Borgese MS

~~Grid polarized~~ Cop

1

Antinomies extended

Says Kant: they are due to deficiency of reason which cannot understand them in their true significance

Hegel: it is the nature of reason. These contrad. are inherent in the being of things – it is only absolute reason which can perceive them & show them as parts of a whole

Thought is essentially an action NOT a photographic plate – categories grid polarized

like the artist – it tends to make, create universal significance out of particr. experiences – it is reflective.

Then – reflection involves always the I who thinks. When there is thought there is personality

But since everything in the world reveals thought or affinity to thought, there comes up the idea of the Universal I.

It is a very diff. kind of metaphysics

Man is Consciousness of Self

He says I. — But not in contemplation, in absorption — at that point he is object — not whole man

Desire makes him say I

Wants the not-I — Disquiet — Action

Animal desire is sentiment of self — it wants material absorption & annihilation — for the pure preservation of the I

All action is negating

The I that is brought up by Desire is empty, is filled only by the negative negating action.

It will be empty, without Consciousness so long as Desire is natural

Man = non-natural Desire

negation that knows itself as negating

It will go from one thing to another with a certain Copre — becoming

There must be other men. I want what the other man wants, or I want to be wanted, or I want the other

man to recognize that I have what he wants - Consc. of itself

I want something that has value for the other

Hence fight - risk

The consciousness becomes true through risk & conquest, it becomes what it is through the actual drama of that conq.

I have to impose the recognition - myself as strong, or entitled, etc

If both die - finish

If both live, and go on being different, they build up the personality of two unequals

Master & slave

"To speak of the origin of the consciousness, is to speak of of the dependance or autonomy of the Consc. of self - of mastery or of servitude"

And "if man is nothing except his becoming in time", if his being is his being in time, if this reveals human reality is also universal History,

~~Thought is active~~
then it will be the history of the interaction of Mastery & Servitude

There is no consciousness, no human reality without recognition
Otherwise schizophrenia

Recognition is imposed
and only if I do not kill but impose my way. I suppress the other, but so that he lives & knows himself suppressed
He tried out and not take death
— a potential Master has become an effective slave. He has been suppressed in what he was really not, preserved in what he is, & has been made to be, really.
This is dialectical suppression
If the slave did not call you master, you wouldn't know
Consc. for itself
But now — that Action is largely delegated —

slave becomes master of Nature to serve — (6
he creates a world for his master — work makes up time
slave becomes master of master
etc.

But this time, he has imposed recognition on somebody that is able to recognize — he wants that recognition of one whom he looks up to

Human society is established

Ex — slave has realized that this is the rigid state condition but an interplay. He is the man of change, transcendence, transformation, education. He wants to go beyond himself — he has been able to reflect

The action on nature is performed by the slave.
He works - you enjoy
He cook - you eat

I am brought back to Desire of things, of relation without consciousness. My consc. for itself becomes what is not yet consc. of itself. He had challenged a non-natural thing - another Desire - now he is back to nat.

If the slave is my thing, I am again surrounded by things - like an animal

Whereas he is treated as a thing but knows himself not to be. He recognizes & is not recognized. Corpse in armor

Master is in an existential impasse. Because he needs to be recognized, so there ought be somebody to do so

Hence - Master has destroyed the consciousness for itself for which he strove

Showdown on Dante

by Junius

G. A. Borgese's Goliath has been called by many reviewers a world-event in literature. We feel it should be kept in the arena of discussion, not only as an important book, but as something more than a book: a testimonial and an act of faith by one of the master minds of Italian letters, now breaking silence after seven years of self-imposed exile and meditation in this country. Coming in the wake of Silone's novels, it does what the class ruling at present in Italy, with fifteen years of clamorous running after prestige, was not able to achieve: it puts Italy most definitely

(1) Goliath - The march of fascism - New York, Viking Press 1937

somewhere on the map.

But where? Silone's readers, thinking of the gentle dumb folk of Fontamara, may wonder whether Borges speaks of the same people. By realizing that ? ~~[illegible]~~ a nation does contain two such realities in one, they will achieve a vision in depth. Both men are equally truthful. Only, Borges has set out to describe the class that makes? merde history, ~~and~~ Silone the class that endures it. Together, the two writers carry a terrible lesson, and give some essential bearings in the dark seas of modern history.

A special thanks is due Borges for leaving aside the economic factor. He has accepted to make the explanation less comprehensive that it might go deeper. There is no lack of explanations on the class line right now, ~~and~~ all of them both plausible and

insufficient. It cannot be denied that fascism is a class phenomenon; it is, in a way, a revolution, and also, in a way, the rise of a democracy. A peculiar and most significant one: we refer any one who may doubt this to the works of such independent authorities as Hermann Finer and Max Ascoli. By refusing to discuss this angle Borgese lays himself open to summary condemnation. But he is also free to give us an artistic truth which is apt to outlast both explanations and condemnations.

Here at last, after the many Stendhals and Gissings and Manns, we have an Italy that lives and breathes: there are certain aspects at once familiar and recondite which make up a nation's private

identity, the correct lights and shades on regions and men and events. The whole book is an act of love: but it refuses the axiom that passions should be left blind. This is searching love that wants to know its object: and much has to fall in the process.

The myth of Rome first of all. Rome is there alive, in some pages, the real essential city and not the cheap color prints of the Wilders and Bruffaults and Blumes. Rome of the Romans, the golden city of heavy speech and stony indifference, ~~monument to~~ institution of materialistic ~~[illegible]~~ religion: "the operatic flights of stone-steps, leading to nothing, or to a friendly heaven ~~clear~~ near at hand; and the façades of the baroque churches, eloquent prefaces to nothing.... But it is not so much the easy going cynical

conformism, the Jesuit style with its "multitudes of jumping martyrs and trumpeting angels" that draw the author's fire: it is the imposing rhetoric personage of Eternal Rome, which in Italian minds is wellnigh indistinguishable from reality: a "necromantic obsession" which kept the Italians for so many centuries, while the whole world they had opened up was being bagged by others, "staring, in a kind of lofty idiocy, at columns, arches, porches, and the statues of some bull-faced and fat-breasted emperors of yore".

After Rome, her leader. A formidable idol to-day, and of expensive build-up. But much can be achieved by simply portraying him against the coarse provincial background which ~~was~~ really ~~in the actual sense~~ did build up his

now famed realism: "the taverns and cafés, teeming with drinkers, smokers, card-players, and political orators, whose eloquence, richly spiced with surprisingly picturesque oaths, rashly solved the problems of the day" — many flourishing commonplaces, also, about his alliance with religion will be disposed of by some ethnological truths concerning his own "blood of Romagna," of which he is proud: ~~of exquisite~~: "This expression hints at the most obdurate complex of paganism that can be found in Europe. Generosity and hospitality are primitive, violence is sudden, sin is remorseless, or no sin at all".

Thus, quite naturally, the real man stands before us: beyond the many issues of his successive allegiances, the true and unreconstructed

anarch, rebel and nihilist at first, then expanding into success, mellowed and intoxicated at once by the power of the State: "The One and his own", as Stirner his master had put it. Crazy dream or commonsense? Both. This is what baffles the anglo-saxon mind.

A representative of the dark mother, Mussolini does know a certain kind of reality thoroughly. Knowing nothing else, he feels no concern in wrecking the elaborate fabric of what we would call commonsense, with its many threads of restraint, principle, manners and wise profit: any more than does the peasant in ploughing up a bed of flowers to plant his turnips.

This is the man who is now a danger to the world. For he is also endowed with that phenomenal historical intuition to which only a man from the people may attain. His power is only seemingly of the gun, but actually he has only guns enough to give his spirit a chance. By stressing the weakness of his intellectual attainments, Borges does risks to weaken his case. If the Duce represents, as most of us are driven to think, the danger of a coming age "that would make the so-called Dark Ages of the past seem as bright as sunshine", then surely the poison that he has extracted, and were it even second-hand, from the philosophies of the fin de siècle has a potency to be investigated.

This Borges acknowledges in his own way, for he searches far back for the origins of the evil. Discarding the rubber stamps of class explanations, he endeavors to ~~point out~~ locate the original mistake in the very roots of the Italian nation. Boldly, he identifies these beginnings with Dante. Here again, he may brace himself for profuse contradiction from the scholars. But we trust he will be able to meet ~~them~~ it, for there is invincible truth in his contention. The backward-looking dream has crystallized, for better for worse, six hundred years ago in a poem that Italy cannot hope to surpass. A dream. & But also more than a dream, for it possesses ~~preserves an~~ proportions of intelligence and beauty, and hence preserves an eternal reality of its own. And from that was born another phantom

reality, the Italian national idea, "which subsisted for centuries without finding ~~international~~ a body." It had what phantoms may have and poets may give: a speech and a myth. Its substance was a craving for the absolute in a political and social emptiness, an unavoidable tragic destiny."

No nationalist was Dante; his mind fixed on the one universal Empire of Christendom, (as a synthesis of small and compact city-states.) But his vision, with the driving compelling force of poesy, awakened the Italians to a new conscience of themselves and of their values. "The impulses of history drove the world, during those centuries, toward national unities; the arrow of Dante's desire fell, against his will, where those world-wide impulses bent its course. Thus Italy was born: a compromise

between the infinite and the city, ~~state~~,
between eternity and the daily news."
The genius of the Comedy is the
classic genius for unity, symmetry,
compactness of inner life: it makes
for the perfect logical and mythological
system, where history, legend, prophecy
and science of the soul are welded
into a complete structure. If we turn
to consider Dante's life, however, it may
appear a flight "unequalled in
straightness and resoluteness, from
absolute frustration in actual life to
absolute fulfilment in a dream."

Let it be so. The fact remains
that the Italian world owes
its measures and proportions, once
and for all, to Dante.

This may not be a scientific
statement. It is nonetheless true.
And Borgese's book is a consistent

effort to revise these proportions and to find some modern yardstick to measure by. This cannot be achieved by merely trotting between academic blinkers: quite naturally, the work becomes the ~~[illegible]~~ anti-Dante, the anti-Machiavelli: the last in line of the great illuministic pamphlets, a solemn burning indictment which at first conveys a deceptive impression of calm from the admirably poised English style and the sophisticated grace of its texture. "It reads like a dream", was an expert's comment. Another dream, then: and this one, too, the dream of the exile: weighed down by the inexpressible tragedy of end and frustration. But ~~this one~~ in its way also, too, a kind of absolutist dream, intended to show the logic of things not seen.

In everyday life, the double aspect in Mussolini of the imitative lowbrow opportunist and of the towering man of destiny is objectively confusing, and does actually confuse many minds: yet in the shifting frame of reference of the artist he quite naturally appears such, as the combination of both ~~of~~ the passive ignorance and the active evil which are destroying this world of men. Only art could thus transcend our very ~~relative~~ ordinary intellectual categories, and effect a presentation in which a wisdom not unworthy of Plato and an almost ~~sidereal~~ Tolstoian detachment blend inimitably with the slow caressing drawl of Sicilian hate ("Yet he knew, Ludwig knew, that the March on Rome happened to happen in a sleeping car....). No epic can be impartial; but if carries means

a valid assessment nevertheless. Here we have the epic of the struggle of the last hundred years: of men who believed and hoped, tried their best for their country and for the world, and failed. They believed in reason and sense in a world where these forces are puny and weak, and did not know how to protect them. ~~But at last they~~ They set out on the stormy ~~high~~ pirate-infested seas of history with much faith and little seamanship. But at least they nailed their tattered flag to the mast, through the sacrifice of such as Lauro de Bosis and Hans Litten, to name only two among many, and their symbol is assured to live. Life eternal is that of the spirit. This is what gives Borgese his seemingly magic protection. Even the unearthly calm

of his style becomes clear. This is a voice coming from the Elysian fields, where the immortal asphodels are still and leaves rustle no more: where the shade of mighty Achilles that was holds converse with Marcellus who might have been:

> O you who hold the wheel and look to [windward
> Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome [and tall as you.

This message, together with that of Thomas Mann, is one of the Last from the Old World which may prove acceptable to the New. It professes to be of unyielding hope: yet it contains a warning not to be ~~[illegible]~~ passed over. In fact, it is meant to convey it, for the author is not naïve. ~~[illegible]~~ ~~[illegible]~~ We should, first of all, consider ~~it~~ this as the end of a trail.

A Romantic is speaking, who will be consistently "bourgeois" and patriotic, and at no point turn off from his apology. ^ He feels he can speak for the people now: even for Silone's people for his artist's sympathy has widened the spiritual bounds of the ancien regime ruling class, and redeemed it. Those who made the nations are justified in his eyes, for they made them only that they might follow the path of justice and freedom — "singing voices in the forward-marching ranks of mankind". Let us take this at face value. We are shown the Italian mind caught in the historic struggle between its vast possibilities and its hopeless obsession, between megalomania and self-depreciation. Even from Dante and Petrarch and Machiavelli, down to the ~~World~~ ~~War, for great men~~ end of last century, her great men strove to give Italy a European reality. By extracting the good from each of them, and the

new understanding brought by each successive age, we watch the harmonious outline of a nation being reared up, as "when Ilion like a dream rose into towers."

A dream again? We fear so. ~~Yet~~ more than historical reality, this is the artist's magic. While still admitting that truth of the spirit, we may well ask of what stuff was the structure made, that the well-tuned trumpet of the anti-god should have transmuted it into what we now see.

A dream it was. The Italian nation is a creation of the intellect: up to the war, its constructive process was determined, more than by the pressure of practical wisdom, by the trend of the main ideologies. It may be symbolized in a contrast between Manzoni, the wise absentee

gentleman, and Mazzini the ever-
present fanatic. Manzoni, plus
Gioberti and all the rest, failed
to provide the bourgeoisie with the
great intellectual personality
that was needed. Cavour's states=
manship found no ~~the~~ ground for
future growth: the leadership was
left to Mazzini's visionary faith,
to Carducci's muddle-headed ~~and~~
~~the~~ if well-meaning civic poetry.
In short, to ideas and images. Now,
ideas and images can be grabbed
by whoever comes along. ~~That was~~
Hence, suddenly, D'Annunzio's all-
pervading influence. But soon Musso=
lini, the clever demagogue, turned
the tables on the intellectuals: and
now the game is out

+ "Nothing, says Borgese, not even
art, is a substitute for social life".
A wholesome truth. But was there

a vital Italian society in the post-war days? Borgese's own elastic novel, Rubé, would provide a sufficient answer. Nor is it clear that what social life there was corresponded to the deep requirements of the Italian people, as manifested many a time through the creative periods of their history. The ideal so finely expressed in these pages, an ideal matured by Europe as a whole, but mainly ultramontane Franco-British in its nineteenth-century form, did surely weld together a notable part of the Italian people. But

+ ~~did that work~~ ~~ideal~~ was this consensus of good will formed on a real working structure?

Such a crisis as the present one cannot be explained away, and the chain of causes goes far back. To trace the origins of fascism to the indelible imprint of the Counter-Reformation, to the D'Annunzian malady which seared and warped the souls of the generation which grew

up in those fateful years 1890 – 1914, is to utter an essential truth, and one too little known. ~~until now~~. Without the Church and D'Annunzio, without futurism and emotional nationalism, without the ~~betrayal~~ about-face of the bourgeoisie towards a cheap Bismarckian diversion, Fascism would never have been. But shall we infer from this that it is a local phenomenon grown to world-proportions only through a deplorable run of bad luck? It would be doing less than justice to the "arch-Catilines, the world-arsonists". Nor to the ~~sort~~ intellectual production of those decades throughout Europe, which expresses ~~nothing but~~ so variedly and ~~completely~~ intimately all the less impotence, despair, lack of direction, sense and measure ~~as~~ which both inner and social, which ~~they~~ beset sensitive minds everywhere.

It was, as Borgese calls it euphemistically, a "very delicate moment". And it was Italy's tragedy and honor to become once more a symbol: to combine ~~the~~ her national crisis with the general crisis of the spirit. After describing how easily the intellectual strongholds of Italy were razed, the author adds: "Because they were not strong at all". But how could they have been?

We do not reproach the oak on which the bolt has alighted for setting the forest on fire. Nor do we advance our cause by explaining that in really nice forests this does not happen. We would have been grateful to Borgese if he had expanded on some of the motives he touches on, and had shown us fascism as a product not only of Italy, but of the West and of our times. Why refuse the larger truth? This uncouth being, half priest,

half Caliban, is the son of our secret thoughts and of our hidden helplessness, it was not born only of rhetoric and unsound thinking, it came also of the lament of the poet and of the doubt of the philosopher, it was an inevitable answer to the smug pharisaism of professors, to the obtuse self-righteousness of moralists, to the stupidity of businessmen and the worldly wisdom of cabinets. It could dissolve any like Mr Valdemar's corpse: but it is strengthened and upheld by the insincerity and futility of its adversaries. Here is the point which concerns us, the believers in democracy, most directly. It is well to remind the world that Mussolini is a third-rate intellectual, so long as we keep in mind that he is a genius nonetheless - a man with a shrewd and ruthless knowledge of the temper of

~~and ruthless knowledge of~~ his Times. He shares with the communists the invincible feeling of being ahead of the others – the heir of all the ages. The small people now ruling throughout the "peace-loving nations" find their comfortable conventions hollowed out, their "idealism" ~~turned into a mockery~~ exposed to derision; they grasp frantically at straws and shadows, mere playthings as they are of fear and necessity. The dictator has stolen the show. "You asked for democracy, ~~surely~~ – he might well say. – Of course you do not mean the rule of the master – you mean the ample, gilt-edged democracy of Gladstonian merchant-princes and Victorian intellectuals. But I will give you democracy – as the laws of modern society make it. May I

present it to you — the grin of a capable, cold, self-seeking, tough plebeian gang. And believe me, they will stop at nothing to get <u>you</u>". That it does pay to carry on the thinking process beyond the customary taboos on money, behaviors and principles set up by the "nice people" — of this the latter-day happenings afford us ample proof. The fascists are more proud of their technique for disrupting the enemy than of their tactics of violence. They know the divided consciences, ~~[illegible]~~ caught between freedom and property. ~~and freedom~~ They press a hidden spring, and a spirit of confusion is brought into the hearts of British statesmen. They subtly titillate the well-to-do, and ~~well-groomed author-~~ authoritative ~~[illegible]~~ old gentlemen pop up from their club chairs, bellowing about the Defence of Civilization. They stare quietly

at the Vatican, from hard nearly, and frantic encyclicals pour forth into the world against the atheistic peril. Nor do these great engineers of emotions ever need fear that the ruin they work may someday fall on them. They work from a safe angle, ~~having~~ even revolution has no fears for them, for they are all at once, conservatives and revolutionists, ~~destroyers~~ wreckers and builders. They are as natural as the microbe, the enzyme, the parasite. They have life itself on their trusted material — Life with its little hopes and great fears, with its Legionaires and politicians, its homely vulgarities and fake spritive asceticism ~~which~~ as ~~is~~ a foundation for any kind of obedience: loud, silly, improvident, penny-wise, patient, cynical, senseless life. The kind of life that priests and dictators know and love. For those, on the other hand, who have accepted

fascism, a short cut has opened to a new Age of Innocence. Theirs the jolly brazen lie, the lowbrow flatness, the scurrilous taunt and the calm obscenity: theirs also a great sense of dedication, a certain ~~new~~ intellectual triumph, and a strange simplicity of soul, an uncouth yearning for a new birth and a new life.

Against these new-formed unities, how is a united front of civilization to be cemented? Borgese knows the full gravity of the situation, and the necessity of sacrifice. From the "mechanized, quick-as-lightning, broadcasting, sky-spanning savagery of our days", he appeals to the guardians of civilization, to the world he calls in a striking term "Britannistic": as a stoic might have appealed to the Hellenistic world as a whole against the barbarians.

But who is to guard the guardians? His innate courtesy forbids him to ask.

Clearly, at the moment of making a choice which renounces all ties of race and habit, a man has to go again over all the motives which unite our civilization in the sign of the spirit. But this means ~~at~~ ~~interpreting the message of the age,~~ putting ourselves in the guard of the strongest assurances which have reached us since there are men who think — declaring the measures of a thought laid out for worlds to come. Is it wise then to show such indulgence to the nineteenth-century versions of it? To say, for instance, that the good Carducci, the excellent De Sanctis, knew "the true value of Dante" is,

To say the least, to discourage us considerably in our efforts at understanding him – and the Italian problem as well. We cannot enter here into a discussion of philosophical foundations: nor of the very doubtful ~~Effect~~ claims that fascism ~~has to any kind of consi-~~ presents ~~duration~~ on that score. ~~But~~ All that we ~~are~~ asking for is, that ~~in~~ once we are agreed on the real ground of our troubles, we should clear our minds of cultured precon-ceptions before starting work. Borgese considers such men as Dante to be prisoners of their desire for unity and formal per-fection, which compels them to be "conformists". Now to call Dante a conformist is to ignore the ~~deep~~ essential motives

of his effort. If a perversion of his thought became the Counter-Reformatory spirit, and later fascism, it is this evil strain that we should seek to isolate. Obviously, his contemporary Eckehart, with his deep going Schauen-merei, would find more grace in the eyes of the author, and of many of us as well. But we must beg to suspend judgment. In another few thousand years, we may be able to reach a safe conclusion

The very old and startlingly actual problem of orthodoxy cannot be ~~solved by writing it off as conformism~~ dismissed so lightly. What happens to lesser men is of no concern: but to brand as conformism the desperate attempts of a Dante or a Leibniz is to ignore the ever-recurring insoluble ~~problem~~ paradox of the intellectual:

the quest for freedom within an integral order of his own creation

Our habitual ideas are crumbling because the foundations laid out could bear so much stress and no more. Surely, if we do not accept this fact and try to work out its full implications, a great and expensive opportunity will have been wasted. Proof positive has been tendered us that to be well-meaning and intelligent is not enough. Dictators have shown that it takes quite a lot of intelligence only to reach the stage where ~~we can begin to making the~~ start are made real mistakes. A conclusion which is implemented on a quite different plane by the ordeal of such prophetic spirits as D. H. Lawrence.

~~that he is bound to aim at an orthodoxy;~~
~~and that~~

The point that seems to us deserving of more attention is this: ~~Actually~~ our world is not in a state of momentary check or misfit: we are in the throes of tragedy, as the Greeks meant it, and should keep our perception attuned to that pitch. Our civilization is sick in the core, it is turning with its teeth on itself.

What had Oedipus done, except to be clever and bold? He was the self-made man, the boy who had made good. Yet the gods fastened on him, they played him like a fish into ~~and caused him to work~~ his own destruction. Not the gods of light and mercy, the ones he supplicated ~~kept in mind~~: but the gods he had ignored – the hidden laws of life. Allegories do not carry conclusive proof, but Borges's book itself rests upon an allegory,

and it points to the same moral. If ~~we~~ really we are dealing with a Goliath, let us take care that we are not Sauls masquerading as Davids.

SHOWDOWN ON DANTE

G.A.Borgese's Goliath has been called by many reviewers a world event in literature.It should be kept in the arena of discussion,not only as an important book,but as something more than a book: a testimonial and an act of faith by one of the master minds of Italian letters,now breaking silence after seven years of self-imposed exile and meditation in this country. Coming in the wake of Silone's novels,it does what the present ruling class of present in Italy,with fifteen years of clamorous running after prestige,was not able to achieve: it puts Italy most definitely somewhere on the map.

But where? Silone's readers,acquainted with the gentle dumb folk of Fontamara,may wonder whether Borgese speaks of the same people. By realizing that a nation does contain two such realities in one,they will achieve a vision in depth. Both men are equally truthful; only Borgese has set out to describe the class that made history,and Silone the class that endures it. Together the two writers provide a terrible object lesson,and give some essential bearings in the dark seas of modern history.

Special thanks are due Borgese for leaving aside the economic factor. He has chosen to make his explanation less comprehensive,that it might go deeper. Surely the economic component is a mighty one,but there is no lack of writers who will

burrow out facts and figures, explain everything by tables and graphs and leave no stone unturned in the thorny expanse of class dialectics. As John Dewey once said, an inordinate outbreak of fact-finding always points to a failure to relate social theory to problems of action. So we may rest assured that facts, so-called, will not be lacking for quite some time.

It cannot be denied that fascism is a class phenomenon. It is, in a way, a revolution and also, in a way, the rise of a democracy. (A peculiar and most significant one: we refer anyone who may doubt this to the work of such independent authorities as Max Ascoli and Herman Finer.) By refusing to discuss this angle Borgese lays himself open to summary condemnation. But at the same time he leaves himself free to give us an artistic truth which is apt to outlast both explanations and condemnations.

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churches,eloquent prefaces to nothing --" But it is not so much the easy-going,cynical conformism,the Jesuit style with its"multitudes of jumping martyrs, and trumpeting angels" that draws his fire: it is the imposing rhetorical personage of Eternal Rome,which in Italian minds is well-nigh indistinguishable from reality,a "necromantic obsession" which,for so many centuries,while the whole world they had opened up was being grabbed by others,kept the Italians "staring,in a kind of lofty idiocy,at columns,arches,porches,and the statues of some bull-faced and fat-breasted emperors of yore."

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This is the man who is now a world danger. He is also endowed with that phenomenal historical intuition which only a man of from the people may attain. His power is only seemingly of the gun; actually he has just enough guns to give his spirit a chance. By stressing the crudeness of his intellectual attainments,Borgese risks weakening his case. If the Duce represents,as most of us are driven to think,the danger of a coming age "that would make the so-called Dark Ages of the past seem as bright as sunshine",then surely the poison that Mussolini has extracted,were it even at second-hand,from the philosophies of the fin-de-siecle,has a potency which ought to be investigated.

This Borgese acknowledges in his own way,for he searches far back for the origins of the evil. Discarding the rubber-stamp of class explanations,he endeavors to locate the original mistake in the very roots of the Italian nation. Boldly,he identifies these beginnings with Dante. Here again he may well brace himself for profuse contradiction from the scholars. But we trust he will be able to meet them,for there is invincible truth in his contention. The backward-looking dream crystallized,for better

for worse,six hundred years ago in a poem that Italy cannot hope to surpass. A dream,but also more than a dream,for it has kept a hovering transcendent reality of its own; and from it was born another phantom reality: the Italian national idea,which subsisted for centuries in the void. "It had what phantoms may have and poets may give: a speech and a myth. Its substance was a craving for the absolute in a political and social emptiness,an unavoidable tragic destiny."

No nationalist was Dante; his mind was fixed on the one universal empire of Christendom. But his vision,with the driving,compelling force of poesy,awakened the Italians to a new consciousness of themselves and their values. The impulses of history drove the world,during the centuries that followed,toward national unities; the arrow of Dante's desire fell,against his will,where those world-wide impulses bent its course. "Thus Italy was born: a compromise between the infinite and a city-state,between eternity and the daily news."

The genius of the Comedy is the classic genius for unity, symmetry,compactness of inner life; it makes for the perfect logical and mythological system,wherein history,legend,prophecy and science of the soul are welded into a complete structure, closed and absolute. If we turn to consider Dante's life ~~and times~~ against the background of his times,it appears a flight " unequalled in straightness and resoluteness,from absolute frustration in actual life to absolute fulfillment in a dream."

Let it be so. Actually, the proportions of the Italian world were given once and for all by Dante. This may not be a scientific statement; it is nonetheless true. And Borgese's book is a consistent effort to revise these proportions and to find some modern yardstick to measure by. This cannot be achieved by trotting between academic blinkers. Quite naturally Borgese's work becomes the anti-Dante, the anti-Machiavelli, the last in line of the great illuministic pamphlets, a solemn burning indictment, which at first may convey a delusive impression of calm through its admirably poised English style and the sophisticated grace of its texture. "It reads like a dream," was an expert's comment. A dream, again, and this one, too, the dream of the exile, weighed down by the inexpressible tragedy of end and frustration. But this one, too, a kind of absolutist dream, intended to show the logic of things not seen. In everyday life Mussolini's double aspect of lowbrow opportunist and towering man of destiny, is objectively confusing and does actually confuse many minds; yet in the shifting fram of reference of the artist he quite naturally appears
the combination of the passive ignorance and the active evil which are destroying this world of men. Only art, then, could transcend our very relative intellectual categories and effect a presentation in which a wisdom not unworthy of Plato and an almost sidereal detachment can blend inimitably with the slow, caressing drawl of Sicilian hate. ("Yet he knew, Ludwig knew, that the March on Rome happened to happen in a sleeping car...")

No epic can be impartial; but it carries, nevertheless, a valid

assessment. Here we have the epic of the struggle of the last hundred years.of men who believed and hoped,tried their best for their country and for the world,and failed. They believed in reason and sense in a world where these forces are puny and weak and where their champions did not know how to protect them. They set out on the stormy,pirate-infested seas of history with much faith and little seamanship. But at least they nailed their tattered flag to the mast through the sacrifice of such men as Lauro de Bosis and Hans Litten (to name only two among many),and their symbol is assured of lastingness. Life eternal is that of the spirit. This is what gives Borgese his seemingly magic protection. Even the unearthly calm of his style becomes clear: a voice coming from the Elysian fields,where the immortal asphodels are still and leaves rustle no more,where the shade of mightly Achilles that was,holds converse with Marcellus who might have been.

> O you who hold the wheel and look to windward
> Consider Phlebas,who was once handsome and tall as you.

This message,together with that of Thomas Mann,is one of the last from the Old World which may prove intelligible to the New. It professes to be of unyielding hope,yet it contains a warning not to be passed over; in fact,it intends to convey this warning, for the author is not naive. We should,first of all,consider this as the end of a trail. A Romantic is speaking,one who will be consistently"bourgeois"and patriotic and at no point turn off from apologia into apology. Those who made the nations are justified in his eyes,for they made them only that they might follow the path of justice and freedom: "singing voices in the forward-

marching ranks of mankind." Let us take it at face value. We are shown the Italian mind caught in the historic struggle between its vast possibilities and its hopeless obsession, between megalomania and self-depreciation. From Dante and Petrarch and Machiavelli down to the end of the last century, Italy's great men have striven to give her a European reality. Formed of the good that was to be extracted from each of them and of the new understanding brought by each successive age, in Borgese's book we see the harmonious outline of a nation being reared up, even as "when Ilion like a dream rose into towers." A dream -- again? We fear so. More than historical reality, this is the artist's magic. While still admitting that truth is of the spirit, we may ask what stuff the structure was made of, that the well-tuned trumpet of the anti-god should have transmuted it into what we now see.

A dream it was. The Italian nation is a creation of the intellect: up to the war, its constructive process was determined, more than by the pressure of practical wisdom, by the trend of the main ideologies. It may be symbolized in a contrast between Manzoni, the wise absentee gentleman, and Mazzini, the ever-present fanatic. Manzoni, plus Gioberti and all the rest, failed to provide the bourgeoisie with the great intellectual perosnality that was needed. Cavour's statesmanship found no ground for future growth, was not developed for lack of a competent class. The leadership was left to Mazzini's visionary faith, to Carducci's muddle-headed if well-meaning civic poetry; in short, to ideas and images. Now ideas and images can be grabbed

by whoever comes along. Hence,suddenly,D'Annunzio's all-pervading influence. But soon Mussolini,the clever demagogue,turned the tables on the intellectuals; and now the game is up.

"Nothing," says Borgese,"not even art,is a substitute for social life." A wholesome truth. But was there a vital Italian society in the post-war days? Borgese's classic novel,Rubé,would provide a sufficient answer. Nor is it clear that what social life there was corresponded to the deep requirements of the Italian people,as manifested many a time through the creative periods of their history. The ideal so finely expressed in these pages,an ideal matured by Europe as a whole,but mainly Franco-British in its nineteenth-century form,did surely weld together a notable part of the people. But was this consensus of good will founded on a real working structure?

Such a crisis as the present one cannot be explained away,and the chain of causes goes far back. To trace the origins of Fascism to the indelible imprint of the Counter-Reformation,to the D'Annunzian malady which seared and warped the souls of the generation which grew up during those fateful years 1870-1914, is to utter an essential truth,and one too little known. Without the Italian Church and D'Annunzio,without futurism and emotional nationalism, without the about-face of the bourgeoisie toward a cheap Bismarckian diversion,Fascism would never have been. But shall we infer from this that it is a local phenomenon grown to world-proportions only through a deplorable run of bad luck? It would doing less than justice to the "arch-Catilines,the world-arsonists". ~~Xxxxx~~ And to the intellectual production of those decades,which expresses so variedly and intensely the rudderless impotence,despair,lack of sense and measure both inner and social,which beset sensitive

minds everywhere. It was,as Borgese euphemistically calls it, a "very delicate moment". And it was Italy's tragedy and honor to become once again a symbol: to combine her national crisis with the general crisis of the spirit. After describing how easily the intellectual strongholds of Italy were razed,the author adds: "Because they were not strong at all." But how could they have been?

We do not reproach the oak on which the bolt descends for setting the forest on fire. Nor do we advance our cause by explaining that in really nice forests this does not happen. We would have been grateful to Borgese if he had shown us Fascism as a product,not only of Italy,but of the West and of our times. Why refuse the larger truth? This uncouth being,half priest,half Caliban,is the son of our secret thoughts and of our hidden helplessness; it was not born of rhetoric and unsound thinking alone: it comes of the lament of the poet and of the doubt of the philosopher,it was an inevitable answer to the smug pharisaism of professors,to the obtuse self-righteousness of moralists,to the stupidity of businessmen and the worldly wisdom of cabinets. It could dissolve any day like Mr.Valdemar's corpse; but it is strengthened and upheld by the insincerity and futility of its adversaries. Here is the point which concerns us,the believers in democracy,most directly. It is well to remind the world that Mussolini is a third-rate intellectual,so long as we keep in mind that he is a genius nonetheless -- a man with a shrewd and ruthless knowledge of the temper of his times. He shares with the Communists the invincible feeling of being one step ahead -- the heir of all the ages. The small people now

ruling throughout the "peace-loving" nations feel their comfortable conventions hollowed out, their "idealism" exposed to derision; they grasp frantically at straws and shadows, mere playthings of fear and necessity. The dictator has stolen the show. "You asked for democracy;" he might well say, "of course you do not mean the rule of the masses: you mean the ample, gilt-edged democracy of Gladstonian merchant-princes and Victorian intellectuals. But I will give you democracy, as the laws of modern society make it. May I present it to you -- the grin of a capable, cold, self-seeking, tough plebeian gang. And believe me, they will stop at nothing to get you."

That it does pay to carry on the thinking process beyond the customary taboos on money, behaviour and principles set up by the "nice people" -- of this the latter-day happenings afford us ample proof. The fascists are prouder of their technique for disrupting the enemy than of their tactics of violence. They know the divided consciences, caught between freedom and property. They press a hidden spring and a spirit of confusion is brought into the hearts of British statesmen. They subtly titillate the well-to-do, and authoritative old gentlemen pop up from their club chairs, bellowing about the defence of civilization. They stare quietly at the Vatican, from hard by, and frantic encyclicals pour forth into the world against the atheistic peril. Nor need these great engineers of emotions ever fear that the ruin they work may someday fall on them. They work from a safe angle; even revolution has no fears for them, for they are all at once conservatives and revolutionists, wreckers and builders.

They are as natural as the microbe,the enzyme,the parasite. They have life itself as their trusted material -- life with its little hopes and great fears,with its Legionnaires and politicians,its homely vulgarities and fake sportive ascepticism, which is a foundation for any kind of obedience: loud,silly,improvident, penny-wise,patient,cynical,senseless life. The kind of life that priests and dictators know and love. For those,on the other hand,who have accepted fascism,a short cut has opened to a new Age of Innocence. Theirs the jolly brazen lie,the lowbrow flatness, the scurrilous taunt,the calm obscenity; theirs also a great sense of dedication,a certain intellectual triumph, and a strange simplicity of soul,an uncouth yearning for a new birth and a new life.

Against these new-found unities,how is a united front of civilization to be cemented? Borgese knows the full gravity of the situation and the necessity of sacrifice. From the "mechanized, quick-as-lightning,broadcasting,sky-spanning savagery of our days," he appeals to the guardians of civilization,to the world he calls in a striking term "Brit~~t~~anistic",as a Stoic might have appealed to the Hellenistic world as a whole against the barbarians.

But who is to guard the guardians? Borgese's innate courtesy forbids him to ask.

Clearly,at the moment of making a choice which renounces all ties of race and habit,a man has to review again all the motives which unite our civilization in the sign of the spirit. And this means putting ourselves under the guard of the strongest assurances which have reached us since there have been thinking men -- declaring the measures of a thought laid out for

worlds to come. Is it wise,then,to show such indulgence to the nineteenth-century versions of it? To say,for instance, that the good Carducci,the excellent de Sanctis,knew "the true value of Dante" is,to say the least,to discourage us considerably in our efforts at understanding him -- and the Italian problem as well. We can explain away Dante,the man,by an ingenious and novel reconstruction of his motives and limitations; but this does not entitle us to an ultimate judgment on his poetic thought. None knows it better than Borgese himself,who had to wage war on the reigning school of Italian criticism just on this issue. Here he comes forward to divide what is good in Dante -- the general aim -- from what is bad: the "mythology". In the name of what? Shall we go on to dismember Plato because he wrote the Republic or the Laws? Plato and Dante are right in what we choose to approve of;they are wrong in what we please to discard. Truly,the living shade of Croce has the apostate by the heels. Poets are not so easy to dispose of,nor are upsurges of feelings which come from the depths of history. We do not want to raise here the philosophical issue; all we ask is,that once we are agreed on the real ground of our troubles,we clear our reason of cultured pre~~conceptions~~judice before starting work. Borgese considers such men as Dante to be prisoners of their desire for unity and formal perfection,which compels them to be "conformists". Hence most of the present evils. Now to call Dante a conformist is to ignore the essential motives of his effort. If a perversion of that kind of thought became the Counter-Reformation spirit and,later,fascism,it is this evil strain we should seek to isolate. Obviously Dante's

contemporary, Eckehart, with his deep-going Schwärmerei, would find more grace in the eyes of the author and of many of us, as well. But we must beg to suspend judgment. In another few thousand years we may be able to reach a safe conclusion.

The very old and startlingly modern problem of orthodoxy cannot be dismissed so lightly. What happens to lesser men is of no concern, but to brand as conformsim the desperate attempts of a Dante or Pascal or a Leibniz, is to is to ignore the ever-recurring, insoluble paradox of the intellect: the quest for freedom within an integral order of its own creation.

Our habitual ideas are crumbling because the foundations laid out could bear so much stress and no more. Surely, if we do not accept this fact and try to work out its full implications, a great and expensive opportunity will have been wasted. Proof positive has been shown us that to be well-meaningand intelligent is not enough. Dictators have proven that it takes quite a lot of intelligence/merely to reach the stage where the real mistakes are made. A conclusion which is implemented on a quite different plane, by the ordeal of such prophetic spirits as D.H.Lawrence.

The point that deserves to be stressed is this: that our world is not in a state of mere momentary check or hesitation. We are in the throes of tragedy as the Greeks understood it, and should keep our perception attuned to that pitch. Our civilization is split to the core, it is turning its teeth upon itself.

What had Oedipus done except to be clever and bold? He was the self-made man, the boy who made good; yet the gods fastened on him, they played him like a fish, to his own destruction. Not the

gods of light and mercy,not the ones he supplicated,but the gods he had ignored: the hidden laws of life. Allegories do not carry conclusive proof,but Borgese's book itself is under the sign of an allegory,and it points to the same moral. If really we are dealing with a Goliath,let us take care that we are ~~xxx~~ not Sauls masquerading as Davids.