REMEMBERING D'ANNUNZIO AND *IL DUCE*:
MODERN PROPHECY IN ITALY

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What is the relation among the dead, their prophets, and genealogies of Italian fascism? The question presents itself most forcefully in the works of Gabriele D'Annunzio, particularly his 1921 convalescent narrative, *Notturmo*. There D'Annunzio, immobilized and temporally blind after a bi-plane crash during the First World War, imagines himself as an embalmed Egyptian scribe who inhabits the world of both the living and the dead. Such an interest on his part in the art of body preservation will come as little surprise to any reader of D'Annunzio or any visitor to the Vittoriale: its built structure resembles nothing so much as a tomb-in-waiting. That D'Annunzio employs a similar rhetoric in *Notturmo* would have been nothing new for a poet so obsessed with investigating the border between life and death.¹ Of course fascism, too, had its cult of the dead. With its worship of the supreme gesture and its obsessive interest in cemeteries and their entombed heroes, Italian fascism traffics in a rhetoric of sacrifice and death; its heroes immortalized in elaborate rituals and their burial often joined to a public spectacle linking their death to the fortunes of fascism.² Despite the energy with which the state memorialized its heroes, the regime never seriously considered embalming as a memorial practice: the costs were prohibitive and, what's more, only one individual merited eternal remembrance.

That person was, of course, Mussolini, who most certainly would have been memorialized appropriately after his death considering the success with which he was monumentalized during his life. As Sergio Luzzatto describes it, fascism accepted a strict corporal imperative vis-à-vis *il Duce*:

Al pari di altri sistemi totalitari del Novecento, il fascismo ha variamente elaborato il sogno di garantire al corpo carismatico la durabilità dell'istituzione ch'egli incarnava e in qualche modo esauriva: la durabilità di un monumento, cioè di un oggetto inanimato, indistinguibile per natura da un corpo imbalsamato (Luzzatto 24).

¹See for example Spackman, Mazza 11-22 and Gibellini 198-213.

²See for example Valli and Gentile, *Il littorio* 57-92.

[Much like other totalitarian systems of the twentieth century, fascism elaborated in a variety of ways the dream of guaranteeing to [Mussolini's] charismatic body the durability of the institution that he both embodied and in some ways exhausted. It was the durability of a monument, that is, of an inanimate object, indistinguishable in its nature from an embalmed body.]

As suggestive as Luzzatto's analysis of institutional commemoration is, he leaves unexamined the connections that run between a semantics of remembrance and genealogies of fascism, of which the D'Annunzian strand stands out: those pages of *Notturmo* devoted not only to the dismembered bodies of fallen comrades, but also to the attempts to re-member D'Annunzio's own body with the assistance of the dead. In this sense *Notturmo* circumscribes a new symbolic politics in which the dead not only sanction the re-membering of the crowd and of *il Comandante*, as D'Annunzio was known to many of his followers, but also to the crowds that gathered to hear him before and after the war. In the following pages I want to argue that fascism draws on D'Annunzio's new symbolic politics in the way it perceives the relation between *il Duce*, the masses, and the dead. I hope to draw parallels between *Notturmo's* corporal politics and fascist cultural practices by examining their respective uses of the dead for creating subjects.³ A sustained examination of *Notturmo* and a number of Mussolini's speeches and biographies from the period immediately following the March on Rome show the bodies of both D'Annunzio and Mussolini changing thanks to their close relation to the patria, marking them fundamentally as modern prophets. In each instance a convalescence spells a closer proximity to the dead, which in turn leads to corporal and subjective transformation. Thus the stakes of the argument run not only to the kind of bodies fascism privileges—the hardened bodies of fascist subjects are by now commonplace—but also to the forms of memory and re-membering (the pun will have been anticipated) and the ways fascism links prophecy to corporal transformation. How does a rhetoric of remembered bodies in *Notturmo* alter our perspectives on fascism?

³Two seminal commentaries often elided on *Notturmo*, the symbolic relation of D'Annunzio's memoir to the dead. For Renato Barilli, the connections running from D'Annunzio to fascism are located principally in D'Annunzio's occupation of Fiume; *Notturmo* merely announcing the future aesthetic republic of Fiume. For Paolo Valesio, *Notturmo* is "the most beautiful long prose poem in Italian literature after Boccaccio's *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*" (xviii). Thus his emphasis falls on marking the work's indebtedness both to Baudelaire and Ungaretti (117-118).

My discussion begins with the events surrounding D'Annunzio's writing of *Notturmo*—namely the war wounds that immobilized him in 1915—and then moves to a closer reading of the dismembering and remembering of the deceased in the narrative. I insist that the text enacts a ritualized dismemberment both of D'Annunzio's dead comrades as well as his own body through its telegraphic economy so as to prepare D'Annunzio and his listeners for body reconstruction that takes place when *il Comandante* addresses the crowd. *Notturmo* specifically makes the changes in D'Annunzio's perception of his body relevant to changes in the political body of Italy via a rhetoric of sacrifice. Interestingly, *Notturmo* links this body refashioning to an Oedipal drama in which D'Annunzio's mother sanctions the reconfiguration of D'Annunzio and his listeners as metallized bodies, who now hear the message of sacrifice the *patria* is sending. In the final section I examine fascist uses of the dead, its project for constructing the new fascist man, and the debt fascism owes *Notturmo*'s procedures for body and subject refashioning. Such a debt, I argue, suggests future lines of inquiry concerning D'Annunzio's influence on fascist symbolic practices.

The Genesis of Notturmo

Notturmo owes much of its narrative force to World War I, to D'Annunzio's military service, and to the memoir's curious publishing history. When war broke out in France in 1915 (Italy, we recall, joined the Allies a year after the outbreak of war), D'Annunzio was residing in France, avoiding his many creditors. Agitating almost immediately for Italian intervention—principally through his weekly dispatches in *Corriere della sera*—D'Annunzio effectively legitimated the interventionist position among the formerly ambivalent.⁴ Returning to Italy in the spring of 1915, he gave a series of speeches (later collected and published the same year no less in *La più grande Italia*). There he put forward the case for war to thousands of rapt listeners, utilizing apocalyptic imagery in nationalist-charged language. In these important speeches, D'Annunzio rehearsed themes and rhetoric that would figure so prominently in the discourses he gave over the course of the Fiume occupation from 1919 to 1921.⁵

⁴For his efforts, the French government in a neat *quid pro quo* suspended the seizure of D'Annunzio's French residence and the seizure of his belongings owing to his amassed debts. See Turchetta vii-xvi and De Felice vii-xxx.

⁵In my forthcoming *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi* I examine the nexus of apocalypse and media in D'Annunzio's Fiume discourses.

Not only did D'Annunzio speak in favour of the war, but he fought in it and flew over it as well. When Italy declared war in the summer of 1915, the Italian state happily enrolled the fifty-two years old D'Annunzio in the infantry, hoping perhaps for star-like propaganda turns for the troops that would soon become a Hollywood fixture (Guglielmo Marconi would perform much the same service for Italy during the First World War). D'Annunzio quickly volunteered, however, for the nascent Italian air force and was soon flying missions, one of which included the later leaflet dropping campaign over Vienna in 1918. On one such mission on 16 January 1916, D'Annunzio was forced to make an emergency landing at sea. The subject of much speculation ever since—some obviously promoted by D'Annunzio himself—what seems clear is that he struck his right temple on the airplane's machine gun in the crash, losing his right eye and nearly his left as well. Ordered by his doctors to remain in bed immobilized for an indeterminate period of time (three months by D'Annunzio's count), he began one of the oddest scenes of convalescence in Italian literature, all of which he describes in painstaking detail in *Notturmo*. Soon after, and in suspiciously quick fashion, his eyesight improved sufficiently for him to begin flying once more.

The publishing success of the memoir—it ranks as one of D'Annunzio's best selling works of the period—underscores how well he used his convalescence to highlight a newly designed system of writing. As D'Annunzio relates it, he was temporarily blind after the crash and yet desperate to write, despite (or on account of) his doctor's entreaties to avoid any direct contact with light. Traditional writing seemed out of the question, though other choices were available to him. He could have opted for the typewriter, which a half-blind Nietzsche had used.⁶ Yet D'Annunzio never seriously considered the possibility. Dictation was another and indeed D'Annunzio will employ stenography regularly during the occupation of Fiume to compose his speeches. But in *Notturmo* he cannot overcome “the ancient repugnance for dictation” [4; “l'antica repugnanza alla dettatura”]. Finally he opts for a writing system that resembles the ancient inscriptions with which the Sibyl, the Greek prophetess inspired by Apollo,

⁶See Kittler 183-208. Most accounts of the Nietzschean anxiety of influence on D'Annunzio continue to focus on the superman and the ideological assumptions that underpin both writers, especially in D'Annunzio's *Trionfo della morte*. A study of D'Annunzio's engagement with the writing machines of his day might well point to a more encompassing material affinity between their two modes of writing.

wrote her predictions on leaves.⁷ Similarly, the immobilized D'Annunzio writes on a "short piece of paper that contains one line," using "the thumb and middle finger of his right hand, balanced on the border of the paper" in order to guide the pen [3; "sopra una stretta lista di carta che contiene una riga"; "il pollice e il medio della mano destra, poggiati su gli orli della lista"]. Sensing "the edge of the paper below with the upper phalanx of the right little finger" allows him to maintain the straightness of the lines written [3; "l'ultima falange del mignolo destro l'orlo di sotto"].

Writing this way bears directly on *Notturmo's* fragmented style. First, the necessity of containing his thoughts on smaller and shorter slips of paper forces D'Annunzio to adopt a telegraphic economy when writing that little resembles his earlier prose. Shorter sentences and the pronounced lack of dependent clauses in favour of a simpler subject-predicate structure are the principal effects of the Sibylline writing system. Second, such an economy of writing leads in turn a dismembering style of description—what critics of D'Annunzio refer obliquely to as the poet's "nocturnal phase"—which, as I will soon show, dovetails with the descriptions of vigils D'Annunzio holds over the bodies of his recently deceased co-pilots.⁸ Finally, writing fragments allows D'Annunzio to organize them in such a way as to construct chronoschisms, those chronological misdirections that characterize much of the narrative both in *Notturmo* as well as the earlier *Leda senza cigno* and *Licenza*.⁹ On this note, D'Annunzio composed *Notturmo* over five different periods and not, as the text would have us believe, simply in the period immediately following his accident. Indeed,

⁷"There you will see the distracted prophetess/Who deep inside the rock foretells the fates/And commits words in writing to the leaves,/Sets them in order and puts them in her cave" (Virgil 70).

⁸For Turchetta such a phase is one of the most clamorous examples of literary blinders ever constructed. Too many critics take D'Annunzio at his word when he himself announces the hypothesis of a 'nocturnal D'Annunzio' (xvi-xix). As will soon become clear, I part ways with Turchetta's analysis, especially to the degree he lessens the significance of the dictation that underpins *Notturmo*.

⁹In her groundbreaking analysis, Ursula Heise defines chronoschisms as those moments when experiences of time compete and coexist in narratives. Although such features are typical of modern and postmodern literature, we do well, however, to mark their distinguishing features: "But the [Postmodernist] narrative technique differs from that of high-modernist and late-modernist novels in two fundamental respects: the differing accounts or flashbacks are not linked to the voice or mind of any narrator or character configured with a view toward psychological realism, and they tell event sequences in contradictory and mutually exclusive versions" (Heise, 53).

D'Annunzio furiously edited the manuscript in the period following his occupation of Fiume in 1921, heightening the apocalyptic tone of his observations by casting them as the product of the Sibylline system, as well as allowing him to adopt the prophetic persona of one who sees far into Italy's future. The collaboration of remembered bodies and apocalyptic imagery will anticipate a number of fascist ideas regarding the nature of the new fascist man himself.

Dispersed Connections

These then are the details surrounding *Notturmo's* publication. In the following section I want to set out how the memoir readies D'Annunzio for his transformation into a modern prophet. The process begins with the text's references to D'Annunzio's deathly resemblance to the war dead. The memoir does so by linking the biographic details I noted above, in particular his enforced immobility, to them. D'Annunzio is dead to the degree he feels "in his entire posture the rigidity of an Egyptian scribe sculpted in basalt" [3; "in tutta la mia attitudine la rigidità di uno scriba egizio scolpito nel basalte"]. Later he senses from his ankles to his neck "a wish for inertia" that renders him "immobile as if an embalmer had actually completed his work on me" [6; "una volontà d'inerzia"; "fisso come se veramente l'imbalsamatore avesse compiuta su me la sua opera"]. *Notturmo* takes up the image of embalment soon after and associates it with convalescence. His body itself dissolves thanks to the fluids his doctors inject into his eye: "with a needle the doctor injects sodium chloride into the sclera, he introduces water into the damaged eye where the coastal wave is clouded with crusted yellow" [76; "il dottore m'inietta con un ago il cloruro di sodio nella sclera, m'intromette l'acqua nell'occhio leso dove s'incupisce l'onda marina crestata di gialliccio"]. Consequently, D'Annunzio's body appears "as if at the onset of its dissolution. I am full of substances that disintegrate and of fermenting juices. I hear in myself the gurgles that I already heard late at night holding vigil over the corpses among the funerary garlands" [94; "come all'inizio del dissolvimento. Sono pieno di sostanze che si disgregano e di succhi che fermentono. Odo in me il gorgoglio che udii già nell'alta notte vegliando le salme tra le corone funerarie"]. Such images recall many others from D'Annunzio's catalogue of decadent tropes. Here as elsewhere the object is always the same: the references to decay make D'Annunzio's body more seductive.¹⁰ But for whom are these displays of dissolution intended?

The answer lies in the peculiarity of *Notturmo's* convalescence, which

¹⁰See Weir on the relation between seduction, modernity, and the decaying body.

combines immobility with temporary blindness so as to create the conditions for prophetic vision. And here D'Annunzio is not content to be merely blind; rather, he glosses blindness as a form of traumatic vision or, better, a traumatized eye that throws up images of the past and future. The result is a form of cinematic and kinetic subjectivity that doubles as prophetic vision. To see what I mean, consider the cinematic qualities of these image streams. D'Annunzio writes: "Beneath the bandage the back of my eye is enflamed like a summer noon at the Mouth of the Arno" [4; "Sotto la benda il fondo del mio occhio ferito fiammeggia come il meriggio estivo di Bocca d'Arno"]. Giving off heat and light, the eye relentlessly projects images from D'Annunzio's life, illuminating for his mind's eye the darker recesses of memory: "In my wounded eye my life's materials are reforged, [as is] the entire sum of my knowledge. It is inhabited by an evocative flame, and is continually tormented" [11; "Nel mio occhio piagato si rifucina tutta la materia della mia vita, tutta la somma della mia conoscenza. Esso è abitato da un fuoco evocatore, continuamente in travaglio"]. The images that move before him appear without warning and beyond any conscious intention in calling them forth.¹¹

I want to insist on the cinematic qualities of this particular trauma for two reasons. First, in most accounts of the period under discussion, attention continues to focus on the kinetic character of the modern subject, in which movement nourishes myths and narratives of agency. As helpful as these observations are for understanding modern subjectivity, *Notturmo's* perspective on immobility offers a different perspective. Precisely because he cannot move, D'Annunzio is subject to long sequences of images transmitted by the body. In *Notturmo's* corporal system of illumination that features the traumatically cinematic, a non-seeing eye throws up images of its own accord that keep D'Annunzio enthralled and motionless. Given D'Annunzio's immobility, he is subjected to these images over which he has little power. "Tonight," he writes, "the demon takes my burning eye in the palm of his hand and blows on it with the force of his swollen cheeks. All the images come into focus" [64; "Stanotte il dèmore prende il mio occhio acceso nella palma della mano e ci soffia sopra con la forze delle gonte gonfie. Tutte le immagini si affocano"]. Typically, the sequences of moving images from the war employ a cinematic form, in long tracking

¹¹Memories projected by a damaged eye recall the cinematic forms of perception that were a part of the period's perception of movement. Considering D'Annunzio's interest in film, notably the 1912 feature, *Cabiria*, depicting memories as images projected would not have been out of the ordinary for the period. See Chimirri 45-47.

shots that detail the most desperate moments of a series of battles of the First World War.

The switch to immobile projection in *Notturmo* is significant because in its reorganization of D'Annunzio's vision *Notturmo* will highlight different features of what he desires, in this instance movement in all its forms. Although we should not be hasty in thinking this together with what we know of fascist aesthetics, *Notturmo* makes of movement not only a fetish, but a metaphysical and aesthetic category around which a set of symbolic practices revolve.¹² I will have more to say about such connections shortly, but at this juncture, I want to argue simply that enforced immobility heightens the fantasy of mobility and its impact on agency in the memoir. This cinematic subject is the foundation upon which *Notturmo* constructs D'Annunzio as prophet.

Technological Subjects

To this juncture I have expressly linked D'Annunzio's broken body to *Notturmo's* elaboration of a prophetic persona. Yet, as became clear in the preceding section, a slip occurs in *Notturmo* between prophecy and D'Annunzio's technological make-over. Indeed, *Notturmo* repeatedly conflates the two in the above passages and elsewhere so that one might well argue that D'Annunzio's transformation is authorized not only by a deathly resemblance to the dead, but also by his resemblance to certain technological advances of the period, cinematic illumination in particular. But *Notturmo* invokes much more than cinema, utilizing changes on D'Annunzio's body as the symptomology of a new technological subject, one intimately linked with the formation of the crowd as an actor in Italian history. It does so by highlighting the acoustic porousness of D'Annunzio and later the masses themselves.

Notturmo first registers these corporal changes in the speech D'Annunzio gives in the Campidoglio on the eve of Italy's declaration of war in 1915. Half dead in D'Annunzio's words—"Nothing remains in me. I am like the demon of the uproar, I am the genius of the free people" [58; "Non v'è più nulla di me in me. Sono come il dèmone del tumulto, sono come il genio del popolo libero"]—he notes the physical changes he undergoes when speaking:

Parlo. Ogni mia parola rintrona sotto il mio cranio come ripercossa dal metallo concavo. Ogni soffio mi sforza il cerchio del petto. Ne soffro e sono altero che la mia gioia sia mista di patimento. È come il dolore di

¹²Schnapp, "Crash" 23-25.

una creazione, è come l'angoscia di una nascita (58).

[I speak. Each of my words reverberates in my cranium as if rebounded by the concave metal. Each breath strains the circle of my chest. I suffer and am proud that my joy is mixed with torment. It resembles the pain of a creation, it is like the anxiety of a birth.]

D'Annunzio speaks, but nowhere does *Notturmo* divulge the contents. Rather the emphasis here and elsewhere returns to the act of speaking and its role in generating a new body and with it a new subjectivity.¹³ As D'Annunzio goes on to describe it, the imagined body features principally a porousness: initially his own words penetrate his cranium, soon followed by the cries of the crowd. In the cacophony of voices that succeed his speech, D'Annunzio is "oppressed by a cry louder than any other. I lose myself in the pauses of my voice. It seems the commanding cry questions more than it speaks" [59; "sopraffatto da un grido più alto d'ogni altro, smarrisco nella pausa la mia voce. Sembra che l'imperioso grido domandi più che la parola"]. The acoustic horizon of such a body is wide indeed, as it registers and amplifies the sounds directed to it. Interestingly, the cacophony of voices shifts almost immediately, becoming the "new silence of the crowd," which D'Annunzio likens to "a vortex that attracts me and encircles me, like a tumult that sucks and destroys my life" [59; "il nuovo silenzio della folla"; "un vortice che m'attira e m'aggira, è come un gorgo che sugge e distrugge la mia vita"]. It is in this interplay between silence and D'Annunzio's words that *Notturmo* locates most forcefully crowd construction in acoustic terms.

Few have commented directly on the imagined features of D'Annunzio's transformed body as he speaks before the crowd, or for that matter the mechanism by which silence and discourse interact to generate the crowd; their attention is turned rather to the figuration of the crowd and the associations D'Annunzio draws between a sculptor's craft and generating a crowd.¹⁴ Yet, a sustained examination of *Notturmo's* figuration of D'Annunzio as prophet shows something unexpected—not only does

¹³Typical of D'Annunzio of course is the implicit misogyny associated with procreation. "Indeed, what Roger Williams calls 'the horror of life' is largely a horror of procreation, which inevitably entails the hatred of the woman who made procreation possible" (Weir xiv).

¹⁴The lone exception is Jeffrey Schnapp who insists on the quality of the silence imposed at Fiume (and by extension in *Notturmo*) as an "immobile gestuality, monumental and commemorative," which he affirms as the virile alternative to writing (Schnapp, "Le parole" 38).

D'Annunzio see cinematically, but he hears over great distance and across time. He does so thanks to a hybrid body that assumes the characteristics of some of the period's best known acoustic technology, in this instance those amplification and receiving devices (namely the telegraph and radio) that were altering the medial topography of the first quarter of the twentieth century.

In the above example, *Notturmo* metaphorically sets out a scene of transmission and reception in which a future formation of *patria* transmits its messages to D'Annunzio, who in turn will relay them to the crowd. Thus, "I hear the name of the Fatherland and a great shiver runs through me. I hear the name of the Fatherland again and the same shiver passes through all my marrow" [72; "odo il nome di Patria; e un gran brivido mi attraversa. Odo di nuovo il nome di Patria: e il medesimo brivido mi passa per tutte le midolle"]. D'Annunzio becomes a sensitive listening device that hears where others cannot. Such a susceptibility to a certain kind of message complements the cinematic vision I noted above, filling out D'Annunzio's prophetic persona. In ways familiar to readers of *Forse che sì forse che no*, D'Annunzio perceives the transformations occurring on his body as linked to larger historical changes in perception.

Mothers, Sons, and the Patria

We are now in a position to return to the question I posed earlier concerning the sanctioning of these corporal changes. Certainly the initial resemblance that *Notturmo* sets out between D'Annunzio and the dead allows him to speak in their name. Yet as we read further into the memoir, we find D'Annunzio haunted less by the dead than by his mother. Indeed, in the discursive relation the poet enjoys with his mother, *Notturmo* will locate the ultimate authorization for D'Annunzio's position as medium for a future *patria*. As often as D'Annunzio foregrounds her presence in *Notturmo*, readers continue to marginalize her importance when discussing *Notturmo*'s political vision. Such a lacuna is all the more curious since D'Annunzio dedicates his memoir to her—"I consecrate these pages written with blood to the love, to the pain, and to the death of my mother"—and repeatedly ventriloquizes her in the "Seconda Offerta" [1; "All'amore al dolore e alla morte di mia madre queste pagine scritte col sangue consacro"].

And so what is her role in *Notturmo*? Essentially, she provides a model for speaking in the name of and listening to the *patria*. Not surprisingly, the procedure begins much as it did with D'Annunzio's futural vision, namely with a trauma occasioned by war. Just as D'Annunzio is remembering "a horrible shaking that uprooted in me," which occurred during

one particularly violent encounter during the war, he suddenly perceives his mother inside him [74; “uno squasso atroce che sradica in me”]: “She was in me, inside me, in the period of struggle and passion. I carried her inside me, just as she carried me, living in her pulse and breath” [75; “Era in me, dentro me, nel tempo della lotta e della furia. La portavo dentro me, com’ella mi portò, vivente in polso e in respiro”]. Her effects are anything but deleterious to D’Annunzio’s martial spirit. Returning to battle, he discovers within himself a greater enthusiasm thanks to his mother’s bent “towards mutilation and death,” which she transmits to her son at birth [74; “alla mutilazione e alla morte”].

Of course mothers have since time immemorial instilled in their sons a love for the native land in the Oedipal drama played out across nations. But *Notturmo* adds a new twist to such moments when it specifically links a desire to defend the *patria* with a primary orality that mothers generate in their sons.¹⁵ Thus *Notturmo* is littered with countless references to his and her mouth: “And it seems to me that as I licked the tears I was doing so with the mouth of my mother, with that deformed mouth that lies heavy in me, that suffers in me” [84; “E mi sembra di lambirle con la bocca di mia madre, con quella bocca deformata che pesa in me, che soffre in me”]. He recalls those moments his mother read to him as a child: “From her mouth the sonnets of the *Vita Nuova* touch me deep inside just as they did when I read them as a sixteen-year old along the green embankment of the Affrico” [88; “[P]er la sua bocca i sonetti della *Vita Nuova* mi toccano a dentro come quando, a sedici anni, li leggevo lungo l’argine dell’Affrico erboso”]. Calling upon the mouth of the mother, especially that from which D’Annunzio first hears the words of Dante, serves two purposes: first it links motherhood to a nascent Italian identity via the mode of speaking and listening she instils in her son. A feedback loop results in which young D’Annunzio desires to hear Dante spoken by his mother, which later returns in *Notturmo* when his daughter reads back to him the sheets of paper on which he has written. In such a way D’Annunzio not only conflates Dante with the voice of his mother, but his own production as well since his daughter reads it back to him. In such a sequence D’Annunzio desires to hear from the mouth of his

¹⁵Renato Barilli senses the first half of the relation when apropos of D’Annunzio’s later output, he writes: “the Author arrived at a sort of society without fathers, as many writers linked to German Expressionism younger than he will want” [247; “Si può ben dire che in questa sua stagione avanzata l’Autore abbia raggiunto una sorta di storia senza padri, come vorranno scrittori di lui più giovani appartenenti all’atmosfera dell’Espressionismo tedesco”]

mother/daughter not simply his own words or the words of Dante, but in them the sounds of the *patria* spoken by his mother. Motherhood and poetry become the media by which the *patria* constructs an Italian identity given to sacrifice.

Notturmo shows D'Annunzio adopting a similar procedure when speaking to the crowd. Essentially he occupies the slot reserved for his mother in their interaction. Taking over her position, he instructs the masses in hearing and desiring to hear in his own words the message of the *patria*. To do so, they must practice silence: "Listen, listen. Grave things I have to tell you, things you do not know. Remain in silence. Listen to me and then everyone leap to your feet" [62; "Udite. Udite. Gravissime cose io vi dirò, da voi non conosciute. State in silenzio. Ascoltatemi. Poi balzarete in piedi, tutti"]. Hearing and not speaking, the crowd "no longer breathes. It listens and every syllable penetrates into the perforated bone of the cranium where it remains infixed" [62; "non respira più"; "ogni sillaba penetra nell'osso forato del cranio e ci resta infissa"]. Only after the syllables have been inscribed in silence does the crowd speak, and then their words are combined with movement: "The formidable mass of people is on their feet. The melted colossus is once again made human by its cry." [63; "La massa formidabile è in piedi. Il colosso fuso è di nuovo umanato dal suo urlo"]. In the combination of bodily movement, auditory capacity and nascent orality, D'Annunzio figures himself as the maternal instructor that puts the crowd in touch with the *patria*. It is the haunting of D'Annunzio's body by his mother that produces an eminently political body in the crowd based upon a primitive orality.

Given the power of motherhood in *Notturmo* for constructing a collective orality, we should not be surprised to find her also sanctioning a remembering of D'Annunzio's body. D'Annunzio's immobile body, which had formerly occupied the zone between the dead and the living, is now re-membered differently in its encounters with the masses. In place of mere limbs collected together, we have instead a new body that consists primarily of an ear and a mouth. Thus D'Annunzio's later musings on bodies transformed by their capacity for hearing the *patria*: "There is a convulsed and bloody body, and in that mangled throbbing flesh there is a vigilant ear, there is the apex of the soul that listens and gasps" [135; "C'è un corpo convulso e sanguinoso; e in tutto quello strazio palpitante c'è un orecchio vigile, c'è un apice d'anima che ascolta e anela"]. And later when speaking to a dead comrade: "My mother speaks to him through my mouth just as his mother did" [137; "Mia madre per la mia bocca gli parla come gli parlava sua madre"]. This makes sense to the degree *Notturmo* sees D'Annunzio as both the crowds' progenitor as well as its instructor in speaking togeth-

er. Indeed, *Notturmo* makes D'Annunzio's body into the principal vehicle by which other bodies are linked to the *patria*; its presence joins one body to another in the name of the *patria*.

Here then we have a confluence of factors that contribute to D'Annunzio's transformation into a prophet. First, D'Annunzio's nearness to the dead offers him a position from which he can speak for them. Second, the mode by which his hearing and vision approximate the period's technologies arms his words with an inevitability that will be useful in persuading the crowds to move towards the holocaustal fires set by the *patria*.¹⁶ Finally, the staging of the encounters with the crowd as moments in an Oedipal drama allows him to cast himself as the maternal origin of their speech.

Fascism and the Dead

How do we want to link *Notturmo*'s staging of prophecy with fascism's construction of the masses? For fascism of course, the process of generating the crowd is first and foremost a process of creating the fascist man. Such a project is accomplished both by Mussolini's words and the spectacles that accompany his discourse: the call and response of the crowds and the speaker and the symbols of Italian nationalism that together spell "a sacralization of politics in modern society" [Gentile, *Il culto* 269; "sacralizzazione della politica nella società moderna"]. Fascism's ultimate purpose was to complete what the Italian Risorgimento had left unfulfilled, namely how to make Italians. For such a project fascism mobilized culture: "Fascist culture must be the life and the expression of life; it must create a type of man, a new man, a whole man, the same man for the family, for society, and for the state" [Gentile, *Fascismo* 260; "la cultura fascista deve essere vita ed espressione di vita; deve creare un tipo di uomo, l'uomo nuovo, l'uomo intero: simile nella famiglia, nella società, nello Stato"]. Here the hundreds of thousands who had recently died and the million more that were wounded in the First World War provide fascism with something Risorgimento leaders and others had never had: models of sacrifice that could be drawn upon when devising an appropriate rhetoric and imagery for creating "l'uomo nuovo." Read in such a key, *Notturmo* and fascism are both products of a culture of death growing out of World War I; *Notturmo*'s obsession with the recent dead and their commemoration mirrors a tendency within fascism to exploit the dead in order to model future behaviour.

In the matter of the dead, fascism clearly realized the importance of properly commemorating them, be they the war dead or fascist martyrs

¹⁶See Serra 9-25.

(and of course conflating the two was essential to fascism's designs). Fascist cultural practices and built spaces — from the tomb of the unknown soldier at the Vittoriano to the cult of the “war dead” [*culto dei caduti*], to the exhibit of the Fascist Revolution in 1932 — evoke the dead both as examples of an *esprit de corps* and of the kind of sacrifices the *patria* requires of its subjects.¹⁷ At a minimum, then, fascism seems intent on making the dead relevant for creating the new fascist man.¹⁸

However, as our reading of *Notturmo* shows, a promiscuous relation between the living and the dead has consequences well beyond modeling sacrifice. In the interaction between the crowd and D'Annunzio, *Notturmo* inscribes the changes *il Comandante* undergoes within a narrative of corporal and subjective transformation brought on by the *patria*, which in turn creates the conditions for prophetic vision. Haunted by the dead, D'Annunzio listens acutely for the message the *patria* sends him; the body that results is outfitted with acute hearing and cinematic vision in order to listen and see temporally into the past and future. Not only a technological, but a political body emerges from the greater proximity of the dead. Is there anything remotely similar in fascism?

Fascism, too, had its mythical convalescence in Mussolini's wounding during the war that enables his contact with the dead. And here accounts of Mussolini's war wounds and subsequent convalescence follow *Notturmo*'s pattern, linking him deeply to his fallen comrades. Summarizing these accounts, Sergio Luzzatto notes how “Mussolini transformed his convalescence propagandistically into a descent into the realm of the dead; he wanted to treat his wounds as a gesture of pity towards the war dead so as finally to merit the eternal recognition of their mothers and widows. Mussolini knew therefore how to escape from the inferno of the Carso, having overcome the ultimate test of a blood offering” [4; “Mussolini ha trasformato la convalascenza in occasione propagandistica per una discesa nel regno dei morti: ha voluto curare le proprie piaghe come gesto di pietà

¹⁷Considering that Mussolini's speeches in the Piazza Venezia were staged not simply in front of the vast crowds, but also to the side of the Vittoriano's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the symbolic presence of the dead provides Mussolini with an imaginative address for the speeches themselves. Addressing the dead and the living in such a way brings them powerfully together, reinforcing the “transferral of the individual death, obscene and unspeakable to collective life” [Canal 660; “trasferimento della morte singola, oscena e indicibile alla vita collettiva”].

¹⁸Fascism also registered the importance of the dead in its “il culto dei caduti.” See in particular Gentile, *Il culto* 131-138 and Schnapp, “Epic Demonstrations” 10-11.

nei confronti dei caduti, fino a meritare ... l'eterna riconoscenza delle madri e delle vedove dei morti. Mussolini ha quindi saputo uscire dall'inferno del Carso avendo superato la prova supreme dell'offerta di sangue"]. The descent into the realm of the dead creates an intimacy between those who survive and those who do not that will form the basis of the solidarity linking war veterans to a vision of a greater Italy. Another way of saying this is simply that the distance between the dead and the living is less for those who have faced death. For Mussolini, the shortened distance will be figured more broadly, however, as the identity between fascism and the *patria*. Fascism, and only fascism, knows the intimate desires of the *patria*; the metonymy of the dead and the *patria* continually undergird its early attempts to speak for Italy itself.

Here Mussolini occupies a key position in fascism's attempt to speak for the *patria*. Having been near death, he sees more clearly the nature of future sacrifice; he can now prophesize a time when the dead and the living will march together under the banner of Italy. In this regard, Mussolini's discourse of 19 May 1918 is paradigmatic: "I no longer see banished to the distant future the coming day in which the banners of the wounded come before the ragged and glorious banners of the regiments. And gathered around the banners will be the veterans and the people. There will also be the long shadows of our dead, all of our dead, from those that fell in the Alps to those that sacrificed themselves beyond the Isonzo" [Simonini 137; "Non vedo più relegato nelle lontananze dell'avvenire il giorno in cui i gonfaloni dei mutilati precederanno le bandiere lacere e gloriose dei reggimenti. E attorno alle bandiere ci saranno i reduci e il popolo. Ci saranno anche le ombre grandi dei nostri morti, di tutti i nostri morti"]. Not only does Mussolini trace the realization of the *patria* as a moment of connection between the living and the dead, but he circumscribes mnemonic space for the war dead within the borders of "il popolo" itself. As that space expands to include the dead's recent sacrifice, the "popolo" will be transformed. Again and again fascist symbolic practices imagine scenarios in which a symbiosis between the dead and Mussolini is concretized so as to authorize his speaking for Italy.¹⁹

¹⁹Thus *Il Popolo dell'Italia* from 4 November 1924: "Fascism took power through the proxy and the procuration of the combatants, both living and dead, and wants to continue to govern in the name of this sublime investiture. Benito Mussolini is the man who restored the temple of profaned Italy" [Gentile, *Il culto* 73; "Il fascismo prese il potere per la delega e la procura dei combattenti, vivi e morti e vuole continuare a governare in nome di questa sublima investitura. Benito Mussolini è l'uomo, il quale [...] restaurò il tempio dell'Italia profonata"]

As time goes on, fascist communicative strategies will have less need of the dead as a medium for the *patria*, signalling the move to a more proper cult of *il Duce*. By means of modern media, fascism will soon present Mussolini as the embodiment of the *patria* itself. Simultaneously, Mussolini's body will grow in importance as the mnemonic space reserved for the dead diminishes. Speaking of the spectacularization of the body of *il Duce*, Mario Isnenghi hints at such a change when he speaks of the spectacularization of the body of *il Duce* and the extraordinary pervasiveness of this body-corpus that newspapers, cinema, radio, and the famous Mussolini "sayings" ["detti"] constructed. Taken together, these different formats construct "a communicative strategy of great capillarity," whose ultimate purpose is to provide "a metaphoric offering of his body-corpus, and the obligation to feed on and nourish oneself spiritually from him" [413; "una strategia comunicativa di grande capillarità"; "offerta metaforica del suo corpo-corpus, obbligo di cibarsi e nutrirsi spiritualmente di lui"]. Isnenghi links Mussolini to the Italian masses via a religious metaphor: Mussolini's body as the secular body of Christ. But beyond connections to the Christological sacred, the appearance of Mussolini across different media suggests something more radical: a communicative model in which the masses do not simply nourish themselves on the body of Mussolini, but more productively are asked to reassemble *il Duce* out of the various formats in which he appears. The suturing of image, sound, and print by the public constructs for *il Duce* an eminently technological body with great symbolic force. It is by identifying with this body that the masses will not only move closer to the *patria*, but also to fascism itself.

It is a sure testament to fascism's success in co-opting the dead for their nationalistic vision early on that the emphasis could shift more forcefully later to Mussolini's body as a locus of feeling for the *patria*. In such a scenario, Mussolini's body not only carries the memories of the dead, but becomes a surface for the projection of images associated with the *patria*. In this sense it makes sense to speak of a collaboration between sacralization and technologization when speaking of the years of consensus, roughly 1928 to 1938. What differs between these later moments and fascism's earlier use of the dead is little more than the kind of medium used to contact the *patria*.

The differences with *Notturmo* in this regard ought to be made clear. In *Notturmo* the technologization of D'Annunzio's body spells a closer relation to the *patria*; he does not simply embody the *patria*, but rather is brought in closer acoustic contact with the *patria* thanks to his relation to the dead; thus he prophesizes a future *patria*. Fascism too, at least in the

initial years, projects Mussolini in similar terms thanks to his proximity to the war dead. Fascist culture parts ways with *Notturmo*, however, when it later identifies Mussolini completely with the *patria* itself via his distribution via mass media. D'Annunzio's relation to the *patria* never reaches the kind of severe coupling we later have in fascism between the *patria* and *il Duce*. Once the installation of the *Duce* cult begins, the distance that allows Mussolini to speak for the dead and the *patria* gives way to another communicative strategy that will utilize the period's technology to lessen the distance considerably.

Be that as it may, in the years immediately following the March on Rome Mussolini remains a spokesman for the *patria*. In order to justify that status, fascist culture calls upon Mussolini's mother in order both to authorize Mussolini's contact with the *patria* and to model, in her relation to her son, the kind of subject relation fascism hoped to construct between subjects and the *patria* itself. Despite the enormous strides made over the last twenty years in examining the social and political space fascism dedicated to women, little work has been done on the uses to which fascist cultural practices put Mussolini's mother.²⁰ What we do know is that her figure, unlike Mussolini's wife and children, had enormous symbolic power for fascist culture.

Ella rappresenterà anche il legame con la cultura, con la conoscenza, con l'educazione. Infine la sua immagine sullo sfondo di quella del duce ridarà vita al simbolo fortissimo del rapporto madre/figlio, in una reinterpretazione adeguata alla esaltazione multipla della madrepatria delle madri dei morti e dei mutilati, del rapporto tra maternità e patriottismo femminile. La fedeltà alla memoria della madre diventerà anche il segno di un'altra fedeltà, giacchè nelle parole del duce, citate dal Beltramelli, 'rinnegare la Patria vuol dire rinnegare la madre' (Passerini 49).

[She will also represent the link to culture, to learning, and to education. Lastly, against the backdrop of the *Duce*, her image will give life to a powerful symbol of the relationship between mother and son, in a reinterpretation adequate to the multiple exaltation of the motherland of the mothers of the dead and wounded, and the relationship between maternity and a feminine form of patriotism. The faithfulness to the memory of the mother will also become the sign of another faithfulness, inasmuch as, in Mussolini's words cited by Beltramelli, "renouncing the Fatherland means renouncing one's mother."]

In a hierarchy of feeling, the memory of mother is the ultimate fount from which fascism will draw its hyper-nationalism. In the above passage this

²⁰See De Grazia.

occurs when fascism elides the differences between motherhood and the *patria*. The implicit result—as the passage makes evident—is the transformation of subjects into sons. The gendering of the fascist subject as masculine is no surprise, but to see the fascist subject as a son of Italy (and by metonymy of Mussolini's mother) is a descriptor most analyses overlook. Tracing the destiny of this rhetorical move within fascist cultural practices is well beyond the range of this paper, but within the scope of the metaphor which conceives the fascist subject as the son of a mother who animates the *patria*, a semantics develops that postulates Mussolini's mother (and by extension motherhood) as a model for the relation between subjects and *patria*.

At the same time, fascist biographies of Mussolini beginning with Sarfatti's *Dux* in 1925 emphasize the genetic inheritance she bequeaths to her son. It is Mussolini's mother, who transmits to her son "a difference transformed by him into a force of domination" [Passerini 50; "una differenza da lui trasformata in forza di dominio"]. This occurs thanks to a corporal resemblance between the two in which, as one biographer put it, "he suffered as did his mother from a nervous system that was always ready to break apart even though resilient" [Passerini 50; "e pur soffriva anche di lui, di quel sistema nervoso sempre pronto a spezzarsi eppur forte, come il suo proprio"]. To the degree, Mussolini shares a nervous system on the verge of a hysterical breakdown with his mother, these accounts concretize his body as one acutely sensitive to the demands the *patria* makes. The effect here, as for D'Annunzio, is to authorize a speaking for the *patria* that depends upon a ghostly resemblance between mother and son.

Media and Mediums

As this paper closes, I want to address myself to some of the larger implications that a reading of prophecy and body transformations in *Notturmo* occasions. As I pointed out in the introduction, the traditional view of the D'Annunzian legacy vis-à-vis fascism finds the poet elaborating symbolic practices that fascism will appropriate when enrolling the masses. Both will ask them to identify with a hyper Italian nationalism conveyed in recognizably religious forms. Beginning with Renzo De Felice, George Mosse and continuing today in the work of Emilio Gentile, discussions of D'Annunzio's occupation of Fiume (and by implication *Notturmo*) continue to linger over the twenty-month adventure as a sort of antechamber to fascist symbolic practices. The ceremonies, the flags, and above all the theatrical stagings of D'Annunzio's discourses work equally well for generating crowds in the principal piazza of Fiume or larger masses across Italy during fascism. Such a view of D'Annunzio's legacy, however, fails to consider for instance other avenues of influence beyond the stage directions

and models he provided at Fiume. One important implication of our reading of *Notturmo*, therefore, is the analogous symbolic uses to which both D'Annunzio and fascism put the dead, both in the roles they could play as models of sacrifice and as foils for the transformations they hoped to enact on their respective massed crowds.

Equally, the changes D'Annunzio marks while blind allow us to witness the rhetorical moves implicit in his becoming a prophet for the *patria*, steps that *il Duce* too will take. Crucial beyond the role of the dead is convalescence as a sign of proximity to the reign of the dead and then linking the dead to the *patria* via a defence of memory. Recognizing the important role the dead could play as a medium for the *patria*, fascism brandishes Mussolini's own convalescence for similar ends. Finally, *Notturmo's* enlistment of D'Annunzio's mother as transcendent model for a new form of subjectivity recalls as well the broader role of motherhood in fascism, not simply for the reproduction of the race "*razza*", but more intimately as the idealization of the *patria*/subject relation.

Finally, my reading suggests a different format of fascist bodies, one less given to Futurist metaphors of hardness than to the re-membering possibilities of the masses themselves. An examination of *Notturmo's* bodies suggests that we have much less to do with speed than with the reappearance of decadent motifs amidst the dead, whose purpose is to authorize a new relation between subjects and the *patria*. And indeed, examinations of futurism help little in understanding how fascism comes to generate a sense of sacrifice among those listening. *Notturmo* points us instead in the direction of technologically inflected prophecy when considering the advent of fascism and its capacity to reach the masses. Much more remains to be done in these areas, both in examinations of how fascist culture understood maternal orality and its relation to the fascist project, and in D'Annunzio's later attempts at imagining Italian identity precisely through corporal changes. We may find a striking symmetry in how both imaginatively work through their hoped-for changes to Italian subjects.

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