"'A fool, a fugitive or a hero'": The European Odyssey of Herbert L. Matthews, 1931-1945

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Abbreviations:

All documents from the Herbert L. Matthews Papers at the Rare Books and Manuscript Library at Columbia University appear in the following format:

Document Type; Date; Herbert L. Matthews (HLM) Papers; Series (S); Box (B); Folder (F); Rare Books and Manuscript Library (RBML), Columbia University (CU).

Introduction:

"Massawa is one of those places where a man has to be a fool, a fugitive or a hero to live. The papers this morning describe a great fire in Italy's fetid port which presumably has destroyed a good part of it. I can hardly imagine less of a loss, except for the human life involved. In fact, starting a fire is Massawa is my idea of a charitable deed. I would like to think of that ghastly place as wiped off the face of the earth and a new city risen from its ashes." Herbert L. Matthews, *Eyewitness to Abyssinia* (1937)[1]

Herbert L. Matthews, writing about a year and half after his arrival in Abyssinia in 1936 on an Italian army transport as foreign correspondent for *The New York Times*, would in the following ten years find himself a fool, a fugitive, and a hero. He would also watch first hand as a great fire spread from Ethiopia to the Mediterranean, Europe, and eventually the world. But the loss of the "human life involved" would reduce to ashes his very ability to conceive of any great fire as "charitable." A journalist steeped in, influenced by, and often present at the tumultuous frontlines of the cultural, intellectual, political, and military conflicts of the interwar period and Second World War, Matthews, like much of the Western world, underwent the sort of intellectual and political transformation that has shaped the order of that world ever since.

Matthews's description of Massawa bears a remarkable resemblance to what Italian historian Emilio Gentile would describe in 2003 as the "Heraclitean and Stoic myth of palingenesis by the great fire" in post-Risorgimento Italian nationalism, Futurism, and fascism.[2] Roger Griffin goes so far as to describe a palingenetic "rebirth myth," based on an active and violent process, as not just the "key definitional component of fascism, but the element that in the extreme conditions of inter-war Europe could endow some variants of nationalism and racism with extraordinary affective and destructive power." The ideological underpinnings of

[1] Herbert L Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia; with Marshal Badoglio's Forces in Addis Ababa* (London: M. Secker and Warburg, 1937), p. 25.
[2] Emilio Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), p. 58.

fascism, Griffin asserts, "'thrust towards a *new* type of society,'" or, more symbolically and as Matthews would have it, the destruction of the old and a new city risen from its ashes.[3]

Myth framed both how Matthews as a man understood his world and, especially, how as a journalist he communicated his understanding of that world. Drawn in the by the rhetoric and propaganda of a dynamic and vigorous Italy in the early 1930s, when he was based in what he saw as a politically decaying and corrupt Paris, Matthews found himself excited by and sympathetic to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. He communicated this sympathy in his dispatches and later writings using the diction and imagery of the epic poem, presenting the Italian conquerors as heroic heirs to the Roman Empire and in doing so (in a typical fascist contradiction) as introducing a new, modern era. In the Spanish Civil War, however, Matthews underwent a conversion. He found himself on the reverse end of the fascist guns and surrounded by inspiring idealists in the Spanish republicans, international brigades, and correspondents such as Ernest Hemingway, with whom he became good friends (and was, according Martha Gellhorn, the inspiration for Robert Jordan in Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*). His sympathy for Italian fascism after he witnessed its actualization in Spain was replaced by seething hatred of its work and a far stronger support for the republican cause as well as a belief in the ideal of liberty as capable of reinventing fallen man. Matthews presented much of his reporting on Spain in the form of a tragedy, and his conception of heroism began to shift to recognize the heroism of fighting and persisting in the face of insurmountable odds. Matthews then begrudgingly returned to Rome to report on Italian politics between 1939 and 1942, where he began to more systematically formulate a denunciation of fascism. His mythical model was

[3] Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: the sense of a beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 2 and Herbert L. Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia; with Marshal Badoglio's Forces in Addis Ababa* (London: M. Secker and Warburg, 1937), p. 25.

again tragedy, but now in the context of fascism's impossible claim to infallibility and its inevitable failure. Briefly imprisoned after Italy declared war on the United States, Matthews returned to New York before reporting in India between 1942 and 1943. He returned to Europe in July 1943 to cover the allied invasion of Italy and then war across Europe until its end. He turned his pen towards a defense of a liberalism couched in the recognition of human fallibility, conceived of in terms of a perpetual but heroic battle against fascism and totalitarianism.

As an American largely detached from the domestic origins of the regimes and ideologies he reported on, Matthews approached them, at least initially, on an especially intellectual plane. As such, an investigation of his first impressions and reception of these ideologies can provide valuable insight into the intellectual and psychological appeal of both democratic and non-democratic systems of thought during the period. But as a journalist, and a particularly intellectually curious and adventurous one at that, Matthews also came face to face with the impressive or horrific (and often both) actualization of the ideologies and regimes he reported on. In this sense, a study of Matthews equally provides insight into the intellectual impact of the experience of the conflicts of the interwar period and Second World War.

On the one hand, therefore, Matthews is useful for understanding interwar Europe, above all the attraction and influence of notions of mythical modernity in the European intellectual and political climate. This is most evident in his initial attraction to Italian fascism. A study of Matthews forces us to question firstly whether ideas such as those he expressed could be taken seriously only in political and intellectual conditions like those of the interwar period and secondly whether such modernist-fascist ideas could gain any mainstream traction in the West in the aftermath of their actualization in the Second World War.[4] Matthews helps us understand the

[4] Robert Paxton considers the development of fascism in the context of early 20th century Europe and argues that it offered an "alternative modernity." He seeks to provide a more flexible definition of fascism and questions views

intellectual character and propagation of Italian fascism and more specifically its relation to modernist thought and aesthetics, and especially fascism's use of history in the creation and propagation of a national myth.[5] His own use of, and early sympathy for, the myths and imagery of Italian fascism and its propaganda, such as myths of palingenesis and imperial Rome, explain in part how ideologies like fascism could often successfully present themselves as appealing in the political and intellectual environment of the interwar period. His case substantiates Griffin's assertion that modernism as an aesthetic and social movement informed fascist ideas and especially the affective power of fascism's cultural representations, as well as Gentile's claim that Italian nationalism's interaction with cultural and aesthetic movements such as Futurism provided much of Italian fascism's intellectual and cultural justifications and drove its psychological and intellectual appeal.[6] Fascism was for Matthews, as Griffin writes in another context, a "vehicle for realizing in the heady sense, not of impotently watching history unfold, but of actually 'making history' before a new horizon and a new sky."[7]

On the other hand, Matthews is equally useful for understanding the American experience of the interwar period and Second World War as well as the trajectory of American

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such as that of Renzo de Felice that fascism could only rise in the interwar period, an era fundamentally different from our present. See especially, Robert Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Knopf, 2004).

[5] Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s and best exemplified by the work of Renzo de Felice, a more distanced and less-moralized examination of Italian fascism gained traction over earlier, more politically and ideologically motivated scholarship. Criticized both by historians as well as the Italian press and public as being too sympathetic to or dismissive of fascism, de Felice's historical approach moved the debate forward significantly by showing a willingness to engage with and consider critically ideas, writing, and other cultural products previously dismissed as pure propaganda. Emilio Gentile, though for the most part more critical of Italian fascism than de Felice, operates very much in the tradition of de Felice and shows a similar willingness to engage with fascist ideas critically. Gentile has come under a more sophisticated version of the "too-sympathetic" attack more recently by R.J.B. Bosworth. Though Bosworth's caveats against normalizing our understanding of fascism are important to bear in mind, couching all analysis of fascist ideology and cultural representation as pure propaganda not to be taken seriously not only risks reducing the appeal of such ideology to an unintelligible aberration but also cannot explain Matthews's detached attraction to fascist ideas in any but the most over-simplified of terms. See especially, Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini.* 4 volumes. (Torino: Enaudi, 1965–97) and R.J.B. Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London: Arnold, 1998).

[6] Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*; Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*.

[7] Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism,* p. 4

liberalism in this crucial period. Herbert Matthews was first and foremost American, as was his primary audience. Unlike the vast majority of Americans, though, Matthews was present at the front lines of the cultural and political battles raging in Europe and Africa during the interwar period and Second World War. Matthews was undergoing a profound questioning about his and his country's place in the world as well as the state of its democracy. And the United States itself was undergoing the same kind of crisis writ large in the 1930s. In this sense, a study of Matthews's individual drama provides a way to examine the American drama of the period. Matthews's flirtation with the far right in interwar Europe stemmed in part from a disillusionment with the appeal of liberal democracy. In this he was not alone.[8]

Matthews began the 1930s identifying, rather loosely, as a "nationalist." This suited him well in Ethiopia, where he could defend the Italian invasion on the grounds of its being in the Italian national interest. But his nationalism began to fail him as he grew increasingly anti-fascist in Spain, where he came realize that he was, more than just a nationalist, a liberal. Nationalism provided no grounds for an adequate critique of Italian and German intervention in Spain, nor for calling on the United States and western democracies to intervene in favor of the Spanish republicans. Matthews's new position rested in part on an affinity between liberalism and intervention that gained traction during the lead up to and especially after the Second World

[8] On fascism in the inter-war United States, the work of John Diggins was especially pioneering. See John Diggins, "Flirtation with Fascism: American Pragmatic Liberals and Mussolini's Italy," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (January, 1966): 487-506; and Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972). Ira Katznelson confronts both the uncertainty over the future of American liberalism and the attractions of fascism in America during the 1930s in *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright, 2013), esp. pp. 7, 12, 17, 92-94, 111-114. David Roberts investigates the interaction between fascist states and liberal democracies in the interwar period in Chapter Six of his recent *Fascist Interactions* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016) and David Schmitz discusses the American reception of Italian fascism throughout *The United States and Fascist Italy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. also examines fascism in the United States in Section Five of Part One of his *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960). On the whole, however, the literature on Italian fascism itself better explains Matthews's initial attraction to fascism. The American context, though important, was very much in the background for a Matthews who by 1935 had lived in Europe for four years and had spent his adult life studying Europe.

War. His questioning of the limits of nationalism in an increasingly internationalized world became the essential American question of the period. Liberalism, and especially American liberalism, came increasingly to define itself as existing within an international context, before assuming an unprecedented role in international affairs in the wake of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War.[9]

This thesis is concerned with *how* Matthews understood, and above all presented, his experience and development. He was a newspaperman, and the vast majority of the documents he left behind were written with the express intention of being published. His dispatches, many of his notes and paraphernalia, and some of his letters and papers are available at the Columbia University archives. But, to some extent, he curated these sources. The dispatches seem to be all there, but there is only a small selection of his letters, each of which is relevant to how Matthews wanted to present himself. He was intensely preoccupied with his reputation, especially given the controversies that surrounded him throughout his career, and the signs of this are present in the archives. The evidence should therefore be read critically and not taken at face value as an exact expression of Matthews's thought. What Matthews actually thought, in any case, is in many

[9] As in the case of American fascism considered in Note 8, Matthews was generally thousands of miles away from where the fate of American foreign policy was decided. Nonetheless, Matthews's increasing opposition to US isolationism and championing of liberal interventionism make him emblematic, if well ahead of the curve, of the trajectory of US foreign relations during the 1930s and 1940s. On the topic of US foreign Relations in the interwar period and the Second War in general, see Kathleen Burk, "The Lineaments of Foreign Policy: The United States and a 'New World Order' 1919-39," *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (December, 1992): 377-391; Robert Dallek, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy 1932-45* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); and Akira Iriye, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, vol. 3 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Chapters 9 and 10 of Iriye's volume, "Totalitarianism and the Survival of Democracy" and "The Emergence of Geopolitics," are particularly relevant to the case of Matthews. On isolationism and interventionism in particular, see Selig Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1966) and Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America 1935-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966). On the origins of the Cold War, the work of John Lewis Gaddis provides perhaps the best introduction and analysis. See Gaddis, "The Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War." *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (July, 1983): 171-190; and Gaddis, *We Know Now: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

ways less important that how he chose to communicate it. He had a tendency to sensationalize but in doing so to elucidate events by drawing historical and literary allusions.

Matthews was accused of overt mythmaking throughout his career. The most notorious example of this, and the incident for which Matthews is best known, was his controversial interview in the Sierra Maestra mountains of Cuba with a Fidel Castro already-pronounced dead by dictator Fulgencio Batista. Writing at the height of the Cold War, Matthews reported that Castro, a communist, held "strong ideas of liberty, democracy, social justice, the need to restore the Constitution, to hold elections."[10] With Castro's subsequent rise to power and opposition to the United States, many pointed to Matthews as a culprit. At best, it was said, Matthews had been tricked by Castro; or, worse, he had sympathized with him. Although not concerned with Matthews's postwar career, this thesis largely coincides with Anthony De Palma's recent analysis of Matthews's mythmaking during the Cuban revolution. For De Palma, Matthews "did not set out to present a distorted picture of Castro." Rather, Matthews's main contribution was to the creation of the myth of Castro: "Castro's was a revolution of images and myths. His whole life is now more than a reality—it is a myth built on a foundation that Matthews laid."[11] Similarly, this thesis argues that in the interwar period and through the Second World War Matthews did not on the whole set out to distort the truth, but recognized the affective power of myth, learned the skills of mythmaking, and produced myths very much couched in the truth.

In the period this thesis does consider, controversy over Matthews's reporting followed him throughout, above all in Ethiopia and Spain. While the thesis is not particularly concerned with controversies over the factual accuracy of Matthews's reporting, which the historical record

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[10] Herbert L. Matthews, "Cuban Rebel Is Visited In Hideout," *The New York Times*, February 27, 1957, p. 1.
[11] Anthony De Palma, *The Man who Invented Fidel: Cuba, Castro, and Herbert L. Matthews of the New York Times* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), p. 282. For those interested in Matthews's role in Cuba, De Palma's account is the authoritative account.

in general settles in his favor, it does deal extensively with the one episode from the interwar period in which his reporting did seem to spill over into overt mythmaking: the end of the Spanish Civil War. But in doing so, this thesis seeks to qualify Adam Hochschild's recent assertion that Matthews fell into unreasoned partisan fabrication, by examining this period in the context of Matthews's appreciation of myth and his understanding of the Spanish conflict.[12] More immediately, though, the consideration of Matthews's use of myth in this thesis examines how his classical reference points and the form of his narratives, as much as their content, reveal his influences and agenda. More than that, Matthews's changing use of literary and mythical models also reveals his developing conception of the role of myth, which shifted from being a way to dramatize and systematize his experiences, first in Ethiopia and then in Spain, to a way to confront the human capacity for depravity and destruction, and finally to re-orient humankind toward its equally human capacity for cooperation in the form of liberalism and internationalism.

Matthews recognized, with increasing sophistication, what might be called a heroic impulse inherent in human kind. There was an innate urge, he thought, in all men to consider or want to consider themselves as in some way living or acting a heightened experience. And this urge fed on and clung to everything from architecture to speeches and outright warfare. But Matthews also came to recognize an equally human capacity for destruction and for deriving satisfaction from it as intimately related to the heroic impulse. Matthews's sense of this impulse explains, among other things, his initial sympathy for an Italian fascism whose rhetoric, propaganda, and actions allowed him to conceive of himself as living like the heroes he had spent his life reading about. Matthews felt this impulse satisfied in Abyssinia, in Spain, and during the Second World War. But, witnessing the horrifying destruction its manifestations had

[12] Adam Hochschild, *Spain in our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).

wrought through fascism in Spain and across Europe in the Second World War made Matthews intent to contain the impulse and conceive of a liberalism that could channel it to nobler ends.

For this to work, Matthews came to recognize that liberalism, just like fascism, needed a myth. The liberalism of the past, he believed, could by the end of the Second World War no longer provide the inspiration it needed to maintain itself. Liberalism, in short, had undergone a sort of existential crisis. This crisis, as Matthews knew all too well, was at least in part responsible for the catastrophic rise of non-liberal dictatorships in the interwar period. Italian fascism, among other things, claimed to be creating a new Italian man and provided an all-encompassing ethical system in the form of an infallible sate. This, Matthews believed was the major source of its downfall, given the limits of human nature, but it was also part of its appeal. Matthews realized that he needed to reinvigorate and imbue liberalism with a similar inspirational and affective power and that this could be done through myth. But, in order for the myth to avoid the extremes and failure of fascism, it had to rest on human fallibility, whilst at the same time channeling the heroic impulse. Matthews's project in *The Education of a Correspondent* (1946) is thus to create a myth for liberalism – one that recognizes human fallibility and the limits of human nature, but uses this very recognition as the basis of its invigorating power. Heroism could no longer consist of an individual's exploits on the battlefields or the seeming transcendence of human nature, but rather a far more demanding (and mature) recognition of human limits and a defense of liberalism on those grounds.

Matthews came to recognize in his work as a journalist the unstable grounds on which truth rested. Experience provided the material for something close to objective truth – one could see something and tell what happened without (consciously) lying. But how people experienced the world was in turn influenced by ideology and myth. Added to this was a competition among

journalists and newspapers for a monopoly over truth and editing, as well as uncritical readers who wanted to hear what they believed. But, apart from his foray into overt mythmaking during the last weeks of the Spanish Civil War, Matthews seems to have refrained from exploiting the unstable basis on which truth rested and committed himself to presenting the world as he saw it, i.e. as necessarily shaped by his views and reference points at the time. Truth – what was experienced – in this sense came to include at least to some degree *how* it was experienced for Matthews. But what matters most for the purposes of this thesis is not whether what Matthews saw was "real," but the varying forms in which he communicated what he saw and how in different stages of his development he thereby integrated his experiences into a more encompassing view of the events he witnessed and the world he lived in. The truth, then, for Matthews became *his* truth; the experience of the period, *his* experience.

Nonetheless, his experiences were emblematic of an entire American generation, whose views of the world he influenced through his articles and books. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to chart the impact Matthews's writings had in the United States and throughout Europe, but it perhaps suffices to say that he wrote for the *New York Times*. The experience of the interwar period and Second World War for millions of readers in America was filtered through the writings of men and women like Matthews. In Columbia University's copy of *The Education of a Correspondent*, when Matthews refers to a troop ship he was on, someone has scribbled "Same ship!" What Matthews's writings by the end of the Second World War offered, for everyone from those who took Rome with him to those nestled in their New York City apartments, was a sense of participation in the process of an American, and an America, finding itself in a far wider world.

Chapter I: Paris

Herbert L. Matthews was born in New York City on January 10, 1900 and grew up there. His father, Samuel Matthews worked in the garment industry and was successful enough to provide a comfortable upbringing for Herbert in their home on Riverside Drive. The Matthews family had emigrated from the European territory claimed by both Russia and Poland to New York in the mid-nineteenth century, changing its name to Matthews and, as Andrew De Palma puts it, "all but abandoning its Jewish roots." His mother passed away during the influenza outbreak in 1918. He associated his interest in and love for music with his mother and "his profound grief at her early death prevented him from ever touching a piano again."[1]

Another lasting and formative motherly influence came in the form of a gift when he was nine years old: a copy of Richard Harding Davis's novel *Soldiers of Fortune*, inscribed by his mother and preserved in Matthews's papers at Columbia University.[2] *Soldiers of Fortune* is a fictionalized embellishment of Harding Davis's experiences as a war correspondent during the Spanish-American War in Cuba. It chronicles the sensationalized adventures of a hyper-masculine American who defends an American-owned mining company in a fictional Latin American nation. Though a writer of fiction and plays, Harding Davis was best known for his journalism and war correspondence. He was young Matthews's hero. Attacked repeatedly as "yellow journalism," Harding Davis's reporting was embellished, romantic, sensationalizing, and exceedingly popular. His coverage of President Roosevelt and the Rough Riders in the Spanish American War is the major source of much of their fame and legendary status.

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[1] Anthony De Palma, *The Man who Invented Fidel: Cuba, Castro, and Herbert L. Matthews of the New York Times* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), p. 46

[2] Inscribed copy of *Soldiers of Fortune*; 1909; HLM Papers; SV, B36, F3; RBML, CU.

Matthews enlisted in the United States Army in 1918 to fight in the First World War. As he would later put it in *The Education of a Correspondent* (1946): "I had responded to the common emotions of unthinking patriotism, fanned by anti-German propaganda which I swallowed whole." Propaganda, anti-German and otherwise, would go on to fan Matthews's sympathies and stimulate his imagination throughout his career. In the case of World War I, accompanying the propaganda was "an intense urge to seek what is bombastically called glory, to fulfill all youthful dreams, to emulate in some modest way the heroes of old that I had been reading about all my life, to win the respect of others." Matthews arrived in France after hostilities had ceased, leaving him with a virgin desire to taste battle.[3]

On his victorious but for him not-especially-triumphant return to the United States, Matthews enrolled at Columbia University, where he studied Romance Languages and Literature, learning the languages that would make his later reporting possible. He was studious and developed an especially strong interest in Italian literature, especially that of Dante, as well as Italian history and thought. Self-described as a "bookish man by nature," he later reflected on his time in college as "as much an escape from life as a preparation for it."[4] Upon graduation, tempted by a future in the academy but retaining his desire for adventure, he responded to an advertisement to work at the *New York Times*. He spent three "miserable years" in the publishing department at the *Times*. Reflecting on these years in 1946, he later recognized his "always, more or less unconsciously, striving to get beyond the easy, level shore and climb the storm-covered mountains where life is truly lived and where our struggling world makes its history. In that I was only responding to a natural urge, of course."[5] This "urge," romantic and modernist in the

[3] Herbert L. Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1946), p. 6
[4] Matthews, *Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 3, 13
[5] Matthews, *Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 4, 5

sense Griffin refers to, resembles remarkably Griffin's articulation of the inter-war conception of fascism as a "vehicle for realizing the heady sense, not of impotently watching history unfold, but of actually 'making history' before a new horizon and a new sky."[6]

Matthews returned to Columbia to pursue graduate study in Romance Languages and Literature, and worked part-time at the *Times* as he studied until 1925, when he departed on a fellowship to spend a year in Rome and France. He showed limited interest in politics, for example paying little attention to the Matteotti affair. Rather, he spent his time "studying—of all things!—Dante and medieval history and philosophy."[7] On his return to New York in 1926 he contacted his friend Arthur Hays Sulzberger at the *Times*, who would later be publisher from 1935 to 1961. Matthews got a job in the news department and "began a forceful education in the things that were really happening in the world."[8] In 1929, Alfred Ochs, publisher of the *Times* and Sulzberger's father-in-law, selected Matthews to represent the *Times* trip to East Asia.[9] This taste of travel and foreign correspondence evidently made him eager for more.

Matthews departed for Paris in November 1931, where he would be based until September 1935, and began his immersion in European politics and culture. Covering French politics, he found a democracy in decay, plagued by economic and budgetary difficulties, lack of unity and political interest among the people, and deceitful politicians. In his April 22, 1932 *Times* article "France is Unmoved as Election Nears," for example, he pointed to an "amazing lack of interest" in politics. He concluded, disillusioned, that "the world is not logical these days. Men everywhere are swayed by fears which have turned their emotions inward to the primitive

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[6] Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: the sense of a beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 4
[7] Matthews, *Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 13, 14
[8] Matthews, *Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 14, 15
[9] Matthews, *Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 15, 16

necessity of supporting life and property above everything, in fact, almost exclusively."[10] French democracy seemed to Matthews particularly ill-suited to dealing with this malaise.

In December 1932, Matthews returned briefly to Rome, where *Il Decennale*, the celebration of the ten-year anniversary of Italian fascism, was still in progress. The full force of the Italian state's propaganda machine was oriented at projecting Italian unity, success, and ambition.[11] The state of Italian politics stood in sharp contrast for Matthews to the disarray of French politics. Where in Paris there was individualism and apathy, the "most striking phenomenon in Italy now is the solidarity of the country behind Mussolini." Italy, he wrote in 1932, "is in fact better off economically and politically than any other country in the world. It is as if the Italians were uniting against a common enemy in the form of the world crisis." He concluded that, even if fascism were not the only solution, liberalism, or at least liberalism in its post-World War I form no longer seemed equipped to manage the present and future demands of a modern state, or at any rate a modern Italian one: "Even if fascism ultimately disappears, something more closely in touch with the present situation must succeed it."[12] This is not to say that Matthews was a fascist, as he would often be labeled during his later reporting. Fascism was simply well-suited to the Italian case, especially relative to the economic fallout and apathetic individualism he saw in France.

Matthews's travel between Paris and Rome in this period heightened his sense of the contrast between them. These years, mostly spent in Paris, but with occasional trips to Italy, formed a montage of impressions between the decaying underbelly of Parisian politics and the

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[10] Herbert L. Matthews, "France is Unmoved as Election Nears," *The New York Times*, April 22, 1932, p. 60.
[11] Atonio Morena describes the *Decennale* as an "exercise in self-representation that looked to the future and aspired to renew the vitality of the fascist movement." Antonio Morena, *Mussolini's Decennale: Aura and Mythmaking in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2016), p. 5.
[12] Herbert L. Matthews, "Mussolini Shows New Confidence," *The New York Times*, December 23, 1932, p. 37.

vigorous projections of the Duce's new Roman Empire. In Paris, he later explained, was to be found "the sad story of a rapid budgetary collapse, only thinly veiled by the deliberate and shameful efforts of French politicians to disguise the facts" and a "seething rottenness under the thin crust of respectability."[13] His occasional trips to what he saw as an organized and forward-looking Rome only strengthened this impression.

But in Paris was also to be found the capital of modernist culture and art, perhaps past its peak when Matthews was there, but nonetheless of great interest and influence to a man so interested in literature and art. Indeed, terms like montage would likely not have been foreign to Matthews, who reported extensively on the Parisian cinema. Of the many films he reviewed while in Paris, discussion of his comments on two in particular bear relevance to understanding his interests and character. In 1932, he considered *Les Croix de Bois* "France's greatest war film, if not the best film of any kind the country had produced," revealing his romantic sympathy for soldiers and warfare.[14] And, later in 1932, he showed special interest in G.W. Pabst's *L'Atlantide*, a film about dreams, the allure and power of myth, and the desert. He explained that "the story is a mixture of dream and reality—the ever seductive tale of the lost Atlantis, for which men will search as long as the world lasts."[15] His interest in the arts, at times, seemed to outweigh his interest in politics. But at other times they merged.

Matthews revealed his knack for writing, his burgeoning interest in politics, and his recognition of the power of myth and history in shaping and heightening present experience in a curious article from February 1935. In "Napoleon's Two Great Arches of Triumph: Victories Celebrated Were Transient but the Monumental Center of Paris Keeps Vivid the Memory of the

[13] Herbert L. Matthews, *Education of a Correspondent* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1946), p. 19
[14] Herbert L. Matthews, "The Screen in Paris," *The New York Times*, April 17, 1932, p. 160.
[15] Herbert L. Matthews, "On the French Screen," *The New York Times*, August 7, 1932, p. 113.

Emperor's Glories," the ghost of Napoleon appears on the Parisian boulevards and appreciates with Matthews the obscuring and glorifying power of the city's monuments. His motivation for writing the piece was the renovation by an American of the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel, which was intended primarily to celebrate the victory at Austerlitz. Matthews points out that "even the inscriptions along the tympans are gilded so that they can again be easily read—in spite of everything." He notes that "not one of those statements" inscribed on the arch, "was true for more than a few years." Nonetheless, and indeed regardless, "if the ghost of Napoleon, out for a stroll on a Winter night in the year 1933" looked out across Paris, "one could hardly blame him if some of his complacency were restored … wherever one looks the things that one sees recall that Emperor who had the Continent at his feet for a few glorious years." Matthews proceeds to enumerate how the streets and monuments of central Paris invoke memories of victories and glory, for example "that column in the Place Vendôme, modeled on Trajan's, made of the iron of melted cannons captured from Germans and Austrians, on top of which stands Napoleon himself, somewhat disguised as a Roman Emperor." The Champs-Élysées, above all, bears the "Napoleonic stamp so that those who walk or ride along it might owe him—though unconsciously—a debt of gratitude and the tribute of admiration." The transience of Napoleon's domination matters little in the company of these monuments, and French claims to glory and power gain a palpability despite their unstable foundations.

Matthews finished the piece with what is among the first uses of a technique he would use throughout his career in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes. Having pointed to the unstable base on which a myth rests – in this case explicitly – he affirms its ongoing relevance and power, in order to enhance the significance of the present: "On this Winter night, perhaps the ghost we are watching, in thinking of the great war which ended only a few years

ago, would think of that poilu [a French infantryman] who gave his life during the course of it, and so earned the right to share with Napoleon Bonaparte the glory of having led his country to victory."[16] Past and present, fact and myth, merge to grant the present a sense of heightened significance. Matthews's appreciation for the reflexivity of past and present allowed him conceive of the present as a moment in history, as capable of fitting into a narrative. Myth, a potent brew of history and literature, for Matthews structured humans' perceptions of the phenomena around them. And these phenomena, imbued with, say, images of French glory or Roman imperial legacies, in turn shaped the self-conceptions of those who walked by them each day. But myth would prove heady indeed for Matthews before long.

Matthews's time in Paris came to an end in 1935 when he asked to be assigned as a war correspondent to cover Italy's invasion of Abyssinia. Again, the contrast between France and Italy would go on to play a role in his formation of impressions and opinions. Unrest that repeatedly erupted into violence ruled France in August 1935, just before his departure for Rome. The titles of a few of his articles from this time convey the general atmosphere during his last weeks in Paris: "20 Injured in Riot in French Arsenal," "French Line Strike Holds 1,000 Abroad," "France is Disturbed by Political Foes," and "Lebrun Appeals for Public Order."[17] The situation descended, and with it Matthew's opinion of the state of affairs in France. He left for Abyssinia via Rome in September 1935, grasping the long-awaited opportunity to "climb the storm-covered mountains where life is truly lived and where our struggling world makes its history."[18]

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[16] Herbert L. Matthews, "Napoleon's Two Great Arches of Triumph," *The New York Times*, February 5, 1933, p. 120.
[17] Herbert L. Matthews, "20 Injured in Riot in French Arsenal," *The New York Times*, August 7, 1935, p. 5; "French Line Strike Holds 1,000 Abroad," *The New York Times*, August 8, 1935, pp. 1 and 5; "France Disturbed by Political Foes," *The New York Times*, August 11, 1935, p. 55; "Lebrun Appeals for Public Order," *The New York Times*, August 12, 1935, p. 5.
[18] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 4, 5

Chapter II: Abyssinia

"There has been nothing like the Ethiopian Campaign from the journalistic point of view since the days of Richard Harding Davis" Matthews wrote in *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, which was published shortly after his assignment as a war correspondent with the Italian forces in Ethiopia.[1] He had followed the path of his hero, Harding Davis, and he was quick to see himself in the company of heroes. Matthews's dispatches from Abyssinia, preserved in their original form in his papers at Columbia, and his description of these dispatches and other stories in *Eyewitness*, present the Italian invasion in the language and imagery of an epic. Matthews's time in Ethiopia, as apparent in his use of epic as well as modernist-fascist diction and imagery, offered to him, more than just the romance of adventure, a way of escaping of the decay he saw in Paris and achieving the sort of transcendent mytho-historical experience he had long been seeking. That much of his description of these experiences resembles so closely fascist rhetoric, imagery, and propaganda, attests to his having been influenced by fascism's illusions, and to the appeal of such rhetoric and propaganda in the Ethiopian and European context.

Matthews described the Italian soldiers and workers as heroes exhibiting impressive strength and perseverance, and, above all, as doing so in unity, characteristics he attributed to their development and training under Fascism. As in his visits to Rome from Paris, he saw in the Italians a vigor and unity lacking in democracies and attributable to Mussolini. On board a troop ship, the *Gange*, and on the way to Ethiopia, he reported that the "Italian has that mystic adoration for the Duce, which has never existed for a leader in the United States since Washington." He found the Italian soldier to be "fighting for Mussolini as much as he is fighting for King and country. No European army has gone to war with such worship in their hearts for

[1] Herbert L. Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia; with Marshal Badoglio's Forces in Addis Ababa* (London: M. Secker and Warburg, 1937), p. 35

one man since the days when the French followed Napoleon."[2] A few weeks later, Matthews reported that the vigor and patriotism was not limited to Italian youth when he described the return of a 61-year old private who had fought in the Italian defeat in Abyssinia 40 years before: "Lieut. Roncaglia marched with Gavinna Division into Adowa three weeks ago, a living symbol of a new, more powerful Italy."[3] This enthusiasm for the Italian soldier-hero was not limited to Matthews's first weeks in Ethiopia. Months later, in January 1936, he pointed out that "nothing ever seems to be done to entertain the soldiers." Whereas "doughboys and Tommies would get into all sorts of mischief just to let off steam, the Italian soldier calls upon some inner philosophical reserve, and manages to behave himself very well."[4]

Matthews veneration and heroification of the Italian soldier and fascist man is perhaps most evident in his discussion of the army's road builders. "The work had to be done by Italians under conditions that would be unbelievable if there were not thousands of witnesses," he put it in an early dispatch from Massawa. These "participants of that truly epic struggle" accomplished "their tasks in the astounding heat of 160 degrees. This was not guesswork. Actual counts of 72 degrees centigrade were recorded on accurate thermometers."[5] This is impossible, as the highest temperature ever recorded is 56.7 Celsius – apparently the Italian thermometers were as embellishing as their politicians. There is nothing overtly political about expressing admiration for the physical feats of these men. But admiration became political when the heroism of the road builders became the foundation of a new Roman Empire: they performed "a task which no

[2] Dispatch; October, 1935; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F2; RBML, CU.
[3] Special Correspondence Dispatch; Oct. 29, 1935; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F3; RBML, CU.
[4] Special Correspondence Dispatch; Jan. 4, 1936; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F4; RBML, CU.
[5] Dispatch; Oct. 1935; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F2; RBML, CU.

other army in the world could have accomplished. History was repeating itself, and once again Romans were carrying their highways into a far corner of the world."[6]

And with their roads, these modern Romans brought "civilization." Matthews's first chapter in *Eyewitness* is titled "Farewell to Civilization." He at one point calls the Ethiopians "pure savages, with a vicious lust for blood, for burning and pillage—not to revenge their conquered country, but to gratify their personal desires."[7] But he wrote this description in the context of the rioting and looting in Addis Ababa in the days before the Italian victory. At other points, he described the Ethiopians as noble and courageous warriors, and in general his descriptions are more respectful, if never sufficiently so. At times, he presented the Italians as liberators, citing in the typical shorthand of his dispatches "visible conversational evidence extwo important provinces tigre dankalia that native population either frankly welcomes Italian intervention or accepts as much lesser of two evils."[8] Events like this mesh with Matthews's narrative of a Roman conquest of the barbarians and an army bringing civilization to the frontier.

The landscape of Ethiopia provided Matthews with a striking, exotic, and potentially deadly (and therefore ideal) setting for his epic to unfold. Matthews recounts how he struggled to describe "in plain language for matter-of-fact people" sights that "seemed unbelievable" and "vistas of beauty that brought a queer feeling inside of me and thrill that almost made me tremble."[9] The so-called "*Val d'Inferno,*" was a region whose effect, as he put in one dispatch, "is one of horrormingled fascination at its extraordinary beauty."[10] As he later wrote in *Eyewitness*, "if there ever was literal hell on earth prehistoric times must been here." This is what

[6] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 289
[7] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 305
[8] Dispatch; 1935; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F2; RBML, CU.
[9] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 36
[10] Dispatch; 1935; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F2; RBML, CU.

the Italians were up against: "The Italians, indeed, had to fight nature, as well as the Abyssinians."[11] Having marched through the Valley of the Inferno, Matthews came in contact with the divine when an officer "fished out a huge thermos, and sure enough, there was the beer with heavenly cubes of ice floating on the top. I knew then what it was the gods called nectar."[12] The fascist machine provided further cause for dramatization. Describing a plane ride near the end of the war, he invoked Futurist poetry and painting, and above all the *Aeropittura* in vogue in Italian futurist painting during the 1930s. In fact, an exhibition of *Aeropittura* was on display in Rome as part of the *Decennale* during his visit there in December 1932.[13] "I stood on the open grill of the cockpit, through which it seemed hard to believe I could not fall into those perpendicular depths," he explained in *Eyewitness*. "Ordinarily heights make me dizzy, but then I was only exhilarated, and overwhelmed with astonishment at that spectacular terrain below me."[14]

Matthew's conception of the Abyssinian invasion as an epic was in one sense apolitical but in another profoundly political. On the one hand, Matthews's epic diction and imagery stems from a non-political sense of adventure. He was intensely excited by all that surrounded him. He seemed to be stepping into one of his beloved films, in a desert like that of *L'Atlantide*, enjoying the experience of chasing after a myth, accompanied as his surroundings were at times of peak poignancy by a soundtrack: "music had an extraordinary effect there—deeply nostalgic, inexpressibly poignant. It created a world of its own as we leaned silently over the mess table while the open flaps of the tent carried our eyes out into the immense void below us, and the

[11] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 191
[12] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 85
[13] Morena, *Mussolini's Decennale*, p. 25
[14] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 281. Notable examples of *Aeropittura* completed before Matthews went to Ethiopia include much of the work of Giugliemo Sansoni, known as Tato.

countless tropical stars above."[15] On the other hand, Matthews's epic references also serve to magnify his mytho-historical narrative of Roman conquest. He describes how, one night,

A sense of the timelessness of what I saw came over me. The eternal solider, and the eternal camp came over me. Caesar's legions had made just such marches in conquering Gaul, and set up just such camps with sentry fires gleaming around them. There was the same moon, the same urge to conquest, the same thrill of adventure—life and death and history in the making, whether it be De Bello Gallico, or just a hasty narrative for one day's newspaper, that is read and thrown away.[16]

Time and space open up as present and past, myth and reality, fuse together, invoking again what Griffin calls the "revolutionary experience of standing on the edge of history and proactively changing its course, freed from the constraints of 'normal' time and 'conventional' morality."[17]

Matthew's imagery and allusion affirm his reception and presentation of his experiences in an epic form. The presentation of the Italian soldiers as heroes continues, as does its debt to classical references. Matthews's description of an Italian stealth attack at night, for example, invokes Odysseus and Diomedes' nighttime raid in Book X of the Iliad. Just as Homer compares Odysseus and Diomedes to lions, Matthews depicts the Italians as accomplishing their task "with catlike precision."[18] Fate "steps in" to aid the Italians as well as Matthews throughout his accounts, especially in *Eyewitness*. The references tend to be slight, but they assign a curious divine, more fate-driving than -driven, nature-altering power to the Italians. For example, Matthews notes how in one instance, "The Italians having won the battle, the rain stopped."[19] The campaign was not without its pathetic fallacies. Matthews describes an eclipse in a dispatch from January 1936: "slowly the mist lifted, and as it did, the shadow moved away from the face of the moon. By midnight sky and earth were cleared, and the full moon, directly overhead,

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[15] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 53
[16] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 122
[17] Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, p. 4
[18] Dispatch; Feb. 26-27, 1936; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F2; RBML, CU.
[19] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 227

poured down its light on Asmara, making the white roofs appear covered with snow."[20] The eclipse imagery returned in his descriptions of the Italians' taking of Addis Ababa, both in his dispatch at the time and later in *Eyewitness*. He describes in the dispatch the "joy oversweeping rigid ranks standing attention for that ceremony was final outward symbol of new roman empire after smany centuries of eclipse."[21] For Matthews, the coming of the Italians, like the eclipse, signaled a re-birth and purification of Ethiopia, along with the re-birth of the Roman Empire and the epic poems and adventure stories he had spent his life reading.

The epic language and narrative reaches its climax, as might be expected, when the Italian army marches into and takes Addis Ababa. Matthews described the occupation as a "triumphal march in truest sense word."[22] Here was the culmination of Matthews's journey in Abyssinia, the end of a campaign which he called a "great human drama." The march, as Matthews put it in *Eyewitness*, "was one of the great moments of modern history, and it lacked no genuine element of drama and colour. The setting was an imperial capital in ruins—buildings still burning, the stinking dead still lying about the streets."[23] Just as in his description of Massawa on arriving in Abyssinia with which this thesis began, Matthews invokes the myth of palingenesis.[24] With the burning fall of Addis Ababa, a new colony and empire had begun – and with it, we might be tempted to believe from Matthews's description, a new, modern epoch.

In Abyssinia, Matthews also came to recognize the unstable basis on which international opinion on world affairs rested. This recognition, combined with the slow erosion of his faith in the possibility of a reporter communicating only objective fact, not tainted by ideology or

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[20] Special Correspondence Dispatch; Jan. 19, 1936; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F4; RBML, CU and Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 319
[21] Dispatch; May 12, 1936; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F2; RBML, CU and Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 319
[22] Dispatch; May, 1936; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F2; RBML, CU.
[23] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, pp. 316, 319
[24] See Introduction, pp. 1, 2

agenda, implicitly allowed more latitude in his reporting, though he did not exploit it in Ethiopia to the same extent he later would in Spain. In some sense, Matthews's use of myth is purposely sensationalizing. Conflicting reports, censorship, and editorial supervision led to confusion and competition for a monopoly on the truth between newspapers, correspondents, and editors. "Those of us on the spot, who were not blinded by British confidence, knew what was going to happen," he pointed out in *Eyewitness*, "but the editors were at least 3,000 miles away, and the result was a fiasco which journalism as a whole will shudder over as long as any of us are alive to tell the tale."[25] In a dispatch sent from Khartoum, free of Italian censorship, in February 1937, Matthews commented on his "profound impression of confusion in outside world over progress Italo-Ethiopian conflict." Italian censorship, he continued, "added to fact that Addis been directly contradicting everything contained in Badoglio daily communiques has evidently developed complete skepticism perplexity abroad as what to believe." Noting that in Khartoum it was "possible to write freely what situation is," Matthews stated that "Italy winning this war without slightest question."[26] Dispatches like this, as he would reflect in *Eyewitness*, led to his beginning to "acquire my reputation as an Italianophile who in all likelihood was being heavily paid by the Fascist Government for sending favourable news."[27] Preoccupied with his reputation throughout his career, Matthews took these accusations seriously.

The most striking and damning instance of conflicting reports came near the end of the Abyssinian campaign. From his camp on a high plateau, a major in the company Matthews was with "proved again his inexhaustible ingenuity by having his operators set up a radio receiver, and he soon had us tuned in with Rome, London, and Berlin. We felt like listeners in Mars

[25] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 15
[26] Dispatch; Feb. 27, 1936; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F2; RBML, CU.
[27] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 193

capturing the echoes of another world." The imagery here invokes the sort of tapping into a suprahuman and transcendent experience that, in the Italian case, was so often associated with machinery. From London there came an account of a battle that had just taken place: "We did some quick figuring. There was no doubt of it. The location of the fighting was exactly where we were, and without having the vaguest notion of it, there we sat, in the midst of a sanguinary battle." With experiences like this, Matthews's faith in international press and opinion was eroded. In order to garner the trust and readership he desired, Matthews would come to recognize that successful journalism demanded a basis in fact, but also required some embellishment to draw in readers, and to make them sympathetic. The manifestations of this recognition, though, would not prove all that important until his time in Spain. Of more immediate concern, Matthew's characterization of the broadcaster's "inexpressibly irritating" and "unctuous voice with its pseudo 'Oxford accent,' half-feminine, half-masculine" espouses a hyper-masculine fascist view, irritated by the decadent, feminine, and outdated English. "Poor England!"[28]

All of Matthews's dispatches from Ethiopia were censored by the Italian press bureau, other than a few from British Khartoum. The marks of the censors are apparent on most of his dispatches. For the most part, his statement in *Eyewitness* is borne out:

I was sending the truth to my paper, to the best of my knowledge, from beginning to end of that war. There were things I had to leave out, of course, but aside from the use of gas towards the end, which did not affect the final outcome there was nothing of prime importance that we had to leave out. There were normal military necessities—such as avoiding information of value to the enemy—which had to be observed, but I honestly belief that if the Italians had given us an absolutely free hand the picture of the war we would have given would not have different in any essential from the one published in the papers from day to day.[29]

Indeed, apart from a few omissions, the general sentiment of his dispatches continued in *Eyewitness*, where he had intellectual freedom to publish in America what he saw and believed.

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[28] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 292
[29] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, pp. 15, 16

Matthews's ruminations on photojournalism also suggest his growing recognition of the unstable and largely subjective grounds on which world opinion and journalistic "fact" rested. He explained that "a picture might only take a fiftieth of a second to take, but in all likelihood some twelve or more hours" of travel and other procedures. Pictures constituted an "imperishable historical record of the greatest national adventures since the World War."[30] But, as he later reflected in *Eyewitness*, photographs were often staged, and needed to be taken *cum grano salis* despite their association with reality. "Of the 'action' pictures which the world saw printed during the war," he claims, "I should not imagine more than one in a hundred actually represented the real thing." For example, "The best picture I got was a close up of an Askari taking a pot-shot at an Abyssinian. It was a fine, clear picture, but any photographer could have got any Askari to pose for him anywhere he pleased and get just as good a photo."[31]

Before attempting to synthesize Matthews's intellectual development during the period, a brief consideration of *how* he conducted his reporting will be useful, above all in reference to his later work, especially that in Spain. Matthews and other journalists took a number of smaller trips between the front and major cities in trucks and planes. But, compared to Matthews's later work, much of the reporting, at least of major battles, was done from afar and well behind the front lines. Matthews describes one such experience from a "post of observation": "the battle was far away, and did not seem at all real, whereas the rain was very wet indeed. Packard, Neil, Holme and myself looked at each other with a common thought. 'How about going back for a game of bridge?' said I." He goes on to describe how

We played bridge while men suffered horribly and died, but we had lots of historic precedents … French correspondent who resented our frivolity. He seemed to feel that if the soldiers suffered, we should suffer too, but he himself reduced the principle to the absurd by refusing to take

[30] Special Correspondence Dispatch; Dec. 10, 1935; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F3; RBML, CU.
[31] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, pp. 41, 42

shelter during a heavy shower … We didn't like him, and we were all for suggesting that he should go out and get himself shot just to be thoroughly logical.[32]

This example is by no means indicative of all of Matthews's reporting in Abyssinia. During the Battle of Ende Gorge, for example, he was caught in the thick of an almost fatal ambush on an Italian column advancing through and stuck in a gorge. But, his reporting as a whole was more distanced and directed by the Italians than it would later be, especially in Spain.

Neither was Matthews's experience in Abyssinia all unvarnished, epic glory. He did not turn to myth as an alternative to describing or heeding reality. Myth supplemented reality just as much as reality tempered myth. He cut his teeth in dangerous and difficult conditions in Ethiopia, for the most part, and maintained a commitment to reporting the truth *as he perceived and experienced it*. Matthews maintained a commitment to objectivity for just about all of his career, but his conception of objectivity was one that rested on inherently subjective grounds of experience as tainted, like the monuments of Paris, by ideology and agenda. He more than recognized the shadows and flickering of illusion and felt the impact of reality on a romanticizing imagination. From the recognition that Ethiopia and especially Massawa would not provide the oriental "spice" he had seen in the movies to the affirmation of an Italian soldier's statement that "'Battles in which you see things only occur in the movies,'" Matthews's experiences unsurprisingly tempered his more romanticized expectations of travel and war.[33] Before long his feet were firmly on the hot and often blood-stained ground. But he continued to walk in the direction of fascism, sympathetic to its project and attracted to some of its promises. Even in cases where he was more or less conscious of Italian propaganda, he was hesitant to

[32] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, pp. 215, 217
[33] Special Correspondence Dispatch; Nov. 25, 1935; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F3; RBML, CU.

expose them fully. Describing an exuberant Italian woman, who drove along the Suez Canal following the Italian army boats to celebrate their arrival and cheer them on, he writes how

Hundreds of times during the day the shout of 'Maria! Maria!' went up as she drove along beside us or went ahead and waited for us to catch up with her. There was an appeal in her enthusiasm and courage which went big with everyone aboard. I am inclined to believe in fairies, and it rather pained me later on, in Asmara, to be told by someone who claimed to know, that she was being paid by the Italian Consulate for the performance. I hope it was not true.[34]

Matthews's sympathies for the fascist project and its methods persisted despite the death and destruction he witnessed. He writes of a "curiously contagious" fatalism at work during the Ethiopian campaign and the battles he was more intimately involved in, above all the Battle of Ende Gorge. After the battle, he recalls "looking at [dead bodies] with indifference, as if I, who had undergone my baptism of fire the previous day, were accustomed to seeing dead bodies and to riding by them unmoved. In the back of my mind there was a lurking wonder that I was not filled with pity, and revolted by the terrible spectacle."[35] This developing view of the human capacity to accept inevitability and desensitize oneself to violence and horror would influence much of his reporting in Spain and elsewhere.

Matthews described with esteem the Italian artillery and bombing tactics in Abyssinia, the same tactics he would come to roundly condemn in Spain. As he puts it *Eyewitness*, he was initially struck by the "unexpectedly slight results of aerial bombardment. I came back from Africa convinced that the public has an exaggerated idea of the destruction which airplanes can cause." And later on in the same book, he describes how "the roar of the guns was a sound that never stopped for five days, except during the nights, for an enormous line of Italian artillery was heavily engaged at all times. Badoglio was a fiend for artillery. He brought shipload after shipload down from Italy while foreign military experts scoffed. And then he won battles with

[34] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 23
[35] Special Correspondence Dispatch; Dec. 19, 1935; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F 3; RBML, CU.

them."[36] Matthews did not show much concern for the victims of these battles. Then again, many of them belonged to people Matthews could refer to as "pure savages, with a vicious lust for blood, for burning and pillage."[37] His concern for the Ethiopians was limited at best, especially compared to that he later held for the Spanish republicans.

Matthews saw in the Italian soldiers a dynamism and vigor that he attributed to fascism, but in this also recognized a commitment to conquest that would not stop in Ethiopia. In a dispatch after the Italian victory, Matthews argued that "Fascism starts from a premise – that war is inevitable – and it reaches the only conclusion possible under the circumstances: a warlike nation, and superimposed upon the nation a technique of warfare permitting maximum effectiveness." He describes how this technique, the so-called "'war of manoeuvre'" was "psychologically better suited to the Italian temperament – fiery, nervous, exalted in moments of stress and danger." And, he concludes, "Mussolini's policies, whether deliberately or not, have definitely prepared Italy for this type of warfare."[38] In *Eyewitness*, he lauds a "young, vigorous, enthusiastic army, animated by a new spirit, and directed with extraordinary brilliance."[39] But the logical conclusion to the recognition of such spirit was his recognition of a "fatalistic feeling that African war has set motion vast terrible machinery whose dynamic power cannot be halted stop italian arent going stop with ethiopian victory stop theyre flushed with success and vital energy."[40] Matthews, as it turned out, was in general terms correct about the major role of this conflict and others like it in the causal chain that ultimately led to the Second World War.

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[36] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, pp. 63, 213
[37] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 305
[38] Special Correspondence Dispatch; May, 1936; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F4; RBML, CU.
[39] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 258
[40] Dispatch; May, 1936; HLM Papers; SIV, B17, F2; RBML, CU.

Matthews recognizes the dualism inherent in fascist policy in his description of how Christopher Holme, a fellow war correspondent "made a remark which was to be the *faux pas* of the war" after witnessing the burial of a number of Italian soldiers. "'If only Mussolini could see that!'" Holmes declared. Matthews describes how the Italian reporter who heard Holme "almost burst down the door in his frantic effort to get away from the contaminated presence of poor Holme … it was nothing short of sacrilege to intimate that Mussolini would be sorry he started the war if he saw a dozen corpses.[41] Matthews thus recognized the subordination of the individual to the interest of the fascist totalitarian state. But of this he could not be critical, according to his own stated, albeit underdeveloped and vague, ideological identification. Matthews at this point saw himself as what he called a "nationalist." In short, he favored the United States, and claimed to take a largely amoral stance toward the unrelated affairs of other nations. He could thus accept the stated Italian justifications for the invasion of Ethiopia – it was in the Italian national interest. In *Eyewitness*, he wrote that "From the nationalistic point of view, the possible sacrifice of a few lives became of little consequence in the face of that necessity."[42] Statements like this obscure the line between totalitarianism and democracy and expose the inadequacy of Matthews's "nationalism." The following ten years, and above all his time in Spain, would reveal to Matthews this inadequacy and many others and force him to attempt to fundamentally reformulate his ideology. As he put in *Education of a Correspondent*, which includes his attempt to formulate such an ideology in 1946: "Abyssinia finished nothing, but it started a great deal. I had gone through it rather heedlessly and cynically; nevertheless I had learned much, even more than I realized at the time."[43]

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[41] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 220
[42] Matthews, *Eyewitness in Abyssinia*, p. 308
[43] Herbert L. Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1946), p. 63

Chapter III: Madrid

"My 'conversion' came in Spain, but it was infinitely more than that. I have already lived six years since the Spanish Civil War ended, and have seen much of greatness and glory and many beautiful things and places since then … but I know, as surely as I know anything in this world, that nothing so wonderful will ever happen to me again as those two and half years I spent in Spain" – *Education of a Correspondent*, 1946[1]

In Spain, Herbert Matthews confronted first-hand the horrors of the fascist bombing he had lauded in Ethiopia. The experience of the bombing, combined with a rapidly growing respect and love for the resilience, idealism, and heroism of the Spanish republicans, the members of the international brigades, and his fellow foreign correspondents, led to a fundamental revision of his politics as he cast off all fascist sympathy and increasingly felt it to be his duty to use his position as a writer to advocate the republican cause. Whereas his reference point in Ethiopia had been the epic, his framework for understanding and presenting the chaos, horror, idealism, resilience, and heroism he saw in Spain became the tragedy.

Matthews arrived in Spain in October 1936, roughly three months after the Civil War began. He covered the Republican campaign from around the country until February 1939, with occasional breaks, one of which he used to write much of 1937's *Two Wars and More to Come*. He wrote and sent thousands of dispatches to *The New York Times* over this period. As Matthews explains in an introductory note to his papers on Spain, written in 1957, his reporting in Spain was markedly different from the often distanced and directed reporting he did in Ethiopia. First of all, there was little to no censorship. Rather, Matthews's greatest difficulty during the Spanish Civil War came from his editors in New York, many of whom were pro-Franco, or at least anti-Republican, largely due to their Catholicism.[2] As Matthews rather diplomatically put it, "the

[1] Herbert L. Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1946), p. 67
[2] For more on the battles within the *New York Times* over the reporting of the Spanish Civil War see, Adam Hochschild, *Spain in our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War*, *1936-1939* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin

exigencies of space in The New York Times, and other considerations of editing, mean that there is more in these despatches than appeared, on many occasions in The Times." The dispatches, therefore, give the historian more direct access to Matthews's immediate experiences and ideas at the moment of his reporting. Because of the limited censorship it was "possible to go to the front lines, to watch a battle, to join an advance or to fall back with the troops in a retreat. The correspondent became a military observer and a chronicler of history."[3] As Matthews would later put it in a dispatch from Madrid in April 1937: "Only one genuine source of information, therefore, is available – our own eyes, ears and judgments. If the government says that the Valencia Road is passable, and the insurgents claim they are across it, there is only one way to find out: get into a car and drive down the road."[4]

Matthews made a number of close and life-long friends in Spain, drawn from the ranks of the internationals, republicans, and above all other foreign journalists covering the republican side of the war, including Ernest Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn. Matthews was, like most, in awe of Hemingway, whose courage and bravado and often-dangerous reporting inspired his own. Hemingway wrote the blurb for Matthews's book *Two Wars and More to Come* (1937):

HERBERT MATHEWS IS THE STRAIGHTEST THE ABLEST AND THE BRAVEST WAR CORRESPONDENT WRITING TODAY STOP HE HAS SEEN THE TRUTH WHERE IT WAS VERY DANGEROUS TO SEE AND IN THIS BOOK HE BRINGS THAT RAREST COMMODITY TO YOU STOP IN A WORLD WHERE FAKING NOW IS FAR MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN THE TRUTH HE STANDS LIKE A GAUNT LIGHTHOUSE OF HONESTY STOP AND WHEN THE FAKERS ARE ALL DEAD THEY WILL READ MATHEWS IN THE SCHOOLS TO FIND OUT WHAT REALLY HAPPENED STOP I HOPE HIS OFFICE WILL KEEP SOME UNCUT COPIES OF HIS DISPATCHES IN CASE HE DIES = ERNEST HEMINGWAY.[5]

Harcourt, 2016), pp. 153-155 and Paul Preston, *We Saw Spain Die: Foreign Correspondents in the Spanish Civil War. New York: Skyhorse,* 2006, pp. 19-20.

[3] Opening note from Matthews; Feb. 18, 1957; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F1; RBML, CU.

[4] Dispatch; April 23, 1937; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F5; RBML, CU.

[5] Telegram from Hemingway; Jan. 1938; HLM Papers; SI, B1, F13; RBML, CU.

Perhaps most indicative of their relationship is the fact that Hemingway misspelled "Mathews" with one T and it seems that Matthews, ever conscious of curating his image, took the time to include both T's in his name with a pen on the original telegram, as preserved in his papers.

Matthews arrived in Madrid in early December, against the advice of his editors, who, like most of the world, expected the republican-held city to soon fall to Franco's forces. Madrid would be Matthews's first lesson in the destructive power of the machines that had so enthused him in Ethiopia. This shift is perhaps most eloquently communicated by an observation in one of his first dispatches: "weather beautiful madrid today which in this unhappy city means that theres been another bombing."[6] Within a few days in Madrid, he concluded that "its indeed true that airplanes can outmete fearful punishment to cities of today." The subjects of Matthews's reporting in Ethiopia had been heroic Italians unleashing new technology. In Spain, Matthews's subjects were Spanish citizens, who, unlike Ethiopian "savages," could be subjects of history.

Matthews's dispatches, written in staccato shorthand and in a fatigued frenzy after days spent dodging bombs, capture his experience of the bombing as a horrifying, fragmenting assault on humanity. His dispatches from December 1936 through February 1937 are, in the most ominous of senses, rather repetitive. As Matthews would put it the next year, "we had told it all before … just more destruction, more horror, more heroism … You cannot tell the same tale every day and continue to hold your audience. It not only loses interest; it loses reality, even though the destruction and horror, far from lessening get worse and worse."[7] In the dispatches, he refers to himself as both "nyktimes" and "eye." In mid-December 1936, he described how he "walked by strong sixstory apartment house one day and next returned to same spot and seen it literally pulverized dash smashed right down to ground while every man woman child in it lay

[6] Dispatch; Dec 5, 1936; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F1; RBML, CU.
[7] Dispatch; May 1937; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F6; RBML, CU.

dead or wounded." Thousands of others, having avoided the bombs, "live huddled miserably in subways."[8] On Christmas, he "walked over pavement that literally ran blood" and past "three men one women literally torn apart by explosion."[9]

Within a few weeks, Matthews began to turn to the imagery and form of the tragedy to describe the misery and resilience of the Spanish people, as well as the almost incomprehensible capacity for devastation of Fascist machinery. After a plane had Machine gunned a line of women waiting in line outside a Butcher shop, Matthews commented on the "recuperative powers of these indomitable people." When he "arrived the line had already reformed … Only the tragic faces of women shows that anything unusual had happened."[10] The bombers began to take on a superhuman character. Whereas in Ethiopia this had been the basis of an epic conquest, in Spain it became the representative of the horrors of indomitable fate. Looking up at a fleet of planes soaring into Madrid was a "fearsome and wonderful sight, perhaps the most eloquent picture of the beauty, terror and ruthlessness of modern destructive machinery that one could hope to see." The bombers were "sailing by with inexorable steadiness."[11]

For Matthews, the citizens of Madrid took on an increasingly tragic character, resigned to their fate but in that very sense unimaginably heroic – more so, he would begin to realize, than the Italian soldiers and road-builders of Ethiopia. In an article from February 1937, made up of a series of "vignettes," Matthews described in ever more detail the violence and horror of the bombings. Tragedy provided a framework both for him to understand the chaos and unimaginable horror he saw and to communicate it in an intelligible way. When bombings exposed the interiors of apartment buildings, they created for Matthews "a strange and horrible

[8] Dispatch; December 1936; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F1; RBML, CU.
[9] Dispatch; Christmas 1936; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F1; RBML, CU.
[10] Dispatch; January 1937; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F2; RBML, CU.
[11] Dispatch; January 6, 1937; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F2; RBML, CU

stage scene where the fourth wall is non-existent so that the characters can stage a tragedy for an unseen audience." In the article, Matthews goes on to describe how "during a bombardment militiamen work like Trojans."[12] He still thought in terms of the epic, but, having been struck by the Italians as the equivalent of the Greeks in Ethiopia, he now began to empathize with the republicans as Trojans in Spain. This was the first stage of his conversion. Indeed, more than just of dramatizing technique, the shift from epic to tragedy that was in its earliest stages at this point also signified a change in his world view and philosophy.

Just as the bombings and the tragic heroism of the Spanish republicans horrified Matthews, the international brigades inspired him. Here he saw idealism, meaning imparted onto life and death like never before. The internationals were "recruited from among communists socialists democrats republicans liberals in far corners of world" and had the "courage freshness zeal born of idealism."[13] Matthews consistently emphasized their liberal or republican backgrounds and cast them, even the communists, as fundamentally anti-fascist. On December 7, 1936, for example, he reported on the commander of the Italian Garibaldi battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Randolfo Pacciardi, a "former lawyer republican" who had a "fine worldwar record" and had formed anti-fascist organizations in Italy that eventually required him to flee.[14] After profiling a number of internationals in another dispatch shortly after, Matthews concluded that "Whatever they may or may not be, they are all anti-Fascists."[15]

In the same dispatch from December 15, 1936, Matthews commented on the other foreigners in Spain. Italian and German involvement in the conflict took on an increasingly nefarious role as the conflict proceeded, but for the first few months, Matthews understood the

[12] Dispatch; February 22, 1937; HLM Papers; SIV, B20, F3; RBML, CU.
[13] Dispatch; December 18, 1936; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F1; RBML, CU.
[14] Dispatch; December 7, 1936; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F1; RBML, CU.
[15] Dispatch; December 15, 1936; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F1; RBML, CU.

conflict as a clash between opposed ideals through a less moralized lens than he later would. In a long-form dispatch he wrote in May 1937 while on a trip to London, he compared the Ethiopian and Spanish wars. There was idealism on display on both sides, but were these ideals worth the blood? Matthews has no answer: "Perhaps it is all a delusion; perhaps the masses are being misled; perhaps they are fighting for false ideals, or think they are fighting for principles when in reality they are fighting for a few ambitious dictators, for mercenary capitalists or scheming revolutionaries. What difference does it make?" The important point, for Matthews, was that "something moved them all to the depths of their beings – something that made them want to fight, and willing to die."[16] Matthews could not share fully in these competing ideologies ("perhaps it is all a delusion") and as a journalist, he did not have to. But the commitment he saw impressed him and forced him to question his own vague identification as a nationalist.

Before long, though, he became increasingly supportive of the Republican cause. Matthews's increasing partisanship, as well as his factual reporting, which often conflicted with reports from Franco's side (which certain editors at the *Times* were only too happy to prioritize), gained him a reputation as a Communist sympathizer and stooge. As he wrote in *Two Wars and More to Come* (finished in Madrid in October 1937 and published on January 1, 1938), in the Abyssinian war "I was accused of being in the pay of Rome: in the present one I am apparently in the pay of Moscow. Since the accusations are mutually destructive I am rather pleased at them than annoyed."[17] *Two Wars* was in part an attempt to restore and maintain his journalistic reputation, but also a more concerted effort to explain what was going on in Spain from his perspective, as well as to reflect on Ethiopia and the European situation and America's relation to it. Matthews sought to galvanize interest in and support for the republican cause, in which he

[16] Dispatch; March/April 1937; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F5; RBML, CU.
[17] Herbert L. Matthews, *Two Wars and More to Come* (New York: Carrick and Evans Inc., 1938), p. 18

had increasingly come to believe, and to improve the reputation of the international brigades. "Has the world gone mad," he asked in the prologue to *Two Wars*, "or just we newspapermen and writers who seem to be preaching in a wilderness of indifference and ignorance?"[18] *Two Wars and More to Come* systematized the style of the early Madrid dispatches and borrowed the structure of a tragedy, but with one crucial omission. It has a Prologue, a Part I, a Part II, an Epilogue, but no Part III. The resolution of the Spanish Civil War is one possible third act. But the other possibility is the spread of the Spanish conflict into an international one. The structure is in part a warning against this possibility. The lack of closure was very much directed at galvanizing the support and prompting the intervention of the United States and Great Britain.

In *Two Wars*, Matthews expands on the tragic descriptions of the bombing of Madrid but now with a view to persuading American readers to confront the realities of the war. "I have always felt on the part of Americans a failure to appreciate the horrors of war," Matthews notes. What strikes him most is the scale on which the war was being waged, that it spared no one. "In Spain we have seen much wanton destruction of life," he writes. "I realize this is quite illogical, but one cannot eradicate the personal equation. I am willing to risk my own life, but not Nancie's or Eric's or Fifi's. War used to be a man's business; now it is the whole damn family's."[19] Nonetheless, Matthews does retain some of his enthusiasm for the experience-heightening atmosphere of a war zone. He maintains that "to be illogical again, I get a great kick out" of covering the war. He also describes how one bombing occurred around a movie theatre in which he was "watching Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in 'The Gay Divorcee.' I wrote in my despatch that day of the audience that snickered at each crash—which many people seemed to doubt. Of course they would feel gleeful! Who would not get all the more excited at seeing and

[18] Matthews, *Two Wars and More to Come*, pp. 13, 14
[19] Matthews, *Two Wars and More to Come*, p. 204

hearing the 'Continental' while death and danger were all around, and yet could not touch you?"[20] Matthews had by no means lost his irreverent sense of adventure.

Matthews re-produced descriptions of the bombers as all-powerful arbiters of mechanized fate. He wrote how "it is a terrible moment when one can hear a bomber directly overhead, knowing its power of destruction and feeling so helpless."[21] To withstand the siege "took a spiritual as well as a physical vitality. It was the reaction to a deep and essentially tragic nature, one which confronts the universe with a soul fortified against its evils, with an instinctive acceptance of its suffering." This was the basis of the tragic heroism of the Spanish Matthews saw in Madrid. The Civil War "had struck deep" and placed the "individual face to face with a tragedy that was more than personal, an infinite, cosmic tragedy. These men and women around me are protagonists in a great drama" – and how impressed Matthews was by their acting, which proved to him the human resilience and determination in defense of a (vague) ideal of liberty. "Drama, tragedy, the conflict of life against death, of man against the universe," Matthews continued, "that is what the Spaniard was apparently built for by a none too charitable creator."[22]

Matthews saw in the Spanish republicans, despite and indeed because of their tragic lot, a heroism even more impressive than that of the Italians in Abyssinia. Whereas the Italians' unity and vigor stemmed from adulation of their Duce, the organic and fundamentally democratic growth of anti-fascism in Spain was much more impressive. At the beginning of Franco's insurrection, Matthews notes, in many cities "the insurgents failed because the common soldiers and the common people throughout the greater part of Spain refused for once to knuckle under."[23] He goes on excuse the republicans for their more destructive acts. "Terror reigned in

[20] Matthews, *Two Wars and More to Come*, p. 205
[21] Matthews, *Two Wars and More to Come*, p. 206
[22] Matthews, *Two Wars and More to Come*, p. 187
[23] Matthews, *Two Wars and More to Come*, p. 178

the great cites," he explains. "It was sheer madness—but how could it be otherwise? On the rebel side just as horrible things were happening in the name of law and order."[24] The international brigades, meanwhile, were generous, committed idealists. The American volunteers, for example, were "not fighting for Moscow, but for their ideals." The names of their Battalions, the "Abraham Lincoln and George Washington Battalions – were the symbols of a genuine patriotism. None of the internationals are so conscious of their nationality."[25]

Matthews stands by most of his opinions on the Ethiopia conflict in *Two Wars*, though he tempers his rhetoric substantially. "Writing as a newspaperman," he explains in the prologue to *Two Wars*, "it is none of my business who is right or wrong." He continues to refer to himself as a "nationalist," and thereby concludes that he has "no objection to seeing any country try to better its position in the world. From that point of view the Abyssinian venture found me sympathetic to the Italians. I love the people, and after going through the campaign from beginning to end I was convinced that the Italian conquest could be a boon to Ethiopia as well as to the new Roman Empire."[26] But the tenets of nationalism, he began to realize, made condemning the Italian and German role in Spain difficult. Italy was in Spain just as much attempting to "better its position in the world" as in Ethiopia. He admits to his "going through an evolution about Fascism which must be obtruding through my daily work, as it will into this book. There was a time when I was all for it, and I am not convinced yet that it has been a bad thing for Italy." He holds that "the vast majority of Italians want it, and as a nationalist I cannot quarrel with that. But the export brand of Fascism with its link now with Naziism in Germany, however logical, is an ugly thing to behold." Matthews takes recourse in his assertion that "even

[24] Matthews, *Two Wars and More to Come*, p. 180
[25] Matthews, *Two Wars and More to Come*, p. 220
[26] Matthews, *Two Wars and More to Come*, p. 14

before I came to Spain I had reached the conclusion that nothing could be worse for that country than Fascist and foreign domination."[27] He does not give much in the way of a reason for this – the statement seems more catered to excusing his sympathies than logical argument. By the end of *Two Wars* he expresses his sympathy for the republican cause, stressing the idealism, dedication to liberty, and determination of the republicans. But he does so without declaring his own allegiance to any greater cause or ideology. Since he still identifies as a "nationalist," he cannot. As Orwell would have put it, he only informs his readers what he is not, not what he is.

Here is the hub of the universe. Here is where one finds the indomitable will to win or fight this war out to the bitter end. Here is courage, idealism, patience, fortitude. I am not a Communist or a Fascist, a radical or a conservative, a Catholic or an anti-clerical, but I take my hat off to these people. They are fighting and suffering and struggling for something better than life has hitherto given them, and I hope they win.[28]

Matthews could retain hope in a republican victory in the fall of 1937, when he wrote *Two Wars*. But disaster for them and devastation for Matthews were around the corner. Before transferring to Barcelona to cover the next stages of the war, and as a prelude of what was to come, he wrote from Albacete in June 1937: "Here in spain we feel like rabbits in a laboratory. germany and italy are trying out their latest engines of war on us to see how they work."[29] In the fall of the same year, Matthews took recourse in Goya to express the horrors he witnessed each day. "One gets inured to pathetic sights during a war," Matthews wrote, "but there are few more poignant pictures to be seen that those streams of wounded men groping and stumbling down the stairs to the safety of the ground floor during a bombardment. there were several figures last night that seemed to come out of a goya etching on 'the disasters of war.'"[30]

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[27] Matthews, *Two Wars and More to Come*, p. 14
[28] Matthews, *Two Wars and More to Come*, p. 296
[29] Dispatch; June 1937; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F7; RBML, CU.
[30] Dispatch; Fall 1937; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F9; RBML, CU.

Chapter IV: Barcelona

In Catalonia, the borders between real and imagined horror would meld and, by the end of the war, so too would the borders between art and reality. The horror and tragedy of fascist bombing only increased, and with it Matthews's hatred for those doing the bombing. His conception of totalitarianism began to take shape in a devastated Barcelona. And, in the final, desperate weeks of the war, he would turn to outright fabrication to build a myth of republican perseverance and heroism, despite and indeed because of an increasingly inevitable defeat.

As Matthews divulged for the first time in 1946, there was no censorship on nearly all of his dispatches from Barcelona as he had discovered "that if my Paris bureau telephoned me at a certain hour, the Spanish censor who usually listened in would be out to dinner."[1] Matthews's dispatches on the Barcelona bombings make for gory reading, and he spares few details. In an early dispatch from February 1938, he conceded that "it has always been a tradition in journalism – and one that good taste has sanctioned – not to be medically precise about what can happen to the human body when it is hurt." But he was determined to impress upon his readers the destruction and devastation fascist bombing wrought in Spain. "War in the abstract might be glamourous to many outsiders," he pointed out, "but suppose one could be made to see that line of children's bodies lying in morgue of the Clinical Hospital in Barcelona after the two raids of Sunday" – "Now we know what bombing can mean to the big cities of the world."[2]

The following excerpts show what bombing meant to Matthews. His reliance on classical and tragic imagery continues, for example in his description of a woman whom "Death had caught … protesting at the pain and horror of it somewhat as the lava from Vesuvius had caught Pompeiians, petrifying their gestures for the future record." Her frozen expression "permitted her

[1] Herbert L. Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1946), p. 119
[2] Dispatch; Feb 15, 1938; HLM Papers; SIV, B21, F1; RBML, CU.

to say in death more about bombs than any number of articles like this could tell you."[3] In March 1938, Matthews charted the effect of "totalitarian" bombing on Barcelona, writing that "it has left the city shaken and terrorstricken human beings in mass have never been asked to suffer as these people are suffering under francos determined effort to break their spirit and induce their government to yield. it is totalitarian in all its horror and efficiency."[4] The worst bombing would come on March 17 and 18. Matthews was there to document it. As he put it later, "my pen was dipped in blood for that dispatch."[5] "One feels so helpless trying to convey horror of all this," Matthews began his dispatch on March 17. He stressed that this wasn't "just another bombing":

its affliction terriblern any of you can imagine stop one comes back from scenes dazed with horror of it dash blood over pavements comma bodies that seemed creation of diseased mind all black and red comma men women children buried alive and screaming in wreckage of their houses like trapped animals stop eyeve never seen so many weeping women para its madness to be at point just after bomb has struck stop theyre using bombs that break low.

Matthews goes on to write that "human beings arent built to withstand such horror stop tis true theyre striking terror all right terror that freezes blood and makes one either hysterical or on verge hysteria." Details such as unwashed dishes and blood-stained berets stuck out to Matthews, who could only see horror everywhere he looked: "wrecked building smoke dust powder and above all blood comma thick sticky pools of blood splotches … everywhere out look something stained with blood."[6] The bombing continued the next day. Matthews struggled to "be coherent about whats happening to barcelona," describing the bombing as "surely savagest ruthlessest punishment any modern citys taken stop this is systematic destruction designed to break spirit as wells body." One remark he heard stuck out to him that was "said in jest": "it maynt be end of

[3] Dispatch; Jan. 30, 1938; HLM Papers; SIV, B21, F1; RBML, CU.
[4] Dispatch; March, 1938; HLM Papers; SIV, B21, F1; RBML, CU.
[5] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 124
[6] Dispatch; March 17, 1938; HLM Papers; SIV, B21, F1; RBML, CU.

war but it feels like end of world."[7] Matthews was now in the midst of the apocalyptic palingenesis of fascism, the creation of the new world he had once lauded. He wrote a telegram to Sulzberger shortly after, urging that his "story todays bombing be printed fully unsparing horrors." He claimed that "its our duty make people realize what war means."[8]

Leading up to and during his time in Barcelona, Matthews expressed his worry and frustration over the fact that contradictory news stories were competing with his and questioned the nature of truth. As he wrote to Frank Paterson, a Columbia English Professor, "What I am seeking is something like mechanical perfection in a problem where both the purveyors and readers are all too human … From the journalist's point of view the problem is to *be believed*."[9] His increasing sense of duty to the republican cause, his recognition of the rickety foundations on which truth and its reception rested, and above all the impending defeat of the Republicans together unraveled Matthews's journalistic integrity in the last, desperate stages of the war. His friend and fellow-reporter Martha Gellhorn is notorious, in the context of the Spanish Civil War, for condemning "all that objectivity shit." [10] A reporter could only communicate what she saw or heard. Journalistic objectivity takes on a subjective hue, but retains a basis in experience. In the final stages of the war in northern Catalonia, Matthews took Gellhorn's statement, as well as Hemingway's assertion that "faking is now far more successful than the truth," all too literally.[11]

The historian Adam Hochschild criticizes Matthews's undue optimism and apparent total obfuscation of reality in describing the republicans at the end of the war. He observes that when Matthews wrote about the determination and hope of the Spanish, Barcelona was "swollen with

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[7] Dispatch; March 18, 1938; HLM Papers; SIV, B21, F1; RBML, CU.
[8] Telegram to Arthur Hays Sulzberger; March 18, 1938; HLM Papers; SIV, B21, F1; RBML, CU.
[9] Independent Journal of Columbia University, Friday Dec 10, 1937: Volume 5, Number 4; HLM Papers; SIV, B22, F3; RBML, CU.
[10] Caroline Morehead *Gellhorn: A Twentieth Century Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Co. Inc., 2003), p. 125
[11] Telegram from Hemingway; Jan. 1938; HLM Papers; SI, B1, F13; RBML, CU.

refugees, scurvy raged, and the official food ration was 3.5 ounces of lentils per day. The lucky might also be able to find a small dried codfish."[12] In his note to the reader of his dispatches from the Spanish Civil War, Matthews observes that "the writer of these despatches had his heart in the Loyalist [republican] cause. The only claims that are made here are that nothing was withheld because of this reason and that nothing was written except from firsthand knowledge or in the belief that what was written was true."[13] Even if we believe Matthews, the fact remains that he was on the whole far too hopeful and granted the republicans far more optimism than they appear to have exhibited. With the fall of Barcelona, refugees and the republican government fled towards the French border, hopelessly defending towns that quickly fell under fascist control.

Matthews continued to emphasize the tragic elements of the end of the war, but also imbued the Spanish republicans and refugees with an especially heroic and, as Hochschild points out, far too hopeful character. In one dispatch he compared the "unending and infinitely unhappy stream of refugees" to an "exodus, a going into exile that has assumed the characters and proportions of a biblical tragedy."[14] The republicans and refugees were now the chosen ones, glorified in Judeo-Christian and classical terms. As far as the military conflict was concerned, "except on the first day the front has never been broken wide open and rolled back, that day after day for 20 days the same soldiers, outnumbered and outarmed have continued to fight doggedly and dangerously." As he added in an insert to the same article, "this is a very critical period, but no responsible person here shows signs of despair."[15] A few days later, Matthews expanded the biblical imagery, claiming that "babies, lambs and kids are born along those roads. old men and

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[12] Adam Hochschild, *Spain in our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), p. 340
[13] Opening note from Matthews; Feb. 18, 1957; HLM Papers; SIV, B18, F1; RBML, CU.
[14] Dispatch; Jan., 1939; HLM Papers; SIV, B21, F5; RBML, CU.
[15] Dispatch; Jan. 11, 1939; HLM Papers; SIV, B21, F5; RBML, CU.

women and worn out animals die before reaching their haven."[16] The next day he asserted that the government, "with some fresh troops and material, plus the little rest already obtainable," "still offers great obstacles" to the Fascists.[17] This rhetoric continued throughout the remaining, increasingly desperate weeks of the war. As Hochschild rightly points out, Matthews *seems* to have lost grasp of reality in his dogged championing of faded republican resolve.

But there is another explanation for Matthew's overblown optimism, borne out by a more thorough investigation of his description of republican determination and resolve. He gives some indication of his motivation in 1946's *Education of a Correspondent*, when Spain remained very much under the control of Franco. While skepticism is still essential in evaluating Matthews's assessment of what was arguably the least auspicious (journalistically speaking) stage of his career to this stage, it is worth closely considering what he had to say for himself. He suggests that the Spanish war should have ended a year before it did. That it did not, he says, "is surely one of the more amazing achievements of the human spirit. It was more than a tribute to the fighting qualities of a magnificent race; it was overwhelming evidence of the Spanish people's hatred of Fascism and of the foreign invaders who had come to force it upon Spain."[18] He expresses his regret that Barcelona was not fought for and defended to the death. The destruction of the city, he assumes in this statement, was inevitable, but a battle would have provided the basis for a Spanish republican myth – one that would have outlasted the republicans' defeat and the rise to power of Franco. "For the sake of republicanism and democracy which had been so well defended, Barcelona should have been fought for," Matthews writes.

Of course, there was not enough food for a siege; the people did not respond; there were hardly any machine guns, and without them streets could not be defended. Above all, the Rebels were soon to cut off Barcelona from the north. So there were good reasons for the fall of the city—and

[16] Dispatch; Jan. 14, 1939; HLM Papers; SIV, B21, F5; RBML, CU.
[17] Dispatch; Jan. 18, 1939; HLM Papers; SIV, B21, F5; RBML, CU.
[18] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 135

yet one must regret that the Catalans, unlike the Castilians of Madrid, the Poles of Warsaw, the Russian of Stalingrad, did not write a heroic page for history to record.[19]

Matthews's overblown descriptions of the last stages of the Spanish Civil War in northern Catalonia, then, can be read as an attempt to remedy the lack of a battle for Barcelona through the maintenance of a myth of Spanish resistance, heroic and tragic determination, opposition to fascism, and commitment to liberty despite all odds. He took it upon himself to write a "heroic page" that history had not recorded. This is best borne out in his description of the final weeks of the war in *Education* (1946), written with distance and more refined style and very much aimed at contemporary Spain as much as historical record. This last stage of the war

was one of the most baffling and significant in my career. I often think about it and wonder whether I made a fool of myself, and to what extent I harmed my reputation. After it was over my publisher reproached me with having misled readers of The New York Times into believing that the situation was consistently better than it proved to be. From the professional point of view, I had to acknowledge the justice of the reproof. And yet ...[20]

The naughty ellipses after "and yet …" are his. He could not explicitly state the creation of a myth, which needed to seem authentic to be believed. His politics and his appreciation of journalism and myth converged to provide a heroic history of and for Spanish republicanism:

what I was catching, almost unconsciously, were the last struggles of a people who did not want to die, who could not believe that they would be allowed to die, who still had life and courage and ideals, and even hope. All those things were cut down, and people denied that they had been there, but I saw them, and they still make the elements of history.[21]

It was this history, Matthews insisted, that would one day provide a reference point to those who hated Franco and fascism and dreamt of a republican Spain.

This kind of thinking comes out most clearly in Matthews's discussion of the Cortes of Figueres. A Cortes is a convening of the Spanish national assembly, and his example here is the

[19] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 168
[20] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 169
[21] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 170

1810 Cortes of Cadiz, where the first National Assembly claimed sovereignty against the old kingdoms and against Napoleon. Its association with the genesis of Spanish democracy suited Matthews's project particularly well. In his parallel to Spanish history, he creates a mytho-historical relation between present and past to provide a reference-point for future anti-fascism.

What happened at *Castle of Figueras of February 1, 1939, will be a symbol as glorious in its way as that of Cadiz in 1811, when Napoleon's Army had overrun the Peninsula. Those are the pages of a nation's history which never fade. Figueras was not the last agony of an ancient order. A live and enduring force was evoked there, something essentially and eternally Spanish, and it will rise again.*[22]

Matthews writes, invoking a phrase from his article on the Napoleon's arches seven year before, that at the Cortes, "in spite of everything, there was that high, indomitable resolve which somehow gave a feeling of hope, despite the evidence of one's eyes." The Cortes, he continued,

meant that the Second Spanish Republic still existed—against Franco and the whole world. The constitution was to be obeyed; the framework of democratic government, however weakened, was supported once more. A gesture was to be made, as truly Spanish as ever made in the tragic and glorious history of the country of Don Quixote.

Matthews draws on the Cortes's suitably fantastic, heroic, and medieval setting, "down it the dungeon-like vaults of the old castle on the hill." "Everyone, he continued, "was conscious of the fact that an unforgettable page of history was being written that night."[23] Negrin provided the thematic finale Matthews needed when he remarked, and Matthews recorded, that

'Countries do live only by victories, but by the examples which their people have known how to give in tragic times.' It was on that noble theme that the long speech ended. No one could call it an oratorical masterpiece; it was disjointed, and badly delivered, by a man so exhausted that he could hardly stand, yet it should take its place with the great documents of Spanish history.[24]

And Matthews did everything he could to be sure that it would.

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[22] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 170
[23] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 173, 174
[24] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 177, 178

Chapter V: Liberalism

Matthews emerged from the Spanish Civil War a committed anti-fascist. Over the course of his time in Spain he gradually came to recognize the limits of his previous identification as a nationalist – on such terms he could not criticize the fascism he had come to despise, nor challenge the non-intervention that had so frustrated him. He was, he had come to recognize, a liberal. The two books Matthews published in the years between the end of the Spanish Civil War and the end of the Second World War, *The Fruits of Fascism* (1943) and *The Education of a Correspondent* (1946) were his attempts to systematize and articulate what this meant. The mythical and literary models he had used throughout his career came to his aid again, but they were no longer simply devices for ordering and dramatizing his experiences. Rather, they integrated with his developing political thought.

Matthews did not want to return to Italy after the Spanish Civil War. He wrote to Arthur Hays Sulzberger a number of imploring letters, giving reasons why he should not. "When you consider my political opinions, the religious difficulties and my personal reactions to seeing Italians work in Spain," he asked in February 1938, "how can you think that I should welcome taking such a post?" Clairvoyantly, he went on to say that "It isn't going to do The Times any good to have its correspondents kicked out of various countries, as I almost certainly would in time from Rome, despite – or rather because – I tried to make an honest job of it. Personally, I believe the European situation is going to blow up too soon to make this a very live issue."[1] Under pressure from the *Times*, Matthews conceded and travelled to Rome in spring 1939. His notes describing his return to Rome demonstrate his frustration in his "first impressions." He wrote that on the train the "ravioli" had been good and that the train was "of course on time."

[1] Letter to Arthur Hays Sulzberger from Perpignan; Feb. 3, 1939; HLM Papers; SI, B1, F23; RBML, CU.

Matthews crossed out "of course" with a pen, before going on to describe his "First revulsion at subservience, fulsomeness, toadying to Ciano. Salutes." In Rome "No foreign newspaperman gives salute, whereas in Spain seemed natural."[2] Matthews's frustration and anger towards the fascists for what they had done in Spain, though tempered by his love for the Italians, remained as he dutifully did his job for the next two years. Matthews got into minor troubles with the Ministry of Popular Culture throughout his time in Italy, but on the whole kept his reporting restrained. When Italy declared war on the United States, however, Matthews was briefly imprisoned, before an exchange of journalists was conducted. He returned to the United States and then reported on Indian politics from 1942 to 1943.

Matthews returns to the structure of a (now complete) tragedy in *The Fruits of Fascism*. Its recurrent theme is the all too human character of fascism, both in its appeal and its failure to achieve its impossible goals. Fascism had reached beyond the limits of human nature, claimed almost divine infallibility, and like the Greek tragic heroes fate had intervened to punish it. Much of the more theoretical parts of the book draw heavily on the quotation of other authors, many of them Italian liberal and anti-fascist writers and journalists. Parts of the book contain paragraph after paragraph of quotation and much of the book's logic and argument stems from the thought of Benedetto Croce, the Italian liberal philosopher who Matthews respected greatly and came to know well and who he described as upholding "the torch of Italian liberty."[3] Matthews conducted a series of interviews with Croce during this period, maintained a correspondence with him, and translated some of his articles into English. Croce's daughter translated Matthews's *The Fruits of Fascism* into Italian the year after it was published in English.

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[2] Dispatch; April 22, 1939; HLM Papers; SIV, B2, F6; RBML, CU.
[3] Herbert L. Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1943), p. 329

Matthews's main point of departure from Croce, as well as his most original claim, concerns fascism's future. Matthews believed that fascism, even if defeated in the Italian and German cases, would persist in some form or as a myth. "Italian Fascism will go," he writes in *Fruits*, "but world Fascism, international Fascism, the ideas, ideals, and desires to which it responded, will remain. Fascism will be a hydra-headed monster, and we democrats can never, in our generation lay aside our guns."[4] On the one hand, this assertion must be understood in the context of the Second World War. Matthews calls for constant vigilance and interventionism against illiberal forces worldwide. This is not surprising, given his intense frustration through the Spanish Civil War with lack of support for the Republicans from the democracies of the west. On the other hand, Matthews's conclusion about the persistence of fascism also reflects his views on human nature and above all his appreciation of myth. Matthews recognized a human susceptibility to fascism's allure and thus feared its resurgence. "Fascism was a beautiful illusion to many millions," he writes. "They placed their faith in it, and once a movement has a grip on the uneducated masses it dies hard. It lasts especially when there is no substitute belief handy. There will be a 'Mussolinian myth' in Italy, one of these days, just like the 'Napoleonic myth' of 19th-century France."[5] In a letter to Matthews in November 1943 concerning the Italian edition of *Fruits*, Croce asserted that the comparison to Napoleon gave Mussolini "troppo onore!" [too much honor].[6] But Matthews was dogged in his belief that the realities of the attractions of fascism had to be confronted and exposed. It is in this context that Matthews's insistence on fascism's persistence is best understood, as well as his project in *Fruits*.

[4] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 326
[5] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 326
[6] Letter from Benedetto Croce; Oct. 13, 1943; HLM Papers; SI, B1, F1; RBML, CU.

Matthews dismisses the myths and doctrine of Italian fascism as opportunist, but also recognizes their immense power and impact. Fascism "offered adventure, excitement, ideals, the promise of power and jobs."[7] Matthews considered the Italians among the most cynical and stubborn people he had ever met. "If Fascism took such a hold on the Italian people," he argues, "and later up on so many others, it must have been because it satisfied certain fundamental cravings," especially a sense of power and importance.[8] Matthews took it as axiomatic that in politics "people follow a mirage." This convergence of "cravings" and myth was capable of creating "an illusion for which men struggle and die."[9] This liberal caution about the demagogic impulses inherent in democracy was in part the legacy of fascism.

To combat such impulses, Matthews attempts to dispel a number of myths about Fascism. For example, he presents fascism as an "unholy alliance" between Italian capitalists and petit-bourgeoisie – that is, a movement founded upon self-interest and not, as was often claimed, in the interest of everyone in the Italian nation.[10] He aims to dispel the myth of fascist economic success compared to the failure of the democracies during the 1930s. He points to an economic downturn and failure that had its roots in the late 1920s. "Fascism pushed autarchy to completely uneconomic limits," Matthews contends, and by the end of the 1930s was economically ruined as a direct result.[11] Mussolini's failure, for Matthews, was that he "never realized the homely truth that human nature cannot be changed. Apparently, it never occurred to him that economics really is a science."[12] Fascist doctrine was "opportunistic" and Mussolini "frequently has sentences which are, literally, meaningless."[13] The Second World War, and Italy's late, reluctant, and

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[7] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 12
[8] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 24
[9] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, pp. 24, 25
[10] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, pp. 303, 304
[11] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 229
[12] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, pp. 118, 119
[13] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 182

inauspicious entry into it, finally exposed the fascists' claims to dynamism and militarism. It was "the final unmasking of a man who showed himself to be devoid of any of those qualities of martial chivalry which fascism was supposed to exemplify."[14] The greatest myth of Italian fascism also had to fall: "Even the trains no longer run on time!"[15]

Fascism's totalitarianism, of which Matthew's definition is fairly standard, made its trajectory inevitably tragic. Totalitarianism gives the state "God-like attributes" and claims infallibility.[16] Matthews alludes to "the chariot of Phaethon which could not be stopped." When Fascism, due to its imperialistic rhetoric, becomes "an 'article for export,"' it "links its destiny to that of Nazism, and sets out to conquer the world."[17] And it could not, according to its claims to infallibility, fail. Italian Fascism peaked in the Ethiopian campaign, which Matthews now terms "pure imperialism acting on the flimsiest excuses."[18] The taking of Addis Ababa was "the grand climax of Italian Fascism. It was the nearest this modern Icarus got to the sun."[19] Matthews's use of classical myths here to some extent serves as a reference point and source of drama for his readers. But, more importantly, it is both the basis and product of his conception of fascism and his developing philosophy as a whole. Fascism's failure stems fundamentally, as in tragedy, from the incompatibility of its idealism and claims to infallibility with human nature. Matthews writes that the "State operates though a group of men who are *all too human*, and who can no more follow an ideal of good than the average Christian can live as Christ did." Liberalism, on the other hand, by not claiming infallible judgement, recognizes such perpetual weakness and checks against its more destructive tendencies.[20] Democracy, though (necessarily) imperfect, "does not

[14] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 273
[15] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 332
[16] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 188
[17] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 205
[18] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 224
[19] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 227
[20] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 193. Italics added.

claim infallibility." Liberalism rests on the assumption that "there is no dogmatic political truth."[21] It rests, therefore, on the assumption and acceptance of human fallibility.

But dispelling the Mussolinian myth would not be enough for liberalism, especially a liberalism understood in terms of fallibility, to grow in Italy. As Matthews noted, there was danger "when there is no substitute belief handy."[22] And, he adds, "there was no real liberal tradition in Italy."[23] So Matthews took it upon himself to do his part in creating one. The Italian needed to be able to properly conceive of himself as a liberal citizen before liberalism could take root. Matthews supplies martyrs for his invented tradition when he references an inscription on the wall of the cell next to his in the jail in which he was briefly imprisoned: "*Qui pianse e soffri' un martiro per l'ideale della liberta'* ['Here wept and suffered a martyr for the ideal of liberty']. Many such martyrs were weeping and suffering in Italy."[24] The Italian conception of liberty, Matthews contends, was rooted in a "strong individualism."[25] Fascism had failed the "ordinary man," who is not "a hero, an ascetic, and idealist. He is just a simple individual who wants to eat and live in peace, to have his home and his little plot of land."[26] This is the plain but powerful grounding for what Matthews then describes in mytho-historical terms: "The Italian will have his new Risorgimento that will rise somehow from the torment of the fiery furnace into which Fascism plunged his country."[27] The revival would be based on the illusion of a golden past not of Roman imperialism but of Renaissance humanism, with its bankers, traders, and artisans.

Was their history less great in the days of the Medici when Italians were the bankers of Europe? When Italian traders roamed to the far shores of eastern China? Would it have improved matters

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[21] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 199
[22] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 326
[23] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 195
[24] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 312
[25] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 195
[26] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 302
[27] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, pp. 330, 331

if they had become good Fascists—stern, disciplined, military automatons? We can leave the judgement to history—and to the Italian people.[28]

Myth, for Matthews's, just as necessary for liberalism as for fascism.

Forced to leave Italy, Matthews wrote an article from Lisbon in May 1942 before returning to the United States. "We are divorcing liberalism from a crude individualism which was never more than one of its features," he claimed. As in Spain, Matthews saw the signs of unity and idealism missing from his earlier experience of liberalism. In war, liberals could "demonstrate again, as we did in 1918, that in a life and death struggle democracy is still the strongest political system in the modern world.'"[29] After his time in India, Matthews returned to Europe in early July 1943 to report on the Allied campaign in Sicily and Italy and continued throughout Europe for the rest of the conflict. By the end of the war in Europe, his concern had shifted to finding a way to maintain the level of unity, commitment, and idealism the democracies held in the war in their defense of their nations and liberty.

Matthews began *The Education of a Correspondent* in the summer of 1944 and finished it in the United States in June 1945. It is primarily a memoir, covering his experiences as a correspondent up to that point. But it is a warning against fascism and its origins as well as a defense of liberalism – less through logic and theory than through parable, analogy, and description. He communicates through artfully presented raw material, rather than the "logical syllogism" of *The Fruits of Fascism*. Matthews sets out to chart and describe what he calls the journey that "impelled me from an ivory tower of political ignorance and cynicism toward a conviction that the only way of life worthy of a moral, thinking man is in liberalism."[30] "If I am daring enough to put down here the educational process through which I went," he continues, "it

[28] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 331
[29] "Democracy and Dictatorship" Dispatch from Lisbon; May 20 1942; HLM Papers; SIV, B24, F1; RBML, CU.
[30] Herbert L. Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1946), p. 9

is primarily because I feel that was the normal and natural one for many other millions of misguided people like me who had to be dragged protestingly through the mill of the gods."[31]

Matthews's grounding of his argument in his own individual, particular experience, indeed, itself combats the universalizing of ideologies like Fascism. Political truth, for Matthews, does not exist. As he puts it, "Politics is an art; it is not a science … In politics, the conclusions are to a large extent matters of opinion and belief. No matter how strong one's convictions are, they are still incapable of proof."[32] And, more forcefully: "There are no valid laws; there are only beliefs."[33] But, proof or not, politics will go on. And if proof and reason are not enough to justify one ideology over another, then sentiment can help. Matthews recognizes the need for a myth for liberalism and democracy. In *Education*, he presents himself as a sort of warrior-scholar, within and without the action, present and detached from the struggles between ideologies and granting some order to a world in which reason has pushed past its limits and erupted into a great fire.

Matthews comments throughout *Education* on the human demand for adventure and capacity for violence. He presents these urges as non-political and natural at first, using largely romantic imagery. "The life that civilization imposes on us is only a veneer," he writes three pages into *Education.* "A man must go to meet his fate, wherever it may be, whenever it may come. The urge to go out and fight, to pit one's strength and wits against the forces of nature, to seek adventure, risk life and take joy in comradeship and danger—these are deep feelings."[34] He recounts how "looking back, I can see now that I was always more or less unconsciously, striving to get beyond the easy, level shore and climb the storm-covered mountains where life is

[31] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 12
[32] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 19
[33] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 28
[34] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 3

truly lived and where our struggling world makes its history."[35] This feeling, he suggests, contributed to his attraction to fascism. This was the "fundamental craving," as he put it in *Fruits*, that Fascism had exploited so well.[36] "Human nature being what it is," he continues, he felt the same rush in Abyssinia, in Spain, and during the Second World War, "like an unholy reminder of primitive forces."[37] Matthews recognized the heroic impulse as essential to human nature. But this impulse had catastrophic results in its conversion into fascism, which had channeled the impulse all too well. Matthews's liberalism, then, could not afford to ignore this impulse. Rather, it needed to provide checks against this impulse and channel it to nobler causes.

Matthews's own story, as he presents it, serves as a parable charting the perversion of this heroic impulse by fascism and its conversion into a liberalism that both better satisfied it and avoided its dangers. Matthews characterizes his time in the 1920s as marked by a general indifference to politics, notably his time on fellowship in Italy and France in 1925-6. He points to a lazy skepticism towards politics, "based on a mixture of cynicism, indifference, and shrewdness."[38] When Matthews set off for Abyssinia, he was in his own words "content to be a mere spectator, to applaud success because it was success, and to refrain from any moral judgment."[39] He mutes his previous articulation of his sympathies for fascism in Ethiopia, while conceding that the "mock heroics of Italian Fascism had vaguely appealed to me."[40] Matthews describes Holme's comment on Mussolini's sadness at an Italian soldier's death as the "most pathetic piece of mistaken characterization I have ever heard. It was the old, unhappy, and ever-recurring story of the good man believing that the evil one must think as he does, and it was too,

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[35] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 5
[36] Matthews, *The Fruits of Fascism*, p. 12
[37] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 7,8
[38] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 20
[39] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 21
[40] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 27

an unwillingness to believe in the force of evil." This characterized the liberal appeasers and those unwilling to confront the realities of fascism: "Carry Home's erroneous way of thinking into international politics and you can explain most of what has happened since 1935."[41]

Matthews presents his time in Spain, on the other hand, as a life-defining experience and the cornerstone of his education and belief in liberalism. Spain was a "melting pot" in which the "dross came out and pure gold remained. It made men ready to die gladly and proudly. It gave meaning to life; it gave courage and faith in humanity; it taught us what internationalism means, as no League of Nations or Dumbarton Oaks will ever do." In Spain men learned that they "could be brothers, that nations and frontiers, religions and races were but outer trappings, and that nothing counted, nothing was worth fighting for, but the ideal of liberty."[42] The republican taking of Teruel in February 1938 was one incident that stuck in Matthews's mind – it was "one of the greatest days of my life" – and served his purposes well. Matthews and Hemingway had the "privilege of accompanying the front-line troops in the victorious assault." Inside Teruel, they heard a group of people, and, expecting the worst, "crept close to the wall of the house and suddenly turned into the street. We were almost mobbed, but not by desperate Fascists. These were men and women who wept for joy to see us. They embraced us, shook our hands until they ached."[43] Matthews reproduces many of his descriptions of the war, with added flourishes. In Barcelona in March 1938, for example, he describes how he "and a million others saw things which Dante could not have imagined."[44] "Spain," he concludes, "was the most suitable place in the world to feel the joy in man's tragic struggle against the forces of evil."[45]

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[41] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 54
[42] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 67
[43] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 99, 105
[44] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 124, 126
[45] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 117

In the liberation of Rome in 1945, Matthews saw two forces at play. One was an organic, joyous, united feeling that stemmed from liberation from fascism and control by the German barbarians. "Rome seemed to rise from its ashes," Matthews writes, invoking the myth of rebirth. He saw "fervor, excitement, joy, a friendliness that flowed like the Tiber itself to welcome not conquerors but deliverers."[46] But there were also stories of fascism's dehumanization, for example the trial and execution of Pietro Caruso, the "hated Questor of Rome who had delivered fifty hostages to the Germans to be shot." "He was not conscious of having done wrong," Matthews notes, "and nothing could have been more typical of the moral decay induced by the totalitarian mentality than that."[47]

Matthews continued to argue, as he had in *Fruits* and against Croce, that fascism remained a threat. For Matthews, eliminating the fascist and totalitarian party, policies, and structure would not be sufficient, for "these things are only the trappings of Fascism!"[48] He insisted that "the heart of Fascism does not lie in such externals," which are only the manifestations of "deep-rooted impulses, philosophies, and historical traditions" and it was "those roots which must be torn up."[49] In this sense, "Fascism is an organic sickness of which the Fascism itself is more effect than cause."[50] The "real enemy of the twentieth century," then, was the "whole evil complex of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, desire, and aims which gave rise to Fascism and which persist until their defeat in the minds and emotions of all men."[51] But this evil complex, as we have learnt from Matthews's other works, is natural – or, at least, all men are naturally capable of entertaining and acting upon it. The myths of Mussolini and Hitler,

[46] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 465
[47] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 476
[48] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 493
[49] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 496, 497
[50] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 497
[51] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 503

Matthews writes, would if allowed to take their natural course, "live again as surely as the spirit of Napoleon rose from its ashes to create the Second French Empire and foster that Napoleonic myth which will forever be a force in France and in Europe.[52] Matthews and other writers' task was to demonstrate that Mussolini and Hitler "were the enemies of mankind in life, and so they are and will be in death. We have only begun to fight them."[53]

Matthews's journey had transformed itself into a crusade. He had been "slow to see the danger" of Fascism, "but not so slow as were some others, and I have fought it as well as the next man. The pen is not really mightier than the sword, but it is a potent weapon, nonetheless, and I shall not lay it down. Indeed, it is for us now to carry on the good fight, for the soldiers of the United Nations have done their part."[54] But in the future, "simply and brutally put," liberals would be "as entitled to use force and to fight for liberty as their opponents are to destroy them."[55] Matthews's insistence on this point, even after the war in Europe was finished, sheds light on the genesis of the Cold War. If communism becomes like fascism an "'article for export,'" Matthews as a liberal would have the right and duty to fight it.[56] He concludes that the twentieth century is "not only the century of Fascism … it is the century of totalitarianism."[57] But, this notion of liberalism's constant battle is not merely the product of a mind attuned to realities of the Second World War and threat of the Cold War. It was also fundamental to Matthews's conception of liberalism itself as well as the basis of its re-invigoration.

Matthews's theoretical defense of liberalism in *Education* is sketchy at best and borrows from a number of thinkers from Mill to Croce. His appreciation of liberalism stems largely from

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[52] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 503
[53] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 504
[54] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 504
[55] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 527
[56] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 203
[57] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 530

its lack of a claim to infallibility and its recognition of a lack of ultimate truth. He is against "categorical attitudes" and dogmatism. The liberal, Matthews is quick to point out, is "naturally anti-Communist and anti-totalitarian in every form. He must hate and fear any way of life which deprives men of freedom, even in order to raise the general well-being or distribute social and economic justice to a somewhat greater extent."[58] Matthews never elaborates on what he means by liberty or freedom, but comments that he does not expect "perfect, abstract liberty, but the nearest thing to it which modern political institutions can provide." He, rather simply, desires individual rights, freedom of speech and press, the franchise, and other typical tenets of (American) democracy. This makes Matthews "proud of being an American," and he notes that "no amount of living abroad could make me blind to the ideals for which the United Sates, in its blundering way, stands."[59] He concedes that perhaps "our fight" – both the American and liberal fight – is "one for survival only, but that is as good a thing to fight for as any, if what we wish to protect, and see survive, is liberty." Liberalism is fated to exist in a constant battle. But this conclusion, Matthews stresses, is "not pessimism." Rather, "it is a recognition of the fact that the history of humanity is nearer to tragedy than to happiness." Transcendence is impossible, ideals unachievable. Given this recognition, "political virtue" was to consist in a "struggle upwards toward the light and air of liberty, a struggle which humanity can never lose."[60]

Liberty thus becomes the ideal in a world where ideals are unachievable – it is in this sense *by definition a myth*. But for this very reason it cannot die. Drawing on Croce, Matthews claims that "liberty is not a fact but a process, not a possession but a conquest, a victory which one must go on fighting to maintain."[61] It is "an absolute which no empirical process can destroy

[58] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 531
[59] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 531, 532
[60] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 532
[61] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, pp. 532, 533

… 'liberty' lives on as an idea and aspiration."[62] This recognition of fallibility and the limits of idealism, then, is not a call to despair but to action – an active and indeed heroic response to a recognition of a tragic world and the human capacity for destruction. This was how the heroic impulse could be satisfied while remaining consistent with liberalism – through recognition of fallibility and dedication to a perhaps unachievable ideal of liberty. The new heroism would stem from recognizing and accepting these limits and, instead of falling into pessimism, taking them in stride and battling on against the Hydra of totalitarianism.

"The years have been strengthening in me an innate tendency to accept inevitabilities," Matthews writes in summary of his thought's development, "and try to make the best of them. That may not be a policy of courage or idealism, but perhaps it is a step toward wisdom."[63] He describes his position as a sort of "anti-Romanticism and anti-Illuminism," a form of "neo-Classicism and neo-Rationalism, which surely is the only direction that offers hope in a world that has run amuck, after its long, disastrous journey from the days when 'Nature,' 'Science,' 'Reason,' and 'Progress' started humanity on the road that was to lead to Fascism, Nazism, and Communism."[64] Matthews's description here is remarkably similar to a passage from *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which Nietzsche introduces his conception of tragic insight and its relation to art:

But science, spurred by its powerful illusion, speeds irresistibly towards its limits where its optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, suffers shipwreck … When they see to their horror how logic coils up at these boundaries and finally bites its own tail—suddenly the new form of insight break through, tragic insight which, merely to be endured, needs art as a protection and remedy.[65]

Having lived and thought through the shipwreck, Matthews recognized the political equivalent of this tragic insight and set out, through art, to create a necessary illusion of a mature heroism for a

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[62] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 527
[63] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 206
[64] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 533
[65] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 97, 98

liberalism aware of its limits. As Nietzsche put it in *The Birth of Tragedy*, we can only achieve "our highest significance as works of art."[66]

The possibly unsettling take-away from Matthews's conclusions is that, for him, the best source of unity was the be found in opposition. The Italians had been united against the depression when he went to Rome in 1932, the republicans and internationals united against fascism in Spain, democrats and communists united against fascism during the war, and the new liberals were to be united against totalitarianism in the wake of the Second World War. More than just entailing the breakdown of ideals of liberal cooperation, this conclusion entails the realization that to a certain degree even the cooperation he had seen in Spain stemmed less from a dedication to "liberty" than from an opposition to fascism. Liberty may have been a uniting force, but the unity had its roots in opposition. Indeed, Matthews in the Spanish Civil War defined liberty for the most part simply as the antithesis to fascism, just as his most compelling discussions of the merits of liberalism come not from of a discussion of liberalism *per se* but rather of liberalism as opposed to fascism. Liberalism did not claim infallibility, it would not end, like fascism and Icarus, in tragedy. Equally, the liberal hero was not heroic because of an idealistic dedication to liberalism so much as a Sisyphean dedication to battle against liberalism's ever-shifting enemies. For Matthews, given his views of human nature, there would always be enemies, and herein would lie the source of liberalism's sustenance. Matthews recognized and felt the necessity of providing an accompanying myth of heroism, of inserting shades of a mythical modernity into a world-view better captured by classical tragedy.

[66] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 52

Conclusion: A Fool, a Fugitive, and a Hero

Herbert Matthews had indeed proved himself a fool, a fugitive, and a hero. Drawn in by the lure of fascism's illusions and propaganda, he trumpeted the Italian invasion of Ethiopia as a great, epoch-defining success and did so in Italian fascism's own, epic terms. Years later, after Italy declared war on the United States, the same Italians imprisoned a Matthews who by then, having undergone his conversion in Spain, was vehemently anti-fascist. He fled to report on the politics of India between 1942 and 1943. Armed with a pen (and typewriter), he had found himself a hero amidst the shelling of Madrid and Barcelona, in the republican taking of Teruel, and again during the Allied redemption of Rome.

As he passed from playing the fool, to the fugitive, to the hero, Matthews also revised his conception of heroism. As a child his model had been Richard Harding Davis's soldiers of fortune, then it was the doughboy and poilu of the First World War, and before long the Italian forces in Ethiopia. But while his reference point during the Ethiopian conflict was Odysseus sneaking up on the Trojans in the *Iliad*, his heroes took on an increasingly tragic hue from his time in Spain on. Now they were women lining up at a butcher's shop in Madrid, just after a pilot had strafed the same spot with a machine gun. They were the lines of refugees streaming out of a forsaken Barcelona, or the Spanish republicans maintaining traditions of democracy and liberalism in the dungeon of a Castle in Figueres, despite their impending defeat.

Matthews's reference point by the end of the Second World War was Odysseus again, but now in the bluer hue of the *Odyssey*. Like Odysseus, the liberal hero of the interwar period perhaps found himself adrift in a wide world after a great victory, had tasted the lotus of appeasement or been tempted by sirens of fascism or communism, but in the end was dedicated enough to an ideal of a liberal home. Matthews too, though he had no taste for appeasement, had

been tempted by the sirens of fascism. Later, unlike many of his fellow-liberals, he saw the necessity of listening to their songs. Having listened, he could better understand and recognize their shrieks. Unlike Odysseus, the liberal hero had not been lost at sea but engulfed in a great fire. He emerged, re-born not as a new, ideal man, but as a hardened survivor, aware of the limits of human nature and his capacity for destruction.

Yet his – both the liberal hero's and Matthews's – odyssey was not over. In a sense, it could not be. The crusade for liberty, a perhaps unachievable ideal, could never end, despite its transitory victory at the end of World War II. Liberty is a notoriously difficult term to define, and Matthews was no expert philosopher. But its very flexibility makes it a useful tool for Matthews who, recognizing its appeal, builds and fills in a foundation for its myth. In the future, the liberal would have to "avoid both the Scylla of Communism and Charybdis of Fascism."[1] At the end of *The Education of a Correspondent*, Matthews's model is Tennyson's Odysseus—older, battle-hardened, recognizing the inevitability of death, but eager for more, for a new journey and a new adventure, responding to an utterly human impulse:

> *I cannot rest from travel: I will drink*
> *Life to the lees: all times I have enjoy'd*
> *Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those*
> *That loved me, and alone …*
> *How dull it is to pause, to make end,*
> *To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!*

Indeed, this vigor and taste for adventure, if channeled appropriately, would be necessary for the maintenance of a liberalism that, however resilient, rested on a pillar of fallibility. But action requires intention or motivation, both of which require access to information. And, in general, the better and more inspiring the information, the better the response. As Matthews goes on to say, "A Newspaperman is the soldier of fortune, the Ulysses of this poem who yearns"

[1] Herbert L. Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1946), p. 530

> *To follow knowledge, like a sinking star*
> *Beyond the utmost bound of human thought*.[2]

Matthews is primarily talking about himself when he introduces Tennyson's poem, but it also applies to the liberalism emerging from the Second World War. I would suggest that the last lines of Tennyson's poem, which Matthews does not quote, capture and distill his conception and propagation of the myth of the liberal hero:

> We are not now that strength which in old days
> Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
> One equal temper of heroic hearts,
> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

[2] Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent*, p. 537

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