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The Janusian Impulse: The Substance of Intellectual Duality
Shared by Both the Italian Renaissance Mentality and the Outlook of Italian Fascism

Perry M. Ward

Usually, historians have interpreted Italian Fascism as a phenomenon that was discontinuous with the rest of Italian history. If historians do concede that there was a logical precedent for Fascism in Italian history, they often point to aspects of the Roman Empire that seemed to inspire Fascism. Perhaps the very distance in chronological time between ancient Rome and the twentieth century, has contributed to the notion of Fascism’s aloofness from the rest of Italian History. Undoubtedly, the shadow of Rome cast its weight on the shoulders of the Fascist movement. However, historians have long ignored other elements of Italian history which contributed perhaps as much, if not more, to the genesis of Fascism. For example, would it not seem logical, that if the Fascist movement perceived itself to be the third great incarnation of “Italian” civilization, that its inspiration was drawn from impulses of not only the first, but the second birth of Italian greatness? Moreover, it can be logically surmised that a historically conscious and opportunistic movement such as Fascism, would recognize the blueprint previously established by the Renaissance for reviving the grandeur of Rome. For the sake of understanding the historical basis for Fascism within Italian history, perhaps it is the phenomenon of Renaissance thought which provides the best basis for comparative analysis.

In a letter to the classical scholar and writer Giovanni Boccaccio—whose works would one day inspire authors such as Chaucer and Shakespeare—Francesco Petrarca, the Father of Humanism, emphasized that from the Italy of old, something new
would arise. Likewise, about 550 years later in the diary of a squadrista, Mario Piazzesi recorded a conversation with his father. His father explained to him “a new Italy has been forming...after a period of uncertainty...for having overcome the age-old awe of the foreigner who for centuries was able to roam at will pillaging our country.” This conversation between a father and son regarding the birth of a new Italy was ironic because Petrarch himself likened the renewal of Italy to the relationship between a father and son; and explained that while the son was not a carbon copy of the father, the son did embody the same “air” as his father before him. Also while conversely, some historians have interpreted Fascism as a phenomenon with an antiquarian interest in the past, eminent specialists such as Roger Griffin, have suggested that if there did exist an intellectual minimum within the nucleus of a generic fascism, it radiated from the concept of palingenesis within a mythic core.

The idea of palingenesis, achieving a rebirth or renewal, is one of the key linking impulses between Renaissance and Fascist thought. More than half of a century before the advent of Fascism, the presence of an irresistible impulse toward rebirth within his historical inquiries, led the legendary Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt to thus define the Italian epoch roughly between 1350 A.D. and 1500 A.D. as the “Renaissance.” Burckhardt’s work illustrated that historical forces affected intellectual change during this era. As Rome lay in shambles during the 1300’s, the Founder of Humanism, Petrarch, wrote a letter to the long departed Roman Consul, philosopher, and orator, Marcus Tullius Cicero, in which he explained to the Roman paragon that if he were still alive to see what had become of

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Italian civilization, his “tears would run down.”⁵ Over one hundred years later in a 1492 letter to his son Cardinal Giovanni, Lorenzo the Magnificent, the most prominent statesman of the Late Italian Renaissance, still referred to Rome as the “sink of all iniquities.”⁶ The same concerns arose again almost half a millennium later. The vaunted Italian poet Gabrielle D’Annunzio both echoed Lorenzo, and anticipated Fascist sentiments, in 1920’s Constitution of Fiume, when he stated that the government of Fiume must be based on a “spirit of new life” which could serve as a harbinger of renewal for the again troubled Italian nation.⁷ Margherita Sarfatti, the Duce’s intellectually influential Jewish mistress, echoed D’Annunzio in an article which demanded the revival of Rome that she associated with a recovery of strength and energy.⁸ The ideas that the intellectual elites of both Renaissance and Fascist Italy emerged during times of extreme privation on the Italian Peninsula, and consequently focused on past glory in an attempt to revive Italian civilization.

One of the best places to pinpoint the spirit of palingenesis within Renaissance thought is the poetry of Michelangelo. The poems are filled with palingenetic imagery. His metaphorical use of fire is especially pertinent to a comparative analysis with Italian Fascism. The idea of equating the destructive elements of fire as a creative genesis was similar to the Fascist understanding of destruction as a creative act, which was inherited by Fascism more directly from the influence of Georges Sorel, the most influential spokesman for syndicalism, and Filippo Marinetti, the prime contributor to Fascist ultra-modernism. In the poem Were one allowed to kill himself right here, Michelangelo mused over the human soul’s

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⁷ Griffin, ed., Fascism, 36-37.

yearning to rise like the phoenix in a fiery solar resurrection, only to inevitably recognize its inability to do so. Michelangelo goes on to equate fire with life and wrote in *I weep, I burn-burn up!*—*my heart thereby* that “he who lives on death is meant never to die.” While it may be difficult for twenty-first century historians to draw the relation between mentalities associated with love and war, this connection would have made perfect sense to the Fascists. Michelangelo’s passages seem analogous to the Fascist dystopian view of life, which viewed war as an act of renewal, and a sign of vitality. In a letter to the Duce in 1923, Marinetti employed futuristic rhetoric to elaborate his idea that war was the “sole hygiene of the world.” The importance of the Fascist understanding of the creative properties of destruction cannot be overemphasized. In perhaps the definitive explanation of exactly what Fascism was, the Duce and the prominent Fascist philosopher Giovanni Gentile, penned *The Foundations and Doctrine of Fascism* in 1932. Throughout the text the idea of both spiritual and physical struggle was ever-present, as the Duce argued that war was directly linked to a nation’s vitality. But perhaps most explanatory, the text read that “through death itself, can be achieved that purely spiritual existence in which his value as a man consists.” This emphasized the differentiation between Fascism and more materially motivated systems like socialism and democracy; Fascist thought was spiritual and perceived to be above material concerns.

The belief that the past was a blueprint to present and future renewal, preoccupied both Humanist and Fascist minds. In a letter to Tomasso da Messina, Petrarch explained his belief in the importance of traversing “old roads”, yet he also felt that “it does not immediately follow that we should linger on it

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10 Ibid., 59.


12 Ibid., 47.
forever." This exemplified the reawakening element of
palingenesis and the political opportunism that would later
classify the Fascist Regime as well. In another letter to
Cicero, Petrarch found points of critique for his literary hero. Petrarch seems to have been aware that while the greatness of the
ancients could serve as a guide to reinvigorating, sycophantic
imitation would not provide the necessary stimulus to revive
Italian civilization.

Both Renaissance and Fascist ideology looked to the past
without antiquarian interest, rather the movements searched to
find the genius of the ancients only to harness their wisdom in a
new historical epoch. Perhaps somewhat unfairly, many historians
have argued that Petrarch was more Medieval than modern in the
respect that he preferred the contemplative life, over one of
action. Yet ultimately, the historical record indicates that
Petrarch and the other Humanists rejected the contemplative life
in favor of an active one. In a letter to Charles IV, the king
of France who is also known to history as “the Fair”, Petrarch
blatantly asked the monarch why he wasted his time in “mere
consultation” rather than actively initiating policy. Later, in
correspondence to Lorenzo Lippi, Ficino defined divinity as the
“harmony of thought, word, and deed”, implying that intellectual
pursuits were without merit unless they guided action. Similarly, one of the Renaissance’s most profound philosophers,
Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, also stressed that actuality was a
higher level of existence than potentiality.

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13 Robinson, ed., Petrarch, 221.
14 Ibid., 250.
15 Charles G. Nauert, Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe, (New York: Cambridge
17 Marsilio Ficino, Meditations on the Soul: Selected Letters, trans. Members of the
Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London (Rochester: Inner
18 Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, Commentary on a Poem of Platonic Love, trans. Douglas
Upon a surface analysis, Fascism has often been interpreted as a strange cluster of incompatible ideas. Additionally, while historians often extract the most positive elements of the Italian Renaissance mentality to justify the subsequent developments of modernity, the contradictory impulses within Renaissance thought have often been ignored. Yet in fact, prominent Humanists actually praised the possession of dual properties. Throughout Lorenzo Valla’s In Praise of St. Thomas Aquinas, the exposer of the spurious nature of the Donation of Constantine, showed a favorable bias toward a dual nature. To praise Aquinas, Valla emphasized the double meaning of the name “Thomas”, and said that the name was synonymous with the word “twin”. Valla also emphasized that Aquinas was a twin giant in philosophy and theology, and employed more dual imagery to saying that it would be appropriate for Aquinas to be playing the cymbals in heaven’s chorus. Both Italian Renaissance thought and Italian Fascism were movements of intellectual duality, which assumed a disproportionate number of opposing positions within their ideologies. This may serve not as an impediment, but as a vehicle, to a better understanding of a similar substance possessed by both mentalities.

Within this framework of understanding, it is appropriate that perhaps the indispensable ingredient of both mentalities should be illuminated. There was a disproportionate number of inconsistencies within both Renaissance thought and Fascist theory. This has led historians to debate whether the Renaissance was either the first step to ending, or continuing the economic, religious, political, and social advantages and advances associated with the Middle Ages. Meanwhile, the nature of Fascism has led many historians to blast the possibility that it was even a coherent ideology, in favor of an interpretation of Fascism as a purely opportunistic phenomenon inculcated through primitive impulses.

20 Ibid., 26.
One aspect of the dual nature of both Renaissance and Fascist thought can be seen in both systems’ gender conceptions. As history continues to surge forward, the Renaissance consequently seems less and less modern, while many historians would still continue to assert that the Renaissance was the genesis of modernity. However, women’s place in society improved little, if any, from its Medieval condition, during the Renaissance in Italy. Women were still terrorized by various antiquarian notions and often powerless to combat them; like the herbal healer Giovanna El Toso who was accused of being a seductress by the Magistrates of Florence in 1427, and was consequently beheaded. Yet, some women in the Italian Renaissance also began to work within the system for greater agency. For example, the female Humanist, Laura Cereta, stood up to the antiquated notions of many of the male Humanists, and wrote a protest defending the appropriateness of women pursuing classical scholarship. These examples are indicative of a rich historical record which reads; that while the official place of women did not change during the Renaissance, there was certainly a change in mentality which occurred, as has been demonstrated by the historian Margaret L. King in her synthesis of Renaissance gender history Women of the Renaissance.

Gender perceptions within Fascist Italy were also often of a dual nature. In The Platform of the Fasci di Combattimento of 1919, the Fascists called for the extension of universal suffrage, including the right to vote for women. But, once the movement obtained political power, the position of women was altered. In many ways, Fascism’s attempt to create a new classless civilization was consistent with its early attempts to breakdown gender barriers, however its attempts to relegate women to domestic child bearing ultimately failed to level gender relations.

22 Ibid., 29.
23 Schnapp, ed., Primer of Italian Fascism, 5.
The relationship between Renaissance/Fascist thought and the Roman Catholic Religion was also of an extremely dual nature. In 1489, within a letter to the Florentine ambassador at Rome, Lorenzo de Medici, praised the works of Pico, despite that they were being labeled “not holy”.

Yet, only three years later, Lorenzo would write in another letter that his son Giovanni’s rise to the position of cardinal was “the highest dignity that our family has yet enjoyed,” which displayed the influence that Catholicism still commanded in Italy.

While perhaps verbally conforming to religious reverence, the great Renaissance neo-Platonist Marsillio Ficino offered implied criticism of the Catholic Church in a letter that emphasized that religious considerations should be for the sake of God, not the clergy.

Valla, who continued his career working for the Papacy, even after exposing the Donation of Constantine, praised many aspects of Catholicism in an essay titled In Praise of St. Thomas Aquinas. The universally celebrated sculptor, painter, and architect Michelangelo Buonarroti, critiqued many aspects of the Catholic Church in his poetry, yet simultaneously devoted many of his works to the praise of God—such as a poem entitled He Who made all there is, made every part.

Humanism’s strange blend of mentality, which teetered between reform impulses, aimed at reforming society toward the new, and conformation to traditional authoritative institutions, would not be lost on Italian Fascism.

Italian Fascism in practice sought to create a new society through the reformation of existing institutions, rather than their destruction, despite the movement’s other vicious tendencies. Just as the Renaissance mentality contributed to an impetus north of the Alps for Reformation; in Italy, it created a new blend of spirituality by combining Catholicism with neo-pagan

24 Thiem, ed., Lorenzo De’ Medici, 173.
25 Ibid., 179.
26 Ficino, Meditations on the Soul, 7.
relic worship.\textsuperscript{29} The Postulates of the Fascist Program in 1920 advocated “the seizure of all goods belonging to religious congregations and the abolition of Episcopal revenues.”\textsuperscript{30} Only one year later, The Program of the National Fascist Party, ignored the issue of Church holdings, in an about face aimed at gaining the Church’s support in the vacuum-like conditions produced by the \textit{de facto} civil war being raged between the red and the black on Italy’s streets.\textsuperscript{31} While the precipice of cordiality between Fascism and the Catholic Church was reached in 1929 with the \textit{Concordat of Rome}, various elements within Fascism ran counter to traditional Catholic doctrine in ways reminiscent of neo-paganism in the Renaissance. Therefore, a civic religion where the state was a god, that invested Benito Amilcare Mussolini as its high priest, skyrocketed during the 1930’s. But, the cult of personality surrounding the Duce was only an element of the varied new belief structure. In 1928, the “spiritual” racist philosopher, Julius Evola expressed his neo-pagan beliefs in a work titled \textit{Pagan Imperialism: Fascism Before the Euro-Christian Peril}. Evola contended that Christianity was responsible for the “dark age” with which Western civilization had been overtaken, and that it was only through neo-paganist fascism that Europe could rise again.\textsuperscript{32} While it is unlikely that neo-paganism overtook Catholicism in its capital, neo-paganism did blend with Catholicism to make a unique contribution to a civic religion. Fascist funeral services sought to link the living and the dead in a spiritual bond. During the ceremony, roll would be called, and when the slain Party member’s name was uttered, everyone there would answer in unison, “Presente!”\textsuperscript{33} These elements of spirituality within Fascism were similar in


\textsuperscript{30} Schnapp, ed., \textit{Primer of Fascism}, 8.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 10-18.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 280.

many ways to the Humanist impulses to both, in theory reform the Church within its existing institutional structure, and in practice, intermingle neo-classical paganism and Catholicism into a new synthesis.

Italian Renaissance thought and that of Italian Fascism also both possessed startling political diversity. The versatility of the Humanist mentality allowed it to take varying forms across geographic boundaries.\(^{34}\) This can be seen in the republican nature of governments in Florence and Venice, juxtaposed with the despotic tendencies of Milan and Naples, in parallel with the unique “theocratic” government in Rome; where the Renaissance popes worked more towards civic policy than religious piety.\(^{35}\)

Geographically, Fascism also morphed from region to region within Italy, and its adaptability to diverse geographic circumstances has led many historians to conclude that it is likely that a generic fascism existed in Europe, if not in other parts of the world as well. Despite the fact that Italian Fascism sought to homogenize the Italian national state, the regional flavors of the movement prevented national unanimity. These regional particularities were most acutely manifested in the ras or consuls who exerted strong provincial control over regional government in Italy and continually checked the power of the Duce himself. Perhaps the strongest example of their influence occurred in 1924 during the Matteotti Crisis, where in that year’s closing days, the ras forced the hand of Mussolini to establish a Fascist dictatorship.\(^{36}\)

Because of the complexity of the varying governmental theories in Renaissance Italy, it is beyond the scope of this work to demonstrate their congruence to Italian Fascism in practice. However, it is clear that the nature of the perpetually controversial government official, historian, and

\(^{34}\) Nauert, Humanism, 8-94.

\(^{35}\) Burckhardt, Renaissance in Italy, 7-89.

early political scientist Niccolo Machiavelli, greatly influenced Fascist policy making. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli portended the use of violence to achieve and maintain political power. Machiavelli believed that a governed people had to be either “caressed or annihilated”.\(^{37}\) Machiavelli’s writing also served as a blueprint to other fascist policies. The Fascists’ use of the extra-parliamentary *squadristi*\(^{38}\), on the offensive, to achieve power is inherent in Machiavelli’s maxim that “armed prophets succeed, while unarmed prophets fail.”\(^{39}\) After achieving power, the Duce’s use of political means to work within the Italian government’s existing institutional structure can be seen as a clear reading of Machiavelli’s maxim regarding cruelties “well” committed versus those “ill” committed. Machiavelli believed that upon achieving power, violence could be used widely as a cleansing of popular opinion, yet he also believed in the validity of traditional institutions out of respect for their lengthy existence, and believed that by decreasing the use of terror over time, a regime would be considered more benevolent by its constituency.\(^{40}\) *The Prince* also showcased maxims regarding both national sustenance and the unavoidable influence of the Catholic Church on politics in Italy. These thoughts anticipated the Fascist Regime’s Battle for Grain, and the regime’s compromises with the Catholic Church.\(^{41}\) Perhaps the connection between the impulses of Machiavellian thought and that of Fascist policy can best be sensed through an analysis of the foreign policy moves made by the Fascist Regime.

Machiavelli believed that “war and its organization and discipline, for that is the only art that is necessary to one who commands.”\(^{42}\) This was a similar conception of war as a necessary


\(^{38}\) “Action Squads”

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 50.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 62.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 67-69.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 81.
impulse of vitality, which would be actively pursued by Fascism both at home and abroad. This same feeling was echoed in early protofascist thought by a former syndicalist icon, who became a significant editor for the Fascist arts magazine Il Frontespizio, Giovanni Papini. In Il nostro impegno\textsuperscript{43} Papini emphasized that war was a sign of life, and a necessary source of national renewal which could take “shit” and turn it into a “fine stone statue”.\textsuperscript{44} In The Prince, Machiavelli also contended that by allying one’s territory to that of many weaker nations in opposition to a hegemon, it was possible to keep the hegemon in check.\textsuperscript{45} The pursuit of this theory regarding the maintenance of a regional balance of power was clearly employed by Fascist Italy in 1934 with the defense of Austria in the face of growing German encroachment. Moreover, as the historian Richard Lamb has demonstrated in Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, Italy’s often-unacknowledged opposition to Nazi Germany throughout the 1930’s was a coherent attempt to maintain a European balance of power that could be manipulated by Italy. Consequently, if Italy had not been repeatedly shunned by Britain, an alliance with Britain and France against Germany would have been preferable to Italy, as is evidenced in the Duce’s establishment of a front of The Great War’s three victorious European powers against Germany at Stresa in 1934.

In hindsight, it is not only Fascist foreign policy which seems contradictory, but also the very nature of the political apparatus itself. To interpret Fascism as a merely dictatorial, authoritarian system is an ignorance of its array of influences and often decentralized nature in practice. The superstructural fragility, and surreptitious strength of its checks, was clearly exposed when the Duce was swiftly removed from power in 1943 without a drop of bloodshed. All it took was a vote of “no confidence” by the Fascist Grand Council, and a withdrawal of the

\textsuperscript{43} “Our task”

\textsuperscript{44} Griffin, ed., Fascism, 23.

\textsuperscript{45} Machiavelli, The Prince, 38.
Duce’s ruling mandate by the Italian Monarch Vittorio Emmanuelle III to remove the constitutionally appointed and elected Premier, Mussolini. It is simplistic to ignore the influence of the King, Catholic Church, Grand Council, and ras on the government of Italy during the Fascist era. While there was no precedence for this aspect of Fascism in Renaissance Italy, this illustrates how the realities of political theory and practice in Fascist Italy have been obscured. Contrariwise, the pervasive influence of anarchic syndicalism on both the Duce and many of the other members of the Fascist braintrust has been well documented, showing a mysterious point of contact and continuity between the extreme left and extreme right on the political continuum. Additionally, the Latin cultural understanding of the term Duce itself, has been rarely grasped by readers of languages that are not Latin based. Textbooks, and surprisingly most literature produced by professional historians in English speaking countries employ the term merely as a title of political leadership. However, the term carried specific connotations. The term Duce was derived from the Latin dux, which is more accurately defined as a “guide” or “conductor”. Within this context, Fascism is more accurately comprehended both as a logical intellectual progression from anarchic syndicalism to a national syndicalism, and as a movement of a dual intellectual nature which sought the homogenization of the masses.

The culture of Renaissance Italy, associated as a byproduct of Humanist thought, demonstrated a fourth element of contact between the philosophies of the Humanists and Fascists. Much like the Fascists’ later attempt at renewal, Humanist culture was devoted to classical precedent. In 1342, Petrarch wrote a letter to Cardinal Giovanni Colonna de San Vito to defend his own frequent use of quotations while writing. He emphasized that the knowledge of historical figures further justified his arguments to his audience. In 1359 Petrarch also wrote an amusing letter

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46 Schnapp, ed., Primer of Fascsim, xv.
47 Petrarch, Letters from Petrarch, 68.
to a Venetian official named Neri Morando. He recounted how he had left a book authored by Cicero on a floor near a doorway, only to seriously injure his leg by tripping over it.\textsuperscript{48} Petrarch was convinced that he had received his just due for leaving the works of Cicero in such a lowly position. It was this tremendous respect for the classics, which Petrarch imparted to subsequent generations of Italian Renaissance Humanists, which is visible throughout the various facets of Renaissance culture. Yet, Petrarch’s devotion to the past was not as an antiquarian interest, rather it was to serve as a building block for future achievement. In 1365 Petrarch wrote a letter to one of his admirers, Boccaccio. Within the letter Petrarch praised the efforts of a young scholar named Ambrose from Ravenna who was under his tutelage. He praised the boy for not copying the classics, but concealing their influence within his own work.\textsuperscript{49} One of Western history’s most fertile minds, that of Leonardo Da Vinci, would later concur. In \textit{The Art of Painting} Da Vinci emphasized the need to study the “old masters”, however he further distinguished that the imitation of another’s greatness was analogous to being a “grandchild of nature, not a child”; meaning that the development of individual skills was predicated on learning from the masters, but that imitation diluted the inherent truth or value of the work.\textsuperscript{50}

Fascist culture was also based on this fourth impulse of looking to the past greatness of Rome to find the future. The classical influence on Italian culture during the Fascist era is well documented, and seems similar to that of Renaissance culture. What is more, it seems that the cultural icons of Fascist society were aware of a congruity between their own thought and that of their forbearers in the Renaissance. The founder of \textit{Novecento}\textsuperscript{51}, and until the late 1930’s one of Fascism’s

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 170-171.

\textsuperscript{49} Petrarch, \textit{Petrarch: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters}, 290.


\textsuperscript{51} “Twentieth Century” art
foremost playwrights, novelists, and literary critics was Massimo Bontempelli. Bontempelli was associated with the ideal of “magic realism” and in a 1926 forum on Fascist art he wrote an essay in *Critica Fascista* that stated that Italian Fascism was the inaugurating event of a “third epoch of human civilization.” In 1927 the painter Cipriano Efisio Oppo also replied to *Critica Fascista*’s forum on Fascist art by saying that “classicism had never grown old”, and he went on to cite various Renaissance artists as models for Fascist art explaining that both art forms were “new and old together like the magnificent contradiction that is the history of Italian art.” Alessandro Pavolini had risen rapidly through the Fascist Party from his early literary career and would hold the ministry of popular culture from 1939-1943, and subsequently, became party secretary of the Republican Fascist Party at Salo. In 1926 he also entered *Critica Fascista*’s forum on Italian art and noted that “ancestry stamps the art” and that the masses were at the core of the masterpieces of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, much as they would again be upon the realization of a truly Fascist civilization. While these critiques were directed specifically at Italian art works, they are relevant to the period’s conception of reality as a whole because of the artists’ conviction to both reflect and culturally construct reality in Fascist Italy.

Social mass mobilization events, and all of their twofold contradictions, perhaps serve as the definitive linkage between the Renaissance mentality and Fascism. In 1410 the merchant Gregorio Dati recorded the Florentine celebration of the feast day of St. John the Baptist. Dati explained the hierarchal organization of the event, yet also emphasized the intense mass mobilization appeal that the event engendered through the use of

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52 “Fascist Critique”


54 Ibid., 233.

55 Ibid., 212-213.
costumes, flags, and trumpets, as he described how the event reinvigorated a feeling of youth and daring in everyone present.\(^{56}\) These Renaissance mass mobilization events aimed at achieving free social intercourse between classes, and were theoretically intended to emphasize the individual’s identity by encouraging each individual to wear a unique mask.\(^{57}\) But conversely in practice, the use of dramatization, legend, and ecclesiastical appeal coupled with the hierarchal procession placement, destroyed individual consciousness, and therefore created what Burckhardt later termed a “unity of conception,” which Fascism would later seek to duplicate.\(^{58}\)

While the totalitarian nature of mass mobilization events in Renaissance Italy has often been ignored, mass mobilization events have become a major staple of the analysis of Fascist Italy. Fascism had startling mass mobilization qualities, but its appeal to violence repudiated Enlightenment principles regarding individualism and reason. Luigi Federzoni, the co-founder of the Italian Nationalist Association, discussed this mass appeal in a speech to the Chamber of Deputies in 1922 which was called *Nuove ipocrisie legalitarie*\(^{59}\). Federzoni discussed the “instinctive dynamic” within Fascism.\(^{60}\) In 1934, Fascist Party Secretary Achille Starace also addressed the issue of mobilizing the masses during his term as party secretary in a speech titled *Andare al Popolo*, in which he borrowed one of the Duce’s favorite phrases which meant “Going to the people”. Starace discussed the justification for the *Opera nazionale dopolavoro*, or roughly translated as national leisure system, as being based in the education of the masses and their physical and moral improvement.\(^{61}\) The way to mobilize the masses in Starace’s view

\(^{56}\) Crouch, ed., *Bibliobase*, 10-11.

\(^{57}\) Burckhardt, *The Renaissance in Italy*, 280-282.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 280-283.

\(^{59}\) “New constitutional hypocrisies”

\(^{60}\) Griffin, ed., *Fascism*, 41.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 71.
was reminiscent of Renaissance mobilization events through the use of "the traditions of the people...expressed in a colorful costume, the harmony of a song, or a religious procession...decked with flags."\textsuperscript{62}

In order to combat many detractors that criticized the movement, Fascist literature often expressed that the movement was ideologically based; yet in the end, the movement put its greatest emphasis on the importance of action. In the Ideal of Culture and Italy Today in 1936, Giovanni Gentile stressed the limits of idealita (ideal nature of values), but contrarily, he emphasized that this realism was not a deterrent to the pursuit of an ideal situation.\textsuperscript{63} Moreover, Antonio Aniante who was best known as the editor of Tevere,\textsuperscript{64} published an article in Critica Fascista in 1927 that stated "muscles were needed to impose poetry."\textsuperscript{65} In 1927 Margherita Sarfatti wrote that "greatness alone was a worthy pursuit" which could only be brought about by devotion to a "will to action" and an existence of constant toil, which had been previously trumpeted in protofascist passages by D'Annunzio.\textsuperscript{66}

The pursuit of excellence which dominated both Humanist and Fascist thought created a drive to create a new type of person, who would be the basis for a new civilization that reached humanity's full potential. The creative genius Leonardo Da Vinci stressed that man must pursue universal qualities.\textsuperscript{67} Pico concluded that rational and intelligent souls were more perfect than inanimate things or things of lesser intelligence.\textsuperscript{68} Burckhardt placed tremendous importance on the Humanist drive to create a l'uomo universale, and stressed that the Humanists

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{63} Schnapp, ed., 256-257.
\textsuperscript{64} "Tiber" River
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 231.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 243-250.
\textsuperscript{67} Da Vinci, \textit{Art of Painting}, 214.
\textsuperscript{68} Pico, \textit{Commentary}, 17.
believed that education was the best way to achieve that status.\textsuperscript{69} The concept of this “all-sided man” would not be lost on Fascist theorists, nor would the emphasis on education as the primary method of molding a modern “universal man.”

In Fascist Italy there was an almost immediate drive to create a new Fascist man that could fulfill and maintain the course of the revolution in the future. Sarfatti believed that a universal Fascist man reminiscent of the universal Renaissance man would bring Italian culture once again to the forefront of the globe’s stage.\textsuperscript{70} Giovanni Giurati was PNF secretary in 1931 when he delivered a speech titled \textit{I giovani e il partito}\textsuperscript{71} which emphasized the importance of indoctrinating the nation’s youth to fulfill Fascism’s course in the future.\textsuperscript{72} Much like in Renaissance Italy, it was largely through both education and physical regimen that the fulfillment of human potential in a new man was to take place. The exact character of Fascist indoctrination varied depending on the respective minister of education. Gentile, Cesare Maria DeVeechi, Pietro Fedele, and Giuseppe Bottai all stressed different elements of the process in the attempt to develop Fascist man. But it is of especial interest that Bottai defined the system under his watch as “Humanist.”\textsuperscript{73} If the Fascist educational experiment could have succeeded in the long term is obviously unknown because of the Italian defeat in the Second World War. However, information indicates that it had been very successful over the course of the previous two decades. Statistics show that as time went on and educational indoctrination accumulated, police expenditures dropped, arrests dropped, and that—unlike under most twentieth century dictatorships—physical coercion was used less and less.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{69} Burckhardt, \textit{Renaissance in Italy}, 97.
\textsuperscript{70} Schnapp, ed., 243.
\textsuperscript{71} “The youth of the party”
\textsuperscript{72} Griffin, ed., \textit{Fascism}, 67.
\textsuperscript{73} Thompson, \textit{State Control}, 118.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 36.
By 1937 seven and one half million Italian youths were members of government-sanctioned organizations. One diary entry of a young child has been deemed typical of the indoctrinal elements of Fascist education. The child records the filiopietistic ceremony, which welcomed the Duce upon his visit to a grammar school. The entry described how “The Founder of the Empire” sowed seed in the school’s humble field, and that it was only when he left, when everyone present realized he was accompanied by other officials because they had had “eyes only for Him.”

The diary passage, along with many others, indicated aspects of a powerful inculcation of the Italian youth during the Fascist era, which portended the rise of a new “Fascist” man. Yet, the fact that the children within the passage had “eyes only for him” (the Duce), perhaps also indicates the major failure of the system as well. While tremendous fidelity was given to the person of the Duce, the masses devoted little piety to the system itself. Consequently, this major shortcoming of the system precipitated the humbling of Italy in the Second World War, and the collapse of Fascism in its place of origin.

Both Italian Renaissance thought and Italian Fascism possessed a startling similar ideological structure. Both were movements of intellectual duality primarily aimed at the palingensis of Latin civilization to actualize humanity’s full potential. This runs counter to many of the common perceptions associated with both phenomena. The exposure of a relationship between the two phenomena flies in the face of the common interpretation of Italian Fascism as a movement without clear precedent in Italian history, and also as a movement that sought to overturn the ideas of modernity, which may have been first detectable in the Italian Renaissance. Many elements of Italian Humanist thought anticipated ideas contained within Fascist doctrine. The Fascists perceived themselves to be at the nexus of a third great incarnation of “Italian” civilization. It

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75 Ibid., 114.
76 Ibid., 111-112.
logically followed, that beyond a congruence of deliberation between the doctrine of Fascism and Renaissance thought, on at least a subconscious level, the Italian Fascist *Intellectuales*\(^{77}\) recognized a path to the renewal of Latin greatness in the precedent already illuminated by Italian Renaissance thought.

\(^{77}\)“Intellectuals”
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