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The Struggle For Modernity, Nationalism, Futurism and Fascism

Emilio Gentile

Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003

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Once upon a time an editor took me to task for too many isms in my text. Well. He should have read *The Struggle For Modernity* and yet Gentile presents a clear and understandable narrative of how fascism came to Italy. Taking several previously essays, Gentile provides a clear thesis. "Fascism was the only completely new type of revolutionary movement of the twentieth century." (Page 2). The fascist looked backward toward a pastoral, myth of peasant society and forward toward a future of technological innovation that celebrated tough-mindedness and rejected the sentimental softness of representative democracy.

And for Italy, Benito Mussolini was the man. An ideological opportunist, he grafted various elements of Italian fascism together. And after his brutal friendship with Hitler, he added racism and a purge of the Jews which was never as dedicated as Hitler's efforts at ethnic cleaning. Mussolini up to a point understood his countrymen. He knew drama and myth and how to attack weaker nations but when he joined Hitler's vision, he was destined for defeat.

Gentile provides a good working definition of myth," a set of beliefs and ideas, ideals, and

values which are condensed in a symbolic image that is capable of mobilizing the individuals as well as the masses because it stirs up faith, enthusiasm, and action. (Page 2) There was neither formal logic to Italian fascism nor historical rationalism. In fact, fascists enjoyed thinking with their blood, a sticky situation at best.

This book is a solid introduction to a very important topic. While Mussolini's brand has slipped into the dustbin of history—modern life carries with it the ideological virus that explode in to a true sickness. The current war on terror has real potential in that regard. The issues are the abuses of myth and the concept that modern men are totally free to create what they will by force and violence —the myth told them so.

The author of a first rate history of fascism, Stanley G. Payne wrote an informative introduction to this book. Unfortunately, the book does not include the following item which is must reading for any student of fascism, Italian or German. Jeffery Herf, *Reactionary Modernism, Technology, Culture, And Politics in the Weimar and the Third Reich* (1984) is the book and it is a classic. *The Struggle For Modernity* comes to that status and that is high praise indeed.

All in all, this book is informative. Readers of the QJI will find much to think about.