noumenon reality. Ideological thinking, then, can explain events as historically necessary.[46] In the case of totalitarian regimes, horrific events such as the mass extermination of certain races is explained as inevitable to history's progress. And since ideological thinking is focused on processes instead of the ideas enacting these processes, the real and lived implications of events are overlooked in favor of the logic that produced a certain event, "Whoever agreed that […] the right to live had something to do with race and did not draw the consequence of killing 'unfit races,' was plainly either stupid or a coward" (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 472).

In Germany, Hitler began with an idea, the preservation and prosperity of the German people[47]; beginning with this idea and ending with the Holocaust has a clear and cohesive logic, which can be discerned. There was an intelligible – not intelligent – logic to Nazism; a logic whose process was accelerated to its only and final end as soon as Hitler became chancellor and made himself the image of the state and the state the image of himself. He fortified an ideological system whose logic was imitated and executed by its followers, which is similar to Herder's concept of genius – as outlined in the introduction of this dissertation.[48]

Genius stripped of its ambivalence makes possible the privileging of logical processes over the merit of the idea driving these processes. As mentioned in the introduction, this concept of genius is credited with setting up new ways of thinking and acting, which can be imitated by ordinary men. However, this genius as a model for imitation is endowed with the

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[46] A contemporary example of ideological thinking ignoring direct and lived experiences is how systemic violence against black folks in the U.S. can be explained away as a product of racism without any concrete action to end it.

[47] Calling for the prosperity of the German people creates the ontological category of "German People," which suggests that the prosperity of this ontological category might depend on the removal of other ontological categories.

[48] Herder called for a genius who is unlearned but inspired, meaning that his concept of genius was without the need for formal education as well as without the need for thinking. Herder leaned towards a concept of genius that was close to enthusiasm instead of knowledge. In other words, the man of genius was filled and guided by a spirit that could not be learned but could be possessed. This concept of genius promotes the absence of thinking thus if genius is to be imitated, it is the imitation of the absence of thinking to which Arendt is turning in formulating the idea of banality of evil.

authority of knowing exactly what should be imitated and, thus, necessitates a confidence that removes the need to reflect on the implications of an idea. Simply, when genius is no longer ambivalent, it creates a category of subjects that no longer need to think. Ambivalence, on the other hand, allows for reflection and demands thinking: how can one be certain of what ambivalence is asking of them? Since ambivalence itself cannot be categorized, then we need to look at ideas and the scenarios through which they could be enacted in lived reality.

Personal and Political Responsibility

Arendt's account of ideological thinking inevitably leads to questions of personal responsibility and if personal responsibility is even possible in political formations, the ramifications of which are heightened when totalitarian regimes are considered. In "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship" (1964), Arendt begins by distinguishing between political and personal responsibility in order to gesture towards an answer to these questions,

> [Personal responsibility] must be understood in contrast to political responsibility which every government assumes for the deeds and misdeeds of its predecessor and every nation for the deeds and misdeeds of the past […] And as for the nation, it is obvious that every generation, by virtue of being born into historical continuum, is burdened by the sins of the fathers as it is blessed with the deeds of the ancestors. (*Responsibility and Judgment* 27)

Arendt's distinction between political and personal responsibility, however, does not erase personal responsibility in political formations. In fact, this distinction helps Arendt to establish personal responsibility regarding the state's actions. In the case of Nazi Germany and its crimes against humanity, Arendt concludes that every individual who acted according to the state or was even passively in accord with the state is personally responsible. She correlates the lack of personal responsibility with the incapacity to think, so Eichmann, for

example, did not admit to being personally responsible for his actions not just because he was following the orders of the state but also because he was not capable of thinking.

However, Arendt, regarding personal responsibility, is more interested in regular citizens living under and accepting the Nazi regime: "In brief, what disturbed us was the behavior not of our enemies but of our friends, who had done nothing to bring this situation about. They were not responsible for the Nazis, they were only impressed by the Nazi success and unable to pit their own judgment against the verdict of History, as they read it" (*Responsibility and Judgment* 24). The notion of pitting one's judgment against the verdict of history returns to how ideologies serve conventional understandings of historical processes. In a way, this kind of thinking assumes a certain historical inevitability that absolves individuals from its processes and outcomes. In the case of these citizens, Arendt explains that they turn to the principle of the lesser of two evils as moral justification for their passive complicity in the Nazi regime:

> In their moral justification, the argument of the lesser evil has played a prominent role. If you are confronted with two evils, thus the argument runs, it is your duty to opt for the lesser one, whereas it is irresponsible to refuse to choose altogether. Those who denounce the moral fallacy of this argument are usually accused of a germ-proof moralism which is alien to political circumstances…" (*Responsibility and Judgment* 35-6)

She continues to explain that the moral fallacy of choosing the lesser of two evils is manipulated in totalitarian regimes to implicate not only the political elite but also ordinary citizens in their criminality:

> Politically, the weakness of the argument has always been that those who choose the lesser evil forget very quickly that they chose evil […] Moreover, if we look at the techniques of totalitarian government, it is obvious that the argument of 'the lesser

> evil' – far from being raised only from the outside by those who do not belong to the ruling elite – is one of the mechanisms built into the machinery of terror and criminality. Acceptance of lesser evils is consciously used in conditioning the government officials as well as the population at large to the acceptance of evil as such. (*Responsibility and Judgment* 36-7)

The principle of the lesser of two evils makes it so that making a choice is seen as practicing personal responsibility even though the content of both choices has evil qualities. Following this, refusal of making a choice is interpreted as lack of political and personal responsibility.[49] What is sacrificed in this principle is the ability to think beyond a binary and imagine a possibility where the withholding of allegiance from a political system is the only way to practice personal responsibility.[50] Considering that the argument of the lesser of two evils is being made here in relation to the Nazi regime, Communism and State Capitalism was narrated in the Third Reich as a worse evil. The ordinary citizen supporting the Third Reich understood Communism and State Capitalism as evils threatening the existence of the German people. After all, Nazism did not begin with the idea of extermination but began with the idea of preservation. Unfortunately, the logical process that can be abstracted from the idea of preservation of a race leads to the extermination of another.

Additionally, since the principle of the lesser of two evils suggests an assent to evil, it helps produce a population whose behavior, despite their original stance, will develop and change to fit the political program which has evil as its primary quality:

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[49] We have seen similar rhetoric during the United States' 2016 election cycle. There was an appeal to the "moral" sensibility of folks who either abstained from voting or voted third party to put aside their personal political judgments and vote for the lesser of two evils. One of the problems with this appeal during this election is that it ignored legitimate critiques on the part of marginalized folks who had been systematically oppressed under and by both the Republican and Democratic parties and refused to participate in the continuation of either party.

[50] Arendt, in order to do away with the principle of the lesser evil, is creating a binary of either participating or not participating in state affairs. However, withdrawal from a political system that has monopolized every aspect of private and public life is not viable in that no one's private actions are impervious to such system.

> We see here how unwilling the human mind is to face realities which in one way or another contradict totally its framework of reference. Unfortunately, it seems to be much easier to condition human behavior and to make people conduct themselves in the most unexpected and outrageous manner, than it is to persuade anybody to learn from experience, as the saying goes; that is, to start thinking and judging instead of applying categories and formulas which are deeply ingrained in our mind, but whose basis of experience has long been forgotten and whose plausibility resides in their intellectual consistency rather than in their adequacy to actual events. (*Responsibility and Judgment* 37)

As has been shown, for Arendt, thinking and judging are fundamental to a personal responsibility that is morally good – itself a tenuous category. Thinking and judging, here, have less to do with the ability to make intelligible connections and more with the ability to assess and think through actual events and scenarios that have real implications in the real world for real people. Arendt suggests that we are conditioned to accept things that are ideologically consistent instead of actual events that deviate from an ideological schema. To use a contemporary example, the election of Donald Trump to presidency in 2016 shocked many liberal Americans as it was not in line with the ideological framework of democracy. However, the events that have shaped American history – for example, the systematic violence against black men that has been broadcast – are clear indications of the possibility of a figure like Trump being elected to the United States of America's highest office. This is not to say that there is no connection between actual events and what Arendt calls, intellectual consistency, but that the failure to reconcile actual events with ideological frameworks shows a lack of thinking.

Arendt further problematizes the incapacity to reconcile actual events with ideological frameworks by introducing the malleable nature of morality and the stability of skepticism:

> We now know the moral norms and standards can be changed overnight, and that all that then will be left is the mere habit of holding fast to something. Much more reliable will be the doubters and skeptics, not because skepticism is good or doubting wholesome, but because they are used to examine things and to make up their own minds. Best of all will be those who know only one thing for certain: that whatever else happens, as long as we live we shall have to live together with ourselves. (*Responsibility and Judgment* 45)

Morality in this case, for Arendt, goes back to social conventions, "It was as though morality, at the very moment of its total collapse within an old and highly civilized nation, stood revealed in the original meaning of the word, as a set of *mores*, of customs and manners, which could be exchanged for another set with no more trouble than it would take to change the table manners of a whole people" (*Responsibility and Judgment* 43). In this sense, individuals who are prone to skepticism and do not conduct themselves based on a set of functions are those who perform personal responsibility because they do not consider social conventions as sufficient evidence for a decision. To refuse unwavering adherence to social conventions is a radical act of judgment when an individual bases behavior on not ideological frameworks but how and if actual events are consistent with certain ideological frameworks; and if they are, what are their implications in real life?

In "Truth and Politics" (1967), Arendt gestures towards how ordinary citizens, perhaps, accept horrendous actions of their country in line with their ideological framework (but not necessarily with their moral sensibility) by discussing the nature of facts in politics:

> The facts I have in mind are publicly known, and yet the same public that knows them can successfully, and often spontaneously, taboo their public discussion and treat them as though they were what they are not – namely, secrets. That their assertion then should prove as dangerous as, for instance, preaching atheism or some other

> heresy proved in former times seems a curious phenomenon, and its significance is enhanced when we find it also in countries that are ruled tyrannically by an ideological government. (Even in Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia it was more dangerous to talk about concentration and extermination camps, whose existence was no secret, than to hold and to utter "heretical" views on anti-Semitism, racism, and Communism.) (*Between Past and Future* 232)

Rendering certain truths and facts as taboo in public discussion essentially aims at distancing the public from the real world. As with how ideological thinking deals with the intelligible and not actual events, the prohibition of certain facts from public discourse allows for sustaining a logical consistency without considering the earthly implications it has on real people. The example Arendt provides of Hitler's Germany is emblematic of a dissonance between thought and thinking. To include concentration and extermination camps in public discourse is to encounter the real implications of anti-Semitism; it is a real-world scenario that could be thought through, and a reflective judgment could be derived that might put into question the racist ideologies of Nazism. Could, for example, the citizens who condemned Hitler but accepted Nazism as historically necessary fall into a passive complicity if the fact of the existence of extermination camps was a regular part of political discourse?[51]

The existence of extermination camps was, undoubtedly, the most horrific fact of Nazi Germany, whose horror is intensified considering that it was known but tolerated by ordinary citizens. Arendt explains that facts turn to opinion in order to mitigate their horror:

> What seems even more disturbing is that to the extent to which unwelcome factual truths are tolerated in free countries they are often, consciously or unconsciously,

[51] It should be noted that expressing one's thoughts about a real-world scenario is not sufficient since it is merely an expression of opinion that is derived from the assumption that one's opinion has merit. What is necessary in cases of reflection is material external to the self that can be examined because reflection requires an object that can reflect something back at us. Texts or, more specifically, stories can be objects of reflections in that they can demand a recognition of how ideas are represented.

> transformed into opinions – as though the fact of Germany's support of Hitler or of France's collapse before the German armies in 1940 or of Vatican policies during the Second World War were not a matter of historical record but a matter of opinion. (*Between Past and Future* 232)

The danger of opinions is to forego the possibility of examining events for the purpose of recognizing and avoiding similar patterns. As Arendt herself states in "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship," "Unfortunately, it seems to be much easier to condition human behavior and to make people conduct themselves in the most unexpected and outrageous manner, than it is to persuade anybody to learn from experience" (*Responsibility and Judgment* 37).[52] It is even harder to persuade learning from experience when those experiences demand a revision in ideological frameworks.

Arendt, Genius, and the Problem of Ideological Frameworks

Genius is transformative in that we can recognize genius through its creative capacity for establishing frameworks for ways of being and thinking. The transformative quality of genius in itself is not threatening; however, it becomes dangerous if genius is understood as a model to imitate because he is endowed with powers inaccessible to ordinary individuals.[53] Following the line of genius as a model, it is assumed that genius' transformative quality is positive in every case, which is not necessarily true. Immanuel Kant gestures toward this misconception with his distinction between succession and imitation that makes it possible to ask how can we be certain of the moral content of that which we are following.[54] Although

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[52] What Arendt fails to account for is that one does not learn from experience itself but learns through a reflection on the experience. Reflecting on experiences can allow for a systematic understanding of how ideas work in the world.

[53] Genius is still transformative even if not ascribed to some transcendental power. It has dangerous implications as soon as it becomes a vehicle for some transcendental power, even if it was claimed by ordinary men. However, in the history of genius, as an embodiment of spirit, genius is only attributed to a few chosen individuals.

[54] A fuller discussion of Kant's concept of genius and his distinction between succession and imitation can be found in the introduction of this dissertation.

Kant's treatment of genius is brief in length, he was careful to moderate the power that other philosophers of the time, particularly Johann Gottfried Herder, bestowed on genius because this concept of genius excludes criticism of it, a point that is picked up by Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1958).

Arendt's account of genius is quite sober but she clearly opposes the category of genius for man. She begins by explaining genius as a phenomenon exacerbated by commercialism:

> The frustration of the human person inherent in a community of producers and even more in commercial society is perhaps best illustrated by the phenomenon of genius, in which, from the Renaissance to the end of the nineteenth century, the modern age saw its highest ideal […] It is only with the beginning of our century that great artists in surprising unanimity have protested against being called "geniuses" and have insisted on craftmanship, competence, and the close relationships between art and handicraft. This protest, to be sure, is partly no more than a reaction against the vulgarization and commercialization of the notion of genius; but it is also due to the more recent rise of a laboring society, for which productivity or creativity is no ideal and which lacks all experiences from which the very notion of greatness can spring […] The modem age's obsession with the unique signature of each artist, its unprecedented sensitivity to style, shows a preoccupation with those features by which the artist transcends his skill and workmanship in a way similar to the way each person's uniqueness transcends the sum total of his qualities. Because of this transcendence, which indeed distinguishes the great work of art from all other products of human hands, the phenomenon of the creative genius seemed like the highest legitimation for the conviction of homo faber that a man's products may be more and essentially greater than himself. (*The Human Condition* 210)

In her account, Arendt points to the fundamental problem with genius as re-conceptualized in the eighteenth century, which Penelope Murray articulates in *Genius, A History of an Idea* (1989), "the most recalcitrant problem of all those associated with the idea of genius, the question of the relationship between the artist and his work. For the study of genius is ultimately the study of human creativity, and its primary interest is in the creative human being rather than in the work he creates" (*Genius* 6-7). In other words, the man – the creator, the producer – is the subject of interest instead of his creation with the re-conceptualization of genius. Arendt, however, articulates this problem in terms of capitalism and explains that the phenomenon of genius is demonstrative of how the quality and content of a creation is overlooked in favor of production – that something is merely produced. As such, Arendt defines the works of genius as material, which limits all the ways genius has been theorized and understood as a transformative figure.[55]

Even though Arendt only treats genius as an artistic genius, her articulation of its problem as the idolization of man can be applied to genius as source of ideological frameworks. Through citing 20th century artists, who want to distance themselves from the moniker of genius, Arendt suggests that the concept of genius has eliminated the need for reflective moments. The artists who want to be recognized by their craftsmanship are asking for an analysis of their work instead of a judgment of their reputation. The concept of genius, thus, creates a myth of man which renders the ideas that shape the man immaterial. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Arendt explains ideological thinking as the privileging of a historical truth over how ideas are enacted in the actual world. Similarly, the genius is

[55] Although Arendt is compelling in her assessment of genius as a productive – instead of transformative – power, her reduction of the artist from genius to the homofaber fails to recognize how it also reduces the creation of the artist from instances of reasoning and logical processes (that can allow for reflective moments) to mere craftsmanship.

abstracted from his work to become an otherworldly truth teller, consequently, ignoring how his ideas function in the world – in the world at large as well as the world of his creations.

Conclusion

The abstraction of genius from his work and ideology from its idea is precisely the problem with neutralizing ambivalence. Both these abstractions negate aesthetic experiences[56] in favor of logical consistency; however, what is sacrificed is the link between the aesthetic and logic which informs our sense of morality. In order to preserve a relationship between the aesthetic and logic, reflective thinking is necessary. Arendt defines thinking as "always deal[ing] with objects that are absent, removed from direct sense perception. An object of thought is always a re-presentation, that is, something or somebody that is actually absent and present only to the mind which, by virtue of imagination, can make it present in the form of an image" (*Responsibility and Judgment* 165). Arendt, however, neglects to connect thinking with aesthetic experience; she fails to account for how "an object of thought" is a representation. If we take the object of thought as a representation, then thinking must begin with an aesthetic experience in that a representation of a thing can only be known through a sensible experience of it. In this sense thinking is a reflective process in the Kantian sense[57] since the reflective process begins with the aesthetic experience and moves towards universal principles instead of appropriate particular events to fit universal principles.

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[56] I use the term aesthetic experience in the Kantian sense, meaning the realm of the sensible.

[57] In *Critique of Power of Judgment*, Kant establishes judgment as a faculty that is governed by principles of understanding. In the First Introduction, he breaks up judgment as having two distinct functions: determining and reflecting. Determining is concerned with particulars under the universal a priori. For example, the particular would be 'rose' and the universal would be 'flower'. We determine rose under the general concept of flower. The reverse of the determining judgment is the reflecting. Reflecting is the task of marking the universal in the particular. For example, a rose leads us to the concept of 'flower'. It is our cognitive power of forming or denoting higher concepts from the things we know.

Arendt's conception of thinking as a necessary quality for making judgments is rooted in Kant's maxims of common human understanding, "1. To think for oneself; 2. To think in the position of everyone else; 3. Always to think in accord with oneself. The first is the maxim of the **unprejudiced** way of thinking, the second of the **broad-minded** way, the third that of the **consistent** way" (*Power of Judgment* 174). One way to understand Kant's maxims of common human understanding is to consider them in conjunction with the categorical imperative in the sense that the categorical imperative refers to moral duties under universal laws.[58] As the categorical imperative is concerned with actions, the maxims of common human understanding deal with thinking that informs our actions. In the *Third Critique*, Kant explains the specifics of each maxim:

> The first is the maxim of a reason that is never **passive**. The tendency toward the latter, hence toward heteronomy of reason, is called **prejudice**; and the greatest prejudice of all is that of representing reason as if it were not subject to the rules of nature on which the understanding grounds it by means of its own essential law: i.e., **superstition.** Liberation from superstition is called **enlightenment** […] As far as the second maxim of the way of thinking is concerned, […] the issue here is not the faculty of cognition, but the **way of thinking** needed to make a purposive use of it, which, however small the scope and degree of a person's natural endowment may be, nevertheless reveals a man of a **broad-minded way of thinking** if he sets himself apart from the subjective private conditions of the judgment, within which so many others are as if bracketed, and reflects on his own judgment from a **universal stand-point** (which he can only determine by putting himself into the stand- point of others). The third maxim, namely that of the **consistent** way of thinking, is the most difficult to achieve, and can only by achieved through the combination of the first two and

[58] See Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785).

> after frequent observance of them has made them automatic. One can say that the first of these maxims is that maxim of the understanding, the second that of the power of judgment, the third that of reason. (*Power of Judgment* 174-5)

Returning to Arendt's assertion that it is not the thought but thinking[59] itself that is dangerous under totalitarian regimes, Kant's maxims of common human understanding undermine the totalitarian monopoly on thoughts. The first maxim clearly renounces imitation of thought, which is an essential demand of totalitarianism; in these regimes, the citizens are required to imitate the will of the state which is embodied by its leader. This maxim specifically addresses how one can distance themselves from dogmatic thinking. The second maxim is threatening to totalitarianism in that it asks for the capacity to think about and think through other modes of thinking as well as how one's understanding informs or is informed universally. To some degree, this maxim requires an understanding of others' aesthetic experiences and how those experiences fit with their way of thinking. The third maxim is self-reflective insofar as it not only asks to think in a consistent manner but also gets at asking if one's thinking is compatible with how they act in the world. These maxims as a whole, ultimately, counter totalitarianism's control of thought because they explain a process which makes imitation impossible and make possible the examination of the ideas with which we think and ideas we think about.

Knowing the difference between the ideas with which we think and about which we think is a crucial distinction that goes back to Arendt's distinction between ideology and idea, where ideology is abstracted from its idea to the point of difficulty discerning the link between idea and the ideology. What lies between thinking with and thinking about as well as

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[59] Although Arendt was a student of Heidegger, she certainly did not follow him in her concept of thinking. For Heidegger thinking is akin to an appreciation of being in the world and it occurs when one is ready to receive it. Of course, Heidegger refrains from referring to spirit in his philosophical work, but what he calls thinking participates in Hegelian spirit.

ideology and idea is experience, more specifically, what lies between these categories that might be forgotten and could, in fact, mediate and reconcile them is a consideration of aesthetic experiences. Ideological frameworks and ideas we think with can be equated in that they provide a set of guidelines dictating the course of things. However, solely relying on frameworks that explain the course of things neglects individual as well as universal experiences that are manifestations of how ideas actually work in the world. One of the examples that Arendt provides in order to explain the failing of ideologies in observing how ideas function in the world has to do with race and racism, where racism is an ideology that can explain historical movements but does not take into consideration how race, the idea, functions in the world. However, it is not sufficient to simply observe how ideas work in the world and impact people; observation should lead to reflection since reflection – or more accurately reflective judgment – allows for an epistemological understanding of an observable event.[60] Arendt's example can be taken further to say that racism is an ideology that can explain historical, political, and institutional inequities but does not necessarily allow for thinking about how these inequities impact people's lives. In a way, not reconciling ideology and idea – what we think with and what we think about – can lead to situations of complicity in that there is an acceptance of an ideological system as matter of fact and a belief that the persecution of some and the triumph of others is a necessary part of natural and historical processes.

There are very few events in our immediate history that have made us question the severe possibilities of our ideological systems, the Holocaust being undoubtedly the most shocking event of the 20th century. The shocking part of the Holocaust, however, was not that man was capable of such atrocities. What was shocking was the uncertainty of a world after

[60] Another way of thinking about the importance of reflective judgment is to view it as a process through which we can place individual, observable, events into a larger system.

the Holocaust: how does one act, how does one think, when the extermination camps are no longer an open secret but part of a global discourse? To what does one turn when previous ways of being are no longer possible? Do we follow world leaders or turn to religion or put our trust in philosophy even though they all have failed to provide any sensible explanation or sense of security? Arendt is quick to point out that in situations like this, there is a tendency to turn against "rational discourse" which is in itself problematic:

> We are only too familiar with the recurring outbursts of passionate exasperation with reason, thought, and rational discourse which are the natural reactions of men who know from their own experiences that thought and reality have parted company, that reality has become opaque for the light of thought, and that thought, no longer bound to incident as the circle remains bound to its focus, is liable either to become altogether meaningless or to rehash old verities which have lost all concrete relevance. (*Between Past and Future* 6)

Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought, first published in 1961, gathers together essays by Arendt that aim at addressing precisely how we can exist after a catastrophe such as Holocaust and before an uncertain future. In these essays, Arendt is critical of tradition, politics, and philosophy as points of reconciliation between thought and reality since they could not prevent such catastrophic events in the first place and are, thus, not applicable to the imagining of any future:

> Without testament or […] without tradition – which selects and names, which hands down and preserves, which indicated where the treasures are and what their worth is – there seems to be no willed continuity in time and, hence, humanly speaking, neither past nor future, only sempiternal change of the world and the biological cycle of living creatures in it. Thus the treasure was lost not because of historical circumstances and the adversity of reality but because no tradition had foreseen its

> appearance or its reality, because no testament had willed it for the future. (*Between Past and Future* 5-6)

Arendt's suggestion of no tradition predicting an event like the Holocaust, however, ignores that the Holocaust was possible because of an established ideological system that had been in practice decades prior to when the first brick of a gas chamber was laid. Thus, it is not that tradition did not foresee the reality of the Holocaust but that reflecting on the past brings about a confrontation that reveals the logical processes that made the Holocaust possible; processes that even those who were shocked by the crimes against humanity invested in and followed. In this moment that Arendt calls 'between past and future', what one is confronted with is the realization of misapprehending the content of ideological systems, which very aptly brings about a sense of distrust in any future ideology. The predicament of this moment is, ultimately, a distrust in our own judgment and thinking: how do we know that which we follow – whom we follow – is morally good? Arendt, of course, tells us that in this moment we must think because no system or rational discourse will save us. In these moments, she calls for thinking – a thinking that is not only concerned with metaphysics or higher truths but also an ability to think through and reflect on our aesthetic experiences as a model for our reason.

Arendt's proposal for such thinking negates the notion of genius since genius is concerned with higher truths or, rather, is the only figure who has access to these higher truths which he can, then, bring down to ordinary men. The break from tradition, from believing in certain higher truths, should, then, be a break from genius or, at least, a return to the ambivalent genius. However, genius continues as the figure who will usher us into the future.

Conclusion

Beyond Genius

"Surrounded by its choral rings,
Still far away. It was like
A new knowledge of reality."
-Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself, Wallace Stevens

Tuesday, November 8th, 2016 was a transformative day for the United States of America. It was transformative for many reasons, depending on who was narrating the transformation. Donald Trump, for all intents and purposes, is a genius[61] since his election altered the actions of a whole country. Trump presents us with a natural progression of genius; he is unlearned but also uninspired, he is without craftsmanship and thought, he is transformative but is, ultimately, a perpetual husk. He embodies a notion of genius so abstracted from its origins, a notion of genius so stripped of its inherent ambivalence and so singularized that it no longer represents anything but a site on which transformation can be imagined.

In a tweet published in January 2018, Trump boasts about being a "stable genius," a tweet which was much mocked, "I went from VERY successful businessman, to top T.V. Star to President of the United States (on my first try). I think that would qualify as not smart, but genius....and a very stable genius at that!" After the release of the tweet, many mocked it and pointed to Trump's instability as the source of humor that negates Trump's claims of being a "stable genius". The irony here, however, is that instability is a fundamental quality of genius. Genius' volatile quality is forgotten when it becomes human and embodied. The pre-Islamic djinn, for example, was seen as menacing because its ambivalent and volatile quality could not render a firm judgment. As Joseph Henninger states, "They are helpful or harmful according to whim, depending on whether they are friendly or hostile to a person,

[61] I would like to add that genius and intelligence are unrelated.

and this is why people are reluctant to have any dealings with them" (*Magic and Divination in Early Islam* 35). The advantage of returning ambivalence to genius and thinking about it as unstable is the access it provides for reflection and thinking through the ideas genius presents. In other words, the ambivalent genius, because it escapes any normative category, is handled with apprehension and a reflective sense of judgment. This is not to say that only the ambivalent genius escapes normative categories; as a matter in fact, genius in all its forms does so. The post-eighteenth century genius also must not belong to any normative category or be easily comprehensible because he is a transformative figure, an original who is disruptive in its originality. However, as Penelope Murray points out, "By the end of the eighteenth century the genius, and in particular the artistic genius, comes to be thought of as the highest human type, replacing such earlier types as the hero, the saint, the *uomo universale* and so on" (*Genius* 2). In this sense, genius, to some degree, becomes totalitarian or, rather, *is* totalitarian in that it demands praise and following without any real check on its powers.

Since genius in this sense is totalitarian, then in a totalitarian state where there is no distinction between public and private life and the state has control of every production – cultural, political, material, etc. – within it, the leader is the genius. To a certain extent, the conception of genius as an embodiment of genius – championed by Herder – and the Hegelian world-historical man are conflated in the totalitarian state and embodied by its leader. In *Philosophy of History*, Hegel explains that any understanding of history depends on following moments of rupture where certain men – the world-historical man, the genius – have acted on behalf of world spirit in the continuation of history, "But to *explain* History is to depict the passions of mankind, the genius, the active powers, that play their part on the great stage; and the providentially determined process which these exhibit, constitutes what is generally called the 'plan' of Providence" (*Philosophy of History* 13).

Hegel, then, goes on to explain that the world-historical man can be identified through his actions:

> It was not, then, his private gain merely, but an unconscious impulse that occasioned the accomplishment of that for which the time was ripe. Such are all great historical men – whose own particular aims involve those large issues which are the will of the World-Spirits […] World-historical men – the Heroes of an epoch – must, therefore, be recognized as its clear-sighted ones; *their* deeds, *their* words are the best of that time. Great men have formed purposes to satisfy themselves, not others. (*Philosophy of History* 30)

In Hegelian terms, Hitler, for example, is a world-historical man as well as a genius even though Hitler as a world-historical man is a contended issue due to a moral conundrum surrounding his program and the subsequent view of him as a personification of evil. However, according to Hegel's general philosophy of history, he would qualify as a world-historical figure in that he achieved forming a state based on the interests of a German identity. Moreover, the destructive expanse of his program in order to preserve a national ethos cannot be escaped to this day and has shaped the progression of history. Hegelian thought clearly influenced the mythos of Nazism. For example, Hitler, during the early years of the Reich, distinguished between the "Fuhrer's perishable body and the body of the eternal Fuhrer" (*The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* 15).[62] As the world-historical man's perishable body acts on behalf of an eternal spirit, Hitler explained himself as an eternal spirit that broke

[62] Eric Michaud's *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (2004) traces the use of art in the Third Reich as foundational to the ideological framework of Nazism that leads to the Holocaust. He positions Hitler as an artist-dictator (similar to the genius-world historical man) whose "legitimation of power through a divine right was replaces by legitimation through artistic genius" (1). Regarding art, specifically paintings of German landscapes favored by the Third Reich, he points out that the role of art was "to establish just such 'a national type of imagination,' one that was able to ensure the formation of a judgment that was at once aesthetic, ethical, and practical" (114).

through into historical reality. The man of genius, as the chosen one, also functions as a perishable body of an eternal spirit.

The fall of Third Reich brings forth the dilemma with following the world-historical man, with imitating the genius. Hitler, by all means, was a world-historical man and a genius. He was transformative and he appeared when the time was, as Hegel says, ripe. Thus, according to philosophical accounts of genius and the world-historical man, his actions, words, and thoughts should be followed, imitated, and replicated throughout the state. It is only in retrospect that it becomes absolutely clear that the actions, words, and thoughts that are being imitated have dire moral consequences. Hannah Arendt, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, notes that "Eichmann feels guilty before God, not before the law […] What he had done was a crime only in retrospect, and he had always been a law-abiding citizen, because Hitler's orders, which he had certainly executed to the best of his ability, had possessed 'the force of law' in the Third Reich" (21-4). Although Eichmann expresses a distinction between feeling guilty before god and not the law, which might suggest a slight sense of moral responsibility, pointing out that he is a criminal only in retrospect is crucial to understanding the danger of accepting genius at face value. Eichmann, during his trials taking place sixteen years after the Nuremberg trials, was relentless in his belief that he did not commit the crimes with which he was charged. He bases this belief on the assertion that he did not order the killing of the Jewish people nor did he kill with his own hands. Essentially, he claimed that because he did not commit the act of murder himself, he cannot be charged for the crime. As an instrument of the state and an imitator of Hitler's will, Eichmann believed he was following the right orders no matter what their worldly consequences. However, there is reprieve from a retrospective clarity of judgment, one that involves a rejection of claims to eternal spirit by the man of genius or the world-historical man. It requires a rejection of genius who possesses an internalized knowledge and a return to reflective judgment on the individual level. It

requires acting and thinking from aesthetic experiences instead of beginning with metaphysical truths.

The end of the eighteenth century saw a move towards a singular and internalized genius instead of an ambivalent and external one, the consequence of which is the misinterpretation of genius. This misinterpretation arises when the man of genius becomes the subject of inquiry and interest instead of his work. As a result, when asked to follow the example of genius, one mistakenly imitates the man instead of considering the ideas present in his work. The nineteenth century succeeded in solidifying genius as worthy of imitation because they have access to a knowledge that transcends the knowledge possessed by ordinary men. In this sense, ordinary men are asked trust genius, that imitating genius will not lead them down a morally offensive path. This creates an incredible risk that frames this dissertation: how do we know what which we follow is morally good?

To return back to the beginning, how do we then define genius? Do we just simply assign that category to those whom we do not properly comprehend? If so, then, how can we be confident in the moral quality of genius? For the past few centuries, the moniker of genius has been assigned to a few chosen men who have access to certain higher truths and, thus, can guide the rest of humanity through history. In doing so, genius has come to mean an outstanding individual in whom we can have trust but what is lost is an individual responsibility of reflecting upon the ideas that genius propagates. The problem with genius, which began to be codified late eighteenth century, is that it no longer allows for any interrogation of its content.

The shift from the work of genius to the man of genius can lead to an absolute disregard of the work and an unreflective embrace of charismatic men; thus, creating the cult of personality. The logical conclusion of genius is a husk but not in the vein of the ancients who depicted poets as vessels inspired by the muses. In the case of the ancients, the poets as

vessels still conveyed ideas finessed into tales that could be read for a certain moral understanding of the world. The logical conclusion of genius is Donald Trump. He has shown, through the election as well as through his life as a cultural figure, inconsistencies in his ideas that discredit some of the ideologies he is selling. He himself has admitted to the public that he ran for the presidency because of his personality carries a certain cachet. He is the logical conclusion of genius because as soon as the notion of genius began to privilege the man over his work, the process of abstracting the man from his work began making it possible for a genius to exist in absence of any product, much less a product that has merit.

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@realDonaldTrump. "I went from VERY successful businessman, to top T.V. Star to President of the United States (on my first try). I think that would qualify as not smart, but genius....and a very stable genius at that." Twitter, 6 Jan. 2018, 5:30 a.m., twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/Status/949619270631256064.

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