

‘Missed Revolutions’: Historical Narratives During Italian Fascism (from Delio Cantimori to Camillo Pellizzi)

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Abstract

This article analyses some examples of historical narratives that, long before the emergence of so-called postmodern history, had a specific narrative character: the reconstructions of ‘missed revolutions’ taking into account a possible alternative history and tracing back the reasons for a social, political, and economic crisis to an interrupted process, one that, had it been completed, would have triggered some sort of progress. Even if this kind of historical representation cannot properly be classified as a form of alternate history, it can be placed between traditional historical accounts of the past and a more innovative pattern, which entails a more speculative argumentation, and therefore has been used to justify or suggest specific political claims. One of the most obvious examples of this literature are the narrations of the ‘unaccomplished Risorgimento’, which was a highly debated theme in the political, intellectual, and historical discussion from the period of the Italian unification until the economic and political reconstruction following the Second World War. This article will stress four possible functions of the ‘missed revolution’ narratives: first, as a way to discover some currents that have been underestimated by the official historiography or mainstream political discourse; second, to observe the role assigned to particular events in altering the destiny of a nation; third, to show how political and intellectual actors use history to justify political actions or events; and finally, to reveal how, conversely, by reconstructing ‘missed revolutions’ individual historians and, more generally, public intellectuals can take up a specific political stance while writing history.

I

According to the recent literature, all alternate history is genre-blurring, and any attempt to classify it as merely fictional or, conversely, as historical, amounts to betraying its original identity and aim.¹ This means that many allo-historical novels should by the same token be viewed also as historical narratives, revealing some historical facts and their representation. In this view, an allo-historical novel such as ‘Fatherland’ by Robert Harris, for example, may have value as a literary work but also as an historiographical reconstruction, containing a great deal of historical data and accurate accounts of the power structure in

¹ L. Hutcheon, *Politics of Postmodernism* (New York, 1989).

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National Socialism, and also offering some original insights into the nature of that regime.² This observation about the historical meaning of allo-historical novels mirrors a parallel interpretation according to which postmodern history is a narrative, a history telling, having an allo-historical connotation. In her 1989 book, Linda Hutcheon thus describes the postmodern break in historical work, whereby the epistemological foundations of history radically change.³ In particular, the self-representation and aims of history are transformed from the presentation of a master narrative and a 'totalizing representation' to the creation of tales narrated according to the historians' goals and values.⁴ Postmodern history, whose forerunners are traced back to Robin George Collingwood, François Lyotard, Hayden V. White, Umberto Eco, and Michel Foucault, neither presents a picture of historical events explained from beginning to end in an all-encompassing framework nor claims to offer an objective and disinterested recording of the past. On the contrary, it acknowledges the interplay of various heterogeneous languages, discourses, reconstructions, and interpretations, as well as 'histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few, and I might add, of women as well as men'.⁵ In postmodern narrations, the historian's self comes to the fore, with his/her work of telling histories, of consciously or unconsciously composing narratives. 'Historical meaning may thus be seen today as unstable, contextual, relational, and provisional, but postmodernism argues that, in fact, *it has always been so*. And it uses novelistic representations to underline the narrative nature of much of that knowledge', argues Hutcheon.⁶

I have underlined the words 'it has always been so', as they actually point out a fundamental contradiction in Hutcheon's approach: either postmodern history is something new and original or 'it has always been so'. If history has always been a reconstruction, a narration of events ordered by the 'composing figure' – the historian – what is new about the postmodern approach? Can we then call postmodern only a new awareness of what has always been?⁷ In this regard, it may prove illuminating to look back at the history of historiography. Not only Collingwood's historical methodology, but also Benedetto Croce's (1866–1952) argument that 'all history is contemporary history'⁸ and his separation between facts and reconstruction, *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum*, would cast doubt on the innovative character of the

² Ibid., p. 62.

³ R. Harris, *Fatherland* (London, 1992).

⁴ L. Hutcheon, *Politics of Postmodernism* (New York, 1989).

⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

⁶ Ibid., p. 66.

⁷ Ibid., p. 67, [my underlining].

⁸ Ibid., p. 67.

postmodern historic turn.⁹ Croce, one of the best known European historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was very explicit about the interplay between the contemporary historian's context, his particular values and interests, and the historiographical narrative. In any case, the contention that 'all genuine history is contemporary history' does not imply that a historical reconstruction should of necessity be relativistic and subjective, it being for instance related to class, the fact of belonging to a specific scientific community, the common values inside a given society or the groups within it, and so forth. Croce's idea of the contemporary character of history implies his distinction between *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum*, namely between facts/events on the one side, and the historical interpretation of them as well as their relation to an overarching philosophical and cultural context on the other.¹⁰

The recent postmodern historical literature investigates not only the contextual character of any historical narration, but also points out the narrative and constructivist features that any historical discourse entails. From Hayden White to the most recent literature, the relationship between a historical reconstruction and reality or truth has been strongly questioned, so that the autonomy of the historical genre and discourse from any self-evident fact has come to the fore.¹¹ According to Cohen's structuralist interpretation, 'whatever else a text performs as an achievement of human thought-labour and ingenuity, it is always a segmentation of the world, a way of dividing, binding, connecting, and separating themes, classes of meanings; the building of conventional notions which can be taken up over and over again for quite different purposes'.¹² In other words, a written text takes a specific place in a complex constellation of other texts and in the historical discourse. 'Written texts are "like" webs which manifest many different designs, patterns, and articulations but which in the end depend upon and owe their existence to the underlying membrane', the membrane being the whole system of discourse.¹³

Following this suggestion, in these pages I will present some examples of historical narratives that, long before the emergence of so-called postmodern history, have a special character: texts which clearly refer to other historical texts and traditions and whose narrative character is crystal clear. In particular, the reconstructions of 'missed revolutions' which take into account a possible alternative history, and trace back

⁹ See: B. Croce, *Teoria e storia della storiografia* (Bari, 1917), p. 4. Croce had a strong impact on his colleague Collingwood. The English historian wrote *Croce's philosophy of History* in 1921.

¹⁰ B. Croce 'L'unità del reale e la confusione tra *res gestae* e *historia rerum gestarum*', *Quaderni della Critica*, 19/20 (1951) pp. 14–20.

¹¹ See: R. Peters, *History as Thought and Action. The Philosophies of Croce, Gentile, De Ruggiero and Collingwood*, (Exeter, 2013).

¹² See: H. White, *Tropics of discourse* (Baltimore 1978); R. Jenkins, *On what is History. From Carr to Rorty and White* (London, 1995); K. Pihlainen, *The Work of History* (London 2017).

¹³ S. Cohen, 'Structuralism and the Writing of Intellectual', *History and Theory*, 17/ 2 (1978), pp. 175–206.

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the reasons for a social, political, and economic crisis or the fact of underdevelopment to an interrupted process, that, had it been completed, would have triggered a progress – one that in fact had already started. Even if this kind of historical representation cannot properly be classified as a form of alternate history, it can be placed between traditional historical accounts of the past and a more innovative pattern, which, as Stuart Woolf has argued,¹⁴ entails a more speculative argumentation and therefore may be – and sometimes has been – used to justify or suggest political claims. My aim in these pages is to show that even if the literature concerning missed revolution cannot be classified as a form of postmodern history – this would mean to de-contextualise it – it is nonetheless a historical genre per se, in which the personality and the political and social values of the writers eventually come much more to the fore than in other historical works. One of the most obvious examples of this literature are the narrations of the 'unaccomplished Risorgimento', which was a highly debated theme in the political, intellectual, and historical discussion from the period of the Italian unification process up until the economic and political reconstruction after the Second World War. Discussions regarding the 'failed Risorgimento' were designed to investigate the reasons for the miserable results of the promising historical movement of Risorgimento and therefore to explain Italy's economic and political underdevelopment in comparison with other nation-states. As in some allo-historical literary works, the starting point was positive and propitious, but, owing to some clear or hidden genetic defects or to the impact of external events, the process was interrupted.

Instead of considering the topic of the unaccomplished Risorgimento only 'as an explanation or as an incentive to promote political contemporary actions',¹⁵ as Stuart Woolf does, the investigation that follows will stress four possible functions of the missed revolution narratives. First, they offer a way to discover some currents that have been neglected or underestimated by the official historiography or political discourse, because they did not prevail or survive in the real historical outcomes – like the meaning of heretics or Jacobins in Italian history. Second, they help us to observe the role assigned to particular events in altering the destiny of a nation or of a political trend – for instance of the Church for the suppression of the Reformation movement in Italy. Third, they make palpable how political and intellectual actors use history to justify political actions or events – as in the use of the Risorgimento myth made by fascist politics in order to legitimize Mussolini's government. Lastly, they reveal how, conversely, by reconstructing 'missed revolutions' individual historians and, more generally, public intellectuals can freely speculate and take up a political stance while writing history. This last point, which has never been directly addressed in the literature, would

¹⁴ Ivi p. 187.

¹⁵ S. Woolf, 'Risorgimento e fascismo. Il senso della continuità nella storiografia italiana', *Belfagor*, 20/1 (1965), pp. 71–91.

seem to be of paramount importance: by reconstructing hypothetical histories of missed revolutions, for example, of a failed Risorgimento, historians or political scientists became involved in a discussion which was political and scientific at one and the same time. They took a stand on a contemporary political issue so to speak indirectly, namely by supporting an interpretation about a highly controversial political issue and, at the same time, without openly abandoning their claim to be scientifically neutral. For example, as the issue of ‘failed Risorgimento’ possessed an epistemologically ambiguous nature and was at the same time the object of political controversies and of historical research under Fascism, any historian who adopted a position for or against an interpretation that saw Fascism as a continuation of the Risorgimento, was in all likelihood expressing a political position with regard to Fascism and antifascism. Building upon Cohen’s approach, the aim, here, is neither to question ‘what do the historical reconstructions of missed revolution mean’, nor ‘how did a past generate a plethora of significations which historians can choose for historical remembrance’, but to reconstruct how different actors take or construct their position within the historical discourse and the political field.¹⁶

The topic of ‘missed revolution’ will be scrutinised in the following pages as both a political and a historical topic, although these two aspects will be distinguished and, at the same time, seen in their interaction. The constellation of topics such as ‘missed revolution’, ‘missed Reformation’, and unaccomplished Risorgimento’ will be therefore considered a point of departure, a cluster of questions that a whole generation – the generation born at the turn of the twentieth century – had to face. This generation was not only internally divided by class and regional origin and allegiance, but was also torn by the ideological conflict between fascism and antifascism – and inside antifascism between liberalism, communism, and socialism. Their respective destinies were determined by their choices in this regard.

I will be especially concerned with the topic of the missed revolution, as it was formulated by the pro-fascist side, in particular by the young historian Delio Cantimori,¹⁷ born in 1904 and eventually becoming a communist, and by the future sociologist Camillo Pellizzi, born in 1896.¹⁸ While there is a huge secondary literature on Antonio Gramsci’s and Piero Gobetti’s interpretations of the Risorgimento and the Reformation, much less has been written about fascist and illiberal thinkers.¹⁹ We

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁷ Cohen, p. 181.

¹⁸ On Cantimori and Fascism see, among others: M. Ciliberto, *Intellettuale e fascismo, Saggio su Delio Cantimori* (Bari, 1977); G. Miccoli, *Delio Cantimori, La ricerca di una nuova critica storiografica* (Turin, 1970); A. Prosperi, ‘Introduzione’, in D. Cantimori, *Eretici Italiani del Cinquecento* (Turin, 2002), pp. XI–LXII; R. Pertici, ‘Mazzinianesimo, fascismo e comunismo. L’itinerario politico di Delio Cantimori (1919–1943)’, *Storia della Storiografia*, 31 (1997), pp. 3–182; G. Sasso, *Delio Cantimori, filosofia e storiografia* (Pisa, 2005); G. Berlardelli, ‘Dal fascismo al comunismo. Gli scritti politici di Delio Cantimori’, *Storia contemporanea*, 24/3 (1993) pp. 379–403; P. Chiantera-Stutte, *Delio Cantimori. Un intellettuale del Novecento* (Rome, 2011).

¹⁹ On Camillo Pellizzi see: M. Salviati, *Camillo Pellizzi* (Bologna, 2021); D. Breschi and G. Longo, *Camillo Pellizzi. La ricerca delle elites tra politica e sociologia* (Soveria Mannelli, 2003); M. Isnighi

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will see that antifascist and fascist perspectives are intertwined not only because the authors in question were familiar with their adversaries' published writings, sometimes they were even personally acquainted, but also because they shared the same perception about the need to bring about a final revolution in Italian political and cultural life. Indeed, in their works, they made use of the same 'raw materials' – the same literature, the same tools for the interpretation of historical events. Croce's historiographical method, Gentile's philosophy of actual idealism, and Ugo Spirito's concept of corporations, then Oriani's and Missiroli's conception of the unaccomplished Risorgimento and De Sanctis's idea of Renaissance were the main reference points for this generation. In any case, the two opposed camps of fascists and antifascists were not internally homogeneous: there were many ways to fight fascism, and also many ways to be fascist. The aim of the following reconstruction is to observe the intertwining of antifascist and fascist perspectives and, at the same time, to understand the different attitudes towards politics and political ideals, illustrating the various ways to 'be fascist' under Mussolini's regime. Cantimori and Pellizzi represent two antithetical fascist ways of interpreting the Italian 'missed revolution' – which can be explained to some degree by their different trajectories, with Cantimori's conversion to communism at the end of the 1930s and Pellizzi's embrace of the managerial revolution. In the first part of the article, the debate on missed revolutions – missed Reformation and failed Risorgimento – will be reconstructed in order to set out the framework for Cantimori's and Pellizzi's interpretations, which will be investigated in the second and third parts.

II

'Once Capitini²⁰ observed: you are not fascist, it seems to me that you have become fascist in order to be free to express your opinions – which were at that time liberal, cosmopolitan and individualistic, with rebellious socialist

and S. Lanaro, 'Fascismo esorcizzato. Cinque schede sulla rivolta *piccolo borghese*', *Belfagor* 25/2 (1970), pp. 219–28; R. Suzzi Valli, 'Il fascismo integrale di Camillo Pellizzi', *Annali della Fondazione di Ugo Spirito*, 6 (1995), pp. 243–84; G. Bechelloni, 'Camillo Pellizzi. Ricordo scomodo di un outsider', *Rassegna italiana di sociologia*, 20/4 (1979), pp. 545–55.

²⁰ Generally, on the revisionist historiography regarding the Risorgimento see, among others: W. Salomone, 'The Risorgimento between ideology and History: The Political Myth of *rivoluzione mancata*', *The American Historical Review*, 68/1 (1962), pp. 38–56; R. Pertici, 'Parabola del revisionismo risorgimentale', *Ventesimo Secolo*, 26/3 (2011), pp. 93–120; M. Baioni, *Risorgimento conteso, memorie e usi pubblici nell'Italia contemporanea* (Reggio Emilia, 2019); R. Romero, 'La storiografia marxista nel Secondo dopoguerra (1956)', in *Risorgimento e capitalismo* (Rome, 1974); L. Cafagna 'Intorno al revisionismo risorgimentale', *Società*, 12 (1956), pp. 1015–35. On Gramsci and the Risorgimento see: C. Vivanti, 'Introduzione', in A. Gramsci, *Quaderno 19. Risorgimento italiano* (Turin 1977), pp. IX–XXXVI; G. Vacca, 'Dal materialismo storico alla filosofia della praxis', in *International Gramsci Journal*, 2/5 (2016); M. Ciliberto, *La fabbrica dei Quaderni. Studi su Gramsci* (Pisa, 2020); M. Musté, *Rivoluzioni passive* (Rome, 2021).

inclinations: I believed in Paneuropa,²¹ read Malaparte,²² “Conquista dello Stato”,²³ because I remembered that Gobetti had published a book of his.²⁴ I remember that I read “Rivoluzione liberale”²⁵ in Forlì, but I did not understand it: I also kept in mind a series of writings which interpreted fascism as a fight between fathers and sons.²⁶

These notes written by the historian Delio Cantimori show not only the eclectic references of a young fascist, but also the political confusion of his ideas. Cantimori, born into a family with a strong republican tradition, was at the time reconstructing in these lines a friend of his, the antifascist Aldo Capitini, who was also a brilliant student at one of the most prestigious academic institutions, the Scuola Normale in Pisa, directed by the eminent philosopher Giovanni Gentile. The intergenerational conflict, a common battle for the whole of his generation, independently of their different political positions, did not of itself give rise to the formulation of a coherent political interpretation. In a note dated 30 August 1934, the allegedly still fascist Cantimori revealed all his doubts regarding politics and his former enthusiasm for fascism— at that time he was only thirty. About his juvenile perception of communists and fascists, he reiterated that ‘at that time I admired the humanity of these people, and sometimes their chivalrous spirit. It seemed to me that they should agree with each other, as they were both courageous; my Machiavellian realism was a mere theory, in practice I did not understand, I did not feel the hatreds and interests of political groups; I saw only theories, that can be, as we know, all combined together.’²⁷

For Cantimori’s, Gobetti’s, and Pellizzi’s generation, the struggle against the ‘old’ subsumed many political differences: their common battle cry was the attack against the Italian political *trasformismo* of Giolitti’s liberal government prior to Fascism, against the petty bourgeoisie and Italian provincial cultural life, against the miserable

²¹ Capitini was an antifascist intellectual, who had been one of Cantimori’s closest friends during his youth. They both attended the Scuola Normale in Pisa, its director then being Giovanni Gentile. See: P. Chiantera-Stutte, *Res nostra agitur* (Bari, 2005), where it shows both their contrasting points of view concerning fascism and liberalism, as well as their mutual respect and esteem.

²² Paneuropa was a conservative movement led by European intellectuals (Prince Anton Rohan, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergy, Max Clauss) who aimed at enhancing an aristocratic and conservative coalition of the European intelligentsia. See: L. Passerini, *Europe in love* (London, 2021).

²³ Kurt Sucket (pseudonym Curzio Malaparte) was a fascist journalist and writer who represented the position of the so-called integral fascism and the *intransigenti*, i.e., of revolutionary fascists who criticised Mussolini for his compromises with the Church and the liberal old establishment.

²⁴ *Conquista dello Stato* was a fascist review, directed by Malaparte, belonging to the political current of integral fascism. See: P. Chiantera-Stutte, *Von der Avantgarde zum Traditionalismus. Die radikalen Futuristen im italienischen Faschismus von 1919 bis 1931* (Frankfurt, 2002); E. Gentile, *Le origini dell’ideologia fascista* (Bologna, 2011).

²⁵ The antifascist Piero Gobetti published two articles and one book written by the fascist Malaparte: C. Malaparte, ‘Il dramma della modernità’, *Rivoluzione Liberale*, 1/16 (1922); Malaparte, ‘Gli eroi capovolti’, *Rivoluzione Liberale*, 1/23 (1922); *Italia barbara* (Turin, 1925). The book *Viaggio in inferno* by Malaparte was only announced and never published.

²⁶ *Rivoluzione liberale* was the antifascist review edited and directed by Pietro Gobetti.

²⁷ Note without date in: Archives Scuola Normale di Pisa *Carte Cantimori*, now in Chiantera-Stutte, *Res nostra*, p. 12.

international role of the Italian State, both in colonial as well as in European politics.²⁸ Their calls for the restoration of international and domestic state power, namely the forging of internal cohesion between the elites and the masses, the creation of a real unity of Italy from North to South, and the burnishing of the prestige of the Italian State in the international arena, were not only political slogans shared by many syndicalists, socialists, conservatives, and fascists, but, with a less rebellious undertone, also represented some of the main issues addressed in debates in academic and intellectual circles.²⁹

Arguments about the late development of Italian political institutions, civic attitudes, and ethos, which were discussed at length during the 1920s and 1930s, had a long history and were all related to considerations about the missed Reformation and the unaccomplished Risorgimento. It is possible then to distinguish four main patterns of interpretation: these are categories defining ideal types in a Weberian sense, fundamental traits of interpretative modes, whereas the real interpretations of missed revolution consist of elements deriving from all of the different models.³⁰ The first is a historical-religious interpretation, initiated by Edgar Quinet³¹ and continued by Francesco De Sanctis³² as well as by Giuseppe Gangale,³³ according to which the shortcomings of Italian political and civic culture depended not only on the lack of a real Reformation, which would have enhanced the development of a modern culture and a spirit of religious liberty and discussion, but more precisely on the intellectual sterility of the Italian Renaissance, deemed incapable of imparting a revolutionary turn to Italian politics. Second, a religious-moralistic pattern emerged in the guise of a number of works by Alfredo Oriani³⁴ and Mario Missiroli, who blamed the Catholic Church for the suppression of the Reformation, and the consequent social and political weakness of Italy.³⁵ In this view, the ignorance of the masses and their indifference towards the Risorgimento had played a pivotal role in the failure of

²⁸ In Prospero, 'Introduzione', p. XXII.

²⁹ *Trasformismo* was the term used to define the method of forging a flexible centrist coalition that isolated the extremes of the political left and right in Italian politics after Italian unification and before the rise of fascism.

³⁰ See, among others: Gentile, *Le origini*; Z. Sternhell, *Naissance de l'idéologie fasciste* (Paris, 1989); R. De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista. La conquista del potere 1921–1925* (Turin, 1995); Chiantera-Stutte, *Von der Avantgarde*.

³¹ I refer to, but slightly alter the classification used by Salomone (the Risorgimento) in identifying three distinct trends: the political-moralistic, the historical-moralistic, and finally the social-moralistic trend.

³² Lectures au Collège de France 1848–52., translated in E. Quinet, *Le rivoluzioni d'Italia* (Bari, 1935), p. 339 ff. On missed revolution see: M. Firpo, 'Historical Introduction', in J.A. Tedeschi, J.M. Lattis, and M. Firpo (eds.) *The Italian reformation of the Sixteenth century and the Diffusion of Renaissance Culture: A Bibliography of the secondary Literature ca. 1750–1997* (Modena, 2000), pp. 18–59.

³³ F. De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, L. Russo (ed.) (Milan, 1956), vol. II, p. 192 ff.

³⁴ *La rivoluzione protestante* (Turin, 1925). See also: V. Spini, *Risorgimento e Protestanti* (Naples, 1953).

³⁵ A. Oriani, *La lotta politica in Italia. Le origini della lotta attuale* (Bologna, 1956); Oriani, *Fino a Dogali* (Bologna, 1889) or 1927.

the various revolutions. The third meaning is the political/historical one, which stressed the social and political immaturity of the Italian ruling class during the Risorgimento, their incapacity to exercise a hegemonic function, as well as the lack of a national culture and identity that might create a common ground of discussion between the dominant classes and the masses. This complex and politically astute interpretation, which was adumbrated by Piero Gobetti and achieved and transformed by Antonio Gramsci later in his ‘Quaderni del carcere’, emerged in the 1920s and was destined to become an interpretative canon after the Second World War. Lastly, the fourth interpretation is the political/technocratic one, which may be represented by Antonio Pellizzi’s perspective, who was strongly influenced by Bottai’s and Spirito’s fascist corporatism.³⁶

The broad topic of ‘missed revolution’, which has been phrased as a ‘missed Reformation’ or an ‘unaccomplished Risorgimento’, recalls a complex constellation of intertwined themes: the lack of social cohesion, in particular the gulf between masses and elites and between intellectuals and ordinary people; the shortcomings of Italian political liberalism, in particular of Giolitti’s government; the rigid and conservative mentality of the petty and/or capitalistic bourgeoisie; the underdevelopment of the Italian economy and the separation between North and South; the failure to achieve an international position of prestige for Italy amidst the European big powers. These were the main external and internal problems of Italian political and social development – and in the 1920s, after the First World War, also Italy’s main challenges. It is not a coincidence that the discussion about the ‘missed revolution’ gathered momentum after the cessation of hostilities.³⁷

From the turn of the nineteenth century to the 1930s, the controversial issue of the ‘missed Reformation’ was being discussed. Already Francesco De Sanctis³⁸ (1818–83), from his historiographical perspective, and Alfredo Oriani (1852–1909), from a more religious and moralistic point of view, had formulated their explanations about the weakness of the Italian political elites, the political apathy of the masses, and

³⁶ M. Missiroli, *La monarchia socialista* (Bologna (1914) 1971); On Missiroli see: A. Botti, *Introduzione*, in *Carteggio M. Missiroli-G. Prezzolini 1906–1974* (Rome, 1992).

³⁷ On fascism’s so-called ‘left wing’ corporatism see: R. De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista*, Vol. 1: *La conquista del potere. 1921–1925* (Turin, 2005) in *Mussolini il fascista*. Vol. 2: *L’organizzazione dello Stato fascista 1925–1929* (Torino, 2008); in *Mussolini il rivoluzionario* (Turin, 2005); E. Gentile, *Le origini*, I. Granata, *La nascita del sindacato fascista. L’esperienza di Milano* (Bari, 1981); S. Lanaro, *Appunti sul fascismo di sinistra - La dottrina corporativa di Ugo Spirito*, in *Belfagor*, 26/5 (1971); A. Lyttelton, *La conquista del potere. Il fascismo dal 1919 al 1929* (Bari, 1974); G. Parlato, *La sinistra fascista: storia di un progetto mancato* (Bologna, 2008); G. Parlato, *Il sindacalismo fascista. Dalla grande crisi alla caduta del regime 1930–1943*, vol. 2 (Rome, 1989); F. Perfetti, *Il sindacalismo fascista. Dalle origini alla vigilia dello Stato corporativo 1919–1930*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1988); F. Perfetti, *Dal sindacalismo rivoluzionario al corporativismo* (Rome, 1984) and the 2009 issue *Annali della Fondazione Ugo Spirito*, pp. 20–21 (2008–2009) with various essays by G. Parlato, G. Dessi, F. Raschi.

³⁸ On the importance of the war for this generation, see M. Isnenghi, *Il mito della grande guerra* (Bologna, 2014).

the fragility of the Italian national state and civic identity.³⁹ While De Sanctis had found the reasons for Italian moral and political decay to lie in the 'religious, political and moral indifference' of the principal Italian Renaissance artists and thinkers and in the corruption of the Catholic Church, which had prevented the religious and moral renewal brought by the Reformation, Alfredo Oriani for his part traced back the failure of the Risorgimento directly to the ignorance of the masses and to the absence of a religious Reformation.⁴⁰ According to Oriani, the Risorgimento failed because it was promoted exclusively by the Northern Savoyard Monarchy and did not penetrate the people's mentality, which was characterised by a 'dull moral sense and by an instinctive mischief'.⁴¹ In his view, the revolution exalted in the patriotic Risorgimento literature was actually an insurrection against foreigners with a view to obtaining autonomy, and therefore could not lead to a real change in society, in contrast to the French revolution. Moreover, Italy had already missed another chance of development during the Reformation: while Luther was 'dragging humanity into theology', Italian corruption meant the 'liquidation' of the Reform and of Italy. 'The religious democracy of the Reformation rendering everyone equal in the unfettered interpretation of the Bible and subjecting it only to the eternal guide of the Revelation, [that] will be the cause of all future democracies' was halted in Italy.⁴² According to Oriani, who would become one of the reference points of Fascist doctrine, the exceptional history of missed revolutions – Reformation and Risorgimento – led Italy to international catastrophe, epitomised by the final defeat of the Italian troops at Dogali against the 'inferior' Abyssinian power. Oriani's openly colonialist and nationalist interpretation differed from that of De Sanctis, not only for his attribution of blame to the masses – whereas De Sanctis held the intellectuals and the Church responsible – but also for his aim and method.⁴³ De Sanctis sought to explain with historical tools the shortcomings of Italian cultural and moral development, whereas Oriani for his part offered the key to understanding a contemporary colonial question, namely the lack of Italian national power. While the historical dimension prevailed in De Sanctis's exposition, a religious and moralistic vision was typical of Oriani's journalistic approach. Oriani's critique of the missed Risorgimento and Reformation was echoed in a number of works by

³⁹ On De Sanctis, see Cantimori, 'De Sanctis e il Rinascimento', in *Studi di Storia*, II (Turin, 1965), pp. 321–39; C. Muscetta, *Francesco de Sanctis* (Rome, 1978); M. Fubini, 'F. De Sanctis e la critica letteraria', in id. *Romanticismo italiano* (Bari, 1953); M. Mirri, *Francesco De Sanctis politico e storico della civiltà moderna* (Messina-Firenze, 1961); S. Landucci, *Cultura e ideologia di Francesco De Sanctis* (Milan 1963); A. Asor Rosa, 'L'idea e la cosa: De Sanctis e l'hegelismo', in *Storia d'Italia*, IV, 2 (Turin, 1975), pp. 850–78; D. Cantimori, 'Sulla storia del concetto di Rinascimento (1932)', in *Storici e storia* (Turin, 1971), pp. 413–62.

⁴⁰ On Oriani see: Oriani, ed. G. Spadolini (Faenza, 1960); M. Baioni, *Il fascismo e Alfredo Oriani. Il mito del precursore* (Ravenna, 1988).

⁴¹ De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura Italiana*.

⁴² Oriani, *Fino a Dogali*.

⁴³ *La lotta politica in Italia* (or. 1892) (Bologna 1956), pp. 103 and 109–12.

Mario Missiroli. For example, in his 1914 'La monarchia socialista', the Church was seen as the main obstacle to Italian development, from the failed Reformation onward.⁴⁴ Any attempt by the State to come to an agreement with the spiritual and political force of the Church had resulted in the weakening of political power: from Cavour's error in declaring a free Church in a free State to Giolitti's policies. The solution to the open question of the duality between religion and State and the weakness of the latter was paradoxically found by Missiroli in surrendering to the effective religious supremacy of the Papacy.

The debate became heated and bitter during fascism: the idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile and the historian Gioacchino Volpe, both convinced fascists, championed against Francesco De Sanctis Italy's leading role in European cultural and political history during the Renaissance and the Reformation, as well as the continuation of the Risorgimento by Fascism after the miserable break represented by Giolitti's liberal government. Even if Gentile considered the Renaissance intellectuals' individualism as one of the main obstacles to Italian political development, his interpretation can be read as a continuity thesis, asserting the furtherance of Italian Renaissance culture in fascism and the primacy of Italian values in Europe (*il primato dell'Italia*).⁴⁵ According to the fascist interpretation, the interruption of 'progressive history' was discernible in the post-unity governments, which had betrayed the Risorgimento ideals and values that would finally be realised by fascism. In his entry 'Intellectual primacy and political servitude' published in 1933, Volpe for his part described the Italian heretical movements as a pure Italian Protestantism, even more rational, more refined, and more respectful of tolerance and human freedom than Luther's doctrine had been.⁴⁶ If, on the one hand, Volpe denied that the Italian heretics had promoted an Italian popular movement of Reformation, because of their sectarian character and their political and social context, on the other, he highlighted their influence upon the development of modern European society and its mentality.⁴⁷

Conversely, the historiography pioneered by the liberal antifascist Benedetto Croce, and, in particular by Adolfo Omodeo, refused any general scheme – continuity or discontinuity – of interpretation between Reformation, Risorgimento, and the contemporary world.⁴⁸ The question of discerning general patterns in the Italian history – the relations between a series of missed revolutions – seemed to Croce an 'idle question'⁴⁹ and

⁴⁴ See: B. Mussolini, 'Prefazione', in Oriani, *La rivolta ideale* (Bologna, 1930); Pertici, *La parabola*.

⁴⁵ Missiroli, *La monarchia socialista*.

⁴⁶ G. Gentile, *Il pensiero italiano del Rinascimento* (Florence, 1940), p. 36 ff.; Gentile, *Politica e cultura* (Florence, 1990), pp. 14–7.

⁴⁷ *Enciclopedia italiana di scienze lettere e arti*, 1929, XIX, pp. 859–60.

⁴⁸ G. Volpe *Movimenti religiosi e sette ereticali* (Florence, 1961) p. 183.

⁴⁹ A. Omodeo, *Difesa del Risorgimento* (Turin, 1948); On Omodeo and the Risorgimento; B. Croce, 'Adolfo Omodeo', *Quaderni della Critica*, 5 (1946) pp. 1–4; D. Novacco, 'Adolfo Omodeo storico del Risorgimento', *Belfagor*, 11/1 (1956), pp. 1–21; D. Cantimori, 'Commemorazione di Adolfo Omodeo',

any discussion about the hypothetical positive development of the Italian Reformation did not have any meaning in historical studies.⁵⁰ Croce refused 'to repeat lamentations about the failed religious reformation in Italian history: tedious lamentations because history is what it is, and in it, what took place coincides with what is necessary.'⁵¹ In any case Adolfo Omodeo in his 1929 'Figure e passioni del Risorgimento italiano' and in many other writings — book reviews and articles — carried out a philological reconstruction of the main protagonists and ideas of the Risorgimento, taking a stand against any appropriation of the Risorgimento by contemporary fascist historiography and, at the same time, against the critical anti-Risorgimento approach of Oriani and Missiroli.⁵²

Against this backdrop, the political thinker and antifascist militant Piero Gobetti transformed the various suggestions into an original conception, sustaining a political theory of liberal socialism and the attack against fascism, seen as the 'autobiography of a nation'.⁵³ Even if he was prepared to acknowledge the positive role of the Reformation for the development of the modern European world, and even if his relation to the protestant Italian milieu, in particular to Giuseppe Gangale and to his theory of the 'missed Reformation', was consistent, his interpretation of Italian history was more complex and politically meaningful.⁵⁴ He considered the shortcomings of the Italian elites and of their weak relation to the masses in a much wider political perspective, while discussing his theory with the communist leader Antonio Gramsci.⁵⁵ Given Gobetti's liberal stance, some of the major shortcomings in Italian development seemed to him to lie in the misguided attitudes of the Italian elites — and not in the vices of the masses. The main reasons for the weakness of the Italian State consisted of the elites' lack of a modern political and economic mentality, one that would promote progress; their defence of corporate interests and their indifference to the plight of the people; their inability to formulate a coherent national politics and economic programme.

With Gobetti, as Gramsci saw, the question of 'missed revolution' began to be formulated not theoretically, that is, as an abstract

in Studi di Storia (Torun 1959) pp. 51–75; N. Matteucci, *La difesa del Risorgimento* (Bologna, 1952). See: Croce's writings on this topic: 'La crisi italiana del Cinquecento e il legame del Rinascimento col Risorgimento', *La critica*, 39 (1939), pp. 401–11; and 'Per la rinascita dell'idealismo', in *Cultura e vita morale, Intermezzi polemici*, 3rd ed. (Bari, 1955), p. 40.

⁵⁰ 'La crisi italiana del Cinquecento', pp. 401–11.

⁵¹ He argues 'to repeat lamentations about the failed religious reformation in Italian history: tedious lamentations because history is what it is, and in it what took place coincides with what is necessary' in 'Per la rinascita dell'idealismo', p. 40.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ See: Omodeo of Gobetti's *Risorgimento senza eroi* (Turin, 1926).

⁵⁴ P. Gobetti, 'Elogio della Ghigliottina', *Rivoluzione liberale*, 1/34 (1922), p. 130.

⁵⁵ See: A. Cabella, O. Mazzoleni, *Piero Gobetti tra Riforma e rivoluzione* (Milan, 1999): in particular the essays by Robert Paris, Giorgio Spini, and Eric Vidal; G. Rota, *Giuseppe Gangale: filosofia e protestantesimo* (Turin, 2003).

intellectual question, but concretely as a political issue, namely as an investigation that would lead to political action.⁵⁶ Although Gramsci criticised Gobetti's liberalism, he acknowledged his overcoming of the traditional conservative formulation of the question of missed revolution, considering his approach as the necessary ground for a new political consciousness in the project of Italian renewal.⁵⁷ Gobetti took a strong stance against the apologetic fascist⁵⁸ and traditional narrative of the Risorgimento,⁵⁹ by denouncing its effectively antiheroic nature in his 1926 'Risorgimento senza eroi' (Risorgimento without heroes) where he detected the genetic fault of the Risorgimento and traced it to the political failure of the revolutionary movements in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and even further, back to the Reformation.⁶⁰ In his writings in the protestant review 'Coscientia', Gobetti offered an original interpretation of the reasons for the 'missed Reformation', whose outcomes did not only affect the development of a popular lay and independent mentality, but also the formation of a conscious and responsible ruling class.⁶¹ In contrast to the reformed countries, where the bourgeoisie had struggled against the old unproductive economic structures and had developed personal responsibility and moral energy, in Italy neither intellectuals nor economic elites represented a leading national force. According to Gobetti, writing in a state of exaltation after the *biennio rosso* – the general strikes in 1919–20 – the only hope for Italian development lies in the alliance between the masses and the new aristocracy of the working class – the reference to Gramsci's *consigli di fabbrica* [factory councils] seems here to be clear.⁶² He writes: 'In a few decades Turin has been transformed into a centre of a large industrial entrepreneurship [...] There will no longer be any plebs, but a proletariat

⁵⁶ See: P. Gobetti, 'La rivoluzione liberale. Saggio sulla lotta politica in Italia', *Opere*, vol. I, *Scritti politici*, P. Spriano (eds.) (Turin, 1969). On Gobetti and Risorgimento, see S. Bagnoli, *Il Risorgimento eretico di Pietro Gobetti* (Florence, 1976); P. Bagnoli, 'Gobetti, Piero', *Il Contributo italiano alla storia del Pensiero – Storia e Politica* (2013); A. d'Orsi, 'Gobetti, Piero', in *Il Contributo italiano alla storia del pensiero, Filosofia* (2012), [www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/piero-gobetti_\(Il-Contributo-italiano-alla-storia-del-Pensiero:-Filosofia\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/piero-gobetti_(Il-Contributo-italiano-alla-storia-del-Pensiero:-Filosofia)); N. Bobbio, *Trent'anni di storia della cultura a Torino* (Turin, 1977), pp. 1–9; Bobbio, *Profilo ideologico del Novecento Italiano* (Turin, 1986), pp. 124–7; pp. 156–59.

⁵⁷ Gramsci devoted many passages in the Quaderni dal carcere to the Risorgimento, but see in particular 'Osservazioni sul risorgimento e sulla politica contemporanea', *Belfagor*, 2/4 (1947), pp. 412–24. P. Spriano, *Gramsci e Gobetti. Introduzione alla vita e alle opere* (Turin, 1977); Spriano, *Gramsci e Gobetti, Studi Storici*, 17/2 (1976), pp. 69–93; V. Masiello, *Risorgimento senza eroi*; G. Vacca, 'Dal materialismo storico alla filosofia della praxis', *International Gramsci Journal*, 5 (2016), pp. 357–77.

⁵⁸ Gramsci, *Alcuni temi della questione meridionale* (1925), in *La costruzione del partito comunista* (Turin, 1971), p. 156. See also: 'Letter from Gramsci to Togliatti, 19 April 1924', in Togliatti, *La formazione del gruppo dirigente del partito comunista italiano* (Rome, 1962), p. 283.

⁵⁹ G. Gentile, *I profeti del Risorgimento italiano* (Florence, 1923).

⁶⁰ Omodeo, *Difesa del Risorgimento*.

⁶¹ Any reference to Max Weber was absent from Gobetti's analysis, but Ansaldo published in 'Rivoluzione liberale' the first Italian accounts of Weber's study of the Protestant Ethic: see 'La democrazia tedesca nel pensiero di Max Weber', *La rivoluzione liberale*, 2/4 (1923), pp. 13–5.

⁶² P. Gobetti, 'Le democrazie del lavoro e la civiltà della Riforma', *Coscientia*, December 5, 1923.

faithful to the dignity of labour and the humility of sacrifice [...] These experiences will bear a new spiritual revolution in this people who used to live in resignation and mediocrity'.⁶³

III

Delio Cantimori's formulation of the concept of the 'missed revolution' has its roots in the wider debate and controversies between the fascists and the antifascists. Elements of the fascist doctrine, echoes of Gobetti's discussion, as well as the suggestions offered by Croce, can be found in his thinking. Delio Cantimori felt that the internal and external challenges that Italy faced needed to be brought to the fore and that the younger generation had to fight in order to accomplish a real revolution, one that had been interrupted after the Risorgimento. Having in mind the interpretation of Mazzini advanced by fascist intellectuals, he thought that 'the fascists would complete the revolution'.⁶⁴ Fascism represented, according to one article from 1931, the only political movement that 'overcame the Risorgimento, on the same path, following its ideals and not against it'. It could mobilise the masses and defend Italian values in the European concert of nations because it asserted itself as a 'European revolution, a people's revolution, a true revolution [...] embodying a European and universal character'.⁶⁵

At the end of the 1920s, Cantimori was studying Giovanni Gentile's 'I profeti del Risorgimento Italiano' and based his political beliefs on Gentile's theory of the close relationship between fascism and the Risorgimento. The Risorgimento, seen as the key historical example of cohesion between intellectuals and the masses, had represented the ethico-political recasting of Italian life, later interrupted by Giolitti and Italian parliamentarism. The political elites after Mazzini had been unable to mobilise people through the creation of myths – like the national or the syndicalist myth – that could promote popular enthusiasm – so argued Cantimori under the influence of Sorel's thinking in an essay from 1936.⁶⁶ His engagement with the fascist revolution – 'a republican, syndicalist and national revolution, Corridoni's and Mazzini's revolution' was clear at that time – less clear were his political ideas, which oscillated between sorelism, republicanism, idealism, and fascism.⁶⁷ As Gennaro Sasso acutely observes, in Cantimori's early writings 'politics and philosophy, philosophy and politics went together', yet activism did not mean political coherence.⁶⁸

Be this as it may, Cantimori's views were not wholly aligned with the continuity thesis formulated by Gentile and Volpe: from his earliest

⁶³ See: Spriano, *Gramsci e Gobetti*.

⁶⁴ *Risorgimento senza eroi*, pp. 7–8.

⁶⁵ Note without any date in Carte Cantimori, now in Chiantera-Stutte, *Res nostra*, p. 12.

⁶⁶ D. Cantimori, *Politica e storia contemporanea*, ed. L. Mangoni (Turin, 1991), pp. 113–5.

⁶⁷ Cantimori, *Umanesimo e religione nel Rinascimento* (Turin, 1975), p. 3 ff.

⁶⁸ *Storici e storia*, p. 285.

writings, the need to develop a *trait d'union* between intellectuals and masses and to enhance a culture that would be shared by ordinary people, had played a fundamental role in his thinking and paved the way to a reconsideration of the issue of the missed Reformation. Social and political renewal, he judged, could only be achieved through the promotion of a culture and belief common to one and all – people and intellectuals alike – in the Italian national state.⁶⁹ Culture, for Cantimori, who read De Sanctis and Croce, played a fundamental role in the creation of a united nation: culture had to be considered not as an intellectual outcome, but as the product of a common *Streben*, a common idea of transcendence that united masses and elites.⁷⁰ Recalling some of Mazzini's suggestions, Cantimori argued that striving (*Streben*) was a form of lay religiosity, namely the belief in human development, and in the values of a nation and a state, which had to be sustained by a shared national identity and collaboration between classes.⁷¹ Eventually the gap between Cantimori's interpretation of fascism and fascist *realpolitik* began to be evident at the end of the 1920s in his letters and writings.⁷²

The most striking departure from the continuity thesis took place in Cantimori's historical work, starting with his critique of the mixture between political claims and historiographical themes in the contemporary literature about the failed Risorgimento/Missed Reformation. His teachers, Giuseppe Saitta and Gioacchino Volpe, had both, in their different ways, considered the humanistic ideals and revival of Roman antiquity in the Renaissance as tools for a national revolution: Saitta, a follower of Gentile's idealism, had formulated the concept of the 'nationality of philosophy', his claim being that Italy had played a pivotal role in the history of Europe;⁷³ Volpe for his part had analysed one of the main protagonists of the Reformation, Ulrich Von Hutten, highlighting his transformation of humanistic ideas into tools for national and social mobilisation.⁷⁴ In 1935, Cantimori criticised his teachers' approach. Saitta's school had shown an interest in the heretics – Cantimori argued – not as objects of historical research properly understood, but because they were 'men who had faced problems that were still open in Italian spiritual life, painfully open.'⁷⁵ The 'painfully open questions' coincided with the

⁶⁹ Sasso, *Filosofia*, 2005, p. 23.

⁷⁰ See: G. Campioni, F. Lomoro, S. Barbera, *Sulla crisi dell'attualismo, Cantimori, Della Volpe, De Ruggiero, Lombardo-Radice* (Milan, 1981), p. 40 ff.

⁷¹ Cantimori, *Politica e storia*, p. 6.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 5. See: Chiantera-Stutte, Delio Cantimori, p. 26 ff.

⁷³ See: Chiantera-Stutte, *Res nostra*.

⁷⁴ G. Saitta, 'La storia del pensiero come storia nazionale', in *Filosofia italiana e umanesimo* (Venice, 1928), pp. 31–51.

⁷⁵ Volpe, *Momenti di storia italiana* (Florence, 1925). On Volpe see: Eugenio Di Rienzo, *La storia e l'azione. Vita politica di Gioacchino Volpe* (Florence, 2008); E. Di Rienzo, *Un dopoguerra storiografico. Storici italiani tra guerra civile e Repubblica* (Florence 2004); F. Perfetti, 'Introduzione', in G. Volpe, *Italia moderna*, I (Florence, 2002), pp. XXIII–XXVIII; G. Belardelli, *Il Ventennio degli intellettuali* (Rome-Bari 2005), pp. 97–140; E. Di Rienzo, *Storia d'Italia e identità nazionale. Dalla Grande Guerra alla Repubblica* (Florence, 2006); R. Pertici, *La cultura storica dell'Italia unita* (Rome, 2018), pp. 111–38.

issues left unresolved by the 'missed Reformation': the lack of national unity, the gap between people and elites. In this regard, Cantimori saw clearly that the political denunciation of unresolved contemporary issues and historiographical research had to be kept apart. Saitta's historiography – he wrote – had 'dissolved' historical reconstruction into 'the affirmation of one's own actual/contemporary thinking.'⁷⁶ The desire to take a political stance in relation to the 'painfully open' issues left unanswered by the Risorgimento had then prevailed in historiographical research and methods.

This 1935 article seems to foreshadow the subsequent transformation of Cantimori's historiographical perspective, from his first works on the Reformation at the end of the 1920s to his masterwork 'Eretici Italiani del cinquecento', which has been widely and appropriately investigated.⁷⁷ Here, it is necessary to look at Cantimori's changing interpretation of the 'missed revolution' topic, seen as a litmus test of his attitudes towards fascist historiography and fascism itself. Cantimori's original project of writing the history of the Italian heretics' diaspora, which, being strongly influenced by Volpe, was at first designed to show the primary role of Italian heretics in the birth of a modern rational and lay mentality, underwent a complete transformation between the early 1930s and 1939.⁷⁸ Cantimori avowed that he began his research 'on the assumption (presumption) that the Protestant Reform would be a progress [...] and that Italy would participate in this progress' but his final book dismissed any simple and straightforward hypothesis of continuity and of the role of Italy in the creation of European culture.⁷⁹ Cantimori, who had deepened Croce's historiographical method, refused on the one hand the continuity narrative and, on the other, the contrary assumption about the absence of a Reformation and then of a real national Risorgimento. His research reconstructed a fresco of the stories of heretics which reversed Volpe's and Saitta's approach: in other words, he described the deeds and lives of those who had not belonged to any Church and were persecuted by all religious institutions – Catholic and Reformed alike.⁸⁰ He then recast the relationship between heresy and Humanism in an original way, overcoming De Sanctis' approach, according to which Humanism was politically arid and apathetic. In so doing, Cantimori shed light on movements that were apparently destined to disperse and dissolve in the ongoing political and religious struggles, and observed the subtle interplay

⁷⁶ Cantimori, *Politica e storia*, p. 132.

⁷⁷ Ivi, 133.

⁷⁸ See: Miccoli, Delio Cantimori; A. Prosperi Introduzione; Sasso, *Filosofia*; J. Tedeschi, 'Ancora su Delio Cantimori: Per la storia degli eretici italiani', *Annali Della Scuola Normale Superiore Di Pisa. Classe Di Lettere e Filosofia*, 9/1, 2004, pp. 15–6; L. Felici, 'Alle Origini Degli «Eretici Italiani Del Cinquecento». Nuovi Documenti Del Carteggio Bainton-Cantimori (1932–1940)', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 163/3 (2005), pp. 531–93.

⁷⁹ On Cantimori and Volpe, see L. Perini, *Gioacchino Volpe e Delio Cantimori*, in *Annali Della Scuola Normale Superiore Di Pisa. Lettere, Storia e Filosofia*, vol. 37, no. 3/4, 1968, pp. 241–48; M. Berengo, *La ricerca storica di Delio Cantimori*, *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 79/4 (1967).

⁸⁰ Quoted in Prosperi Introduzione, p. XIII.

between the heretics – true Christian believers, prepared to discuss and challenge their own ideas – and the humanists, who were at the same time refining their philological methods and interpretations and applying them critically to all institutional dogmas and beliefs.⁸¹

In his 1939 book, Cantimori narrated the histories of persecuted heretics, the humanists, and the antitrinitarian movements, both as individuals and as interrelated groups, portraying the relations between educated heretics, religious thinkers and ordinary people. On the interaction between heretics and antitrinitarians, namely on the importance of popular movements and on the fight of the Reformed Churches against the heretics, he disputed with Benedetto Croce.⁸² In so doing, Cantimori did not confine himself to rejecting all aprioristic interpretations of the past predicated on continuity, or, conversely, on discontinuities: he brought to light the interrelations between the apparent ‘losers’ of history and their contribution to the European history of ideas.⁸³ He accepted the challenge to overcome Croce’s and Omodeo’s approach, which had entailed a refusal to admit any continuity between heretical groups and contemporary history, rejecting at the same time any straightforward idea of the primary role of Italian culture in Europe. Indirectly criticising Croce’s approach to studying history simply for what it is (Croce’s assumption that ‘what took place coincides with what is necessary’),⁸⁴ Cantimori considered anew the effects and outcomes of religious and political movements that had ostensibly failed.⁸⁵ The heretics, as after them the utopians of the eighteenth century and the Jacobins,⁸⁶ represented in his perspective underground movements, whose meaning could become clear to historians only after their apparent failure. The continuities between past and present could not be evident at first glance but had to be critically excavated by the historian: according to him ‘the history of national cultures [...] is made [...] also by the written and published memory of aspirations, passions, programmes, hopes and attempts that did not succeed.’⁸⁷

IV

If Cantimori’s fascism was informed by his contradictory belief in Mazzini’s republican ideals, Gentile’s idealism, by his own

⁸¹ ‘Prefazione del traduttore’, in F. C. Church *I riformatori italiani*, trans. by D. Cantimori (Florence 1935), pp. 12–24.

⁸² See: D., Cantimori, *Eretici Italiani del Cinquecento* (Florence, 1939). On Cantimori and the heretics, there are many studies, see Berengo, *La ricerca*, and C. Vivanti, ‘Intorno a Umanesimo e Riforma in Studi Storici’, 34/4 (1993), pp. 787–98.

⁸³ Croce ‘Church I riformatori italiani’, *La Critica*, 33 (1935), p. 224. Cantimori replies to Croce with ‘Recenti studi intorno alla Riforma in Italia e ai riformatori italiani all’estero’, *Rivista storica italiana*, 53 (1930), p. 98. On the whole discussion, see Berengo, *La ricerca*.

⁸⁴ L. Mangoni, ‘Europa sotterranea’, in D. Cantimori *Politica e storia contemporanea*, pp. XIII, XLII.

⁸⁵ Per la rinascita dell’idealismo, p. 40.

⁸⁶ See: Cantimori’s translation of *Sommario di storica* by G. Droysen (Florence, 1943).

⁸⁷ See: Cantimori, *Utopisti e riformatori italiani* (Florence, 1943) and *Giacobini italiani* (Bari, 1956).

revolutionary syndicalism, his sorelism, and by his admiration for Croce's historiography, Camillo Pellizzi was for his part fascinated by Ugo Spirito's and Giuseppe Bottai's theories of corporatism. Moreover, while Cantimori disowned fascism and became communist well before the fall of the fascist regime, Pellizzi, who lived between Italy and England, continued to believe in Fascism even after the Second World War and wrote his work *Una rivoluzione mancata*, A Missed Revolution, in 1949. This book features here because, even if written after the cessation of hostilities, it shows an original view on the 'missed revolution' from a true believer in Fascism, who was involved in fascist politics and continued to espouse corporatist beliefs.⁸⁸ Pellizzi, who worked as a University professor in both Italy and England and was founder of the London Fascio, collaborated actively with the fascist regime, in particular with Giuseppe Bottai, who was Minister of corporations (1929–42) in the Mussolini government and one of the most prominent sponsors of fascist academic and cultural initiatives.⁸⁹

Giuseppe Bottai and Ugo Spirito were two of the most influential advocates of fascist corporatism, a doctrine that represented (particularly for the young fascist generation of the 1930s) a new political and economic model beyond communism and capitalism, pitched between the central planning of the economy and social life and a society based on the free market. The fascist 'third way', that for many thinkers and politicians inside and outside Italy represented a novel approach to the shortcomings of a market economy, gained momentum after the 1929 crash.⁹⁰ The 1929 crisis paved the way to a far-reaching debate in Italy, promoted by some of the most widely distributed fascist reviews, in particular 'Critica fascista' directed by Bottai and 'Nuovi Studi di Diritto Economia e politica', and by the works of the philosopher Ugo Spirito.⁹¹ The corporate system meant effectively the absorption of the conflicting trade unions into corporations, which gathered together representatives of the various productive classes on the one hand and industrialists on the other. The State was assigned the role of promoter of and mediator between corporations. Indeed, the corporate system became strongly bureaucratic and static within fascism, with its role involving the stifling of any conflicts that might arise between different classes and interests. In any case, for the young fascist generation of the 1920s and 1930s corporations represented

⁸⁸ Cantimori, *Studi di Storia*, pp. 635–6.

⁸⁹ He taught at the University College of London, where he was appointed Professor of Italian Studies in 1934, but he was appointed in 1939 Professor of history and doctrine of Fascism at Florence University, holding both posts till the end of the war. He was then responsible for the Fasci italiani all'Estero in Great Britain, and in 1940 was appointed by Mussolini as President of the Istituto Nazionale di Cultura Fascista. On Bottai see: S. Cassese, 'Un programmatore degli anni Trenta: Giuseppe Bottai', *Politica del Diritto*, 1/3 (1970). On Spirito see: A. Negri, *Dal corporativismo comunista all'umanesimo scientifico, Itinerario teorico di Ugo Spirito* (Manduria, 1964).

⁹⁰ See: S. Lanaro, 'Appunti sul fascismo di sinistra. La dottrina corporativa di Ugo Spirito', *Belfagor*, 26/5 (1971), pp. 577–99. G. Parlato, *La sinistra fascista. Storia di un progetto mancato* (Bologna, 2000).

⁹¹ Schivelbusch Wolfgang, *Three New Deals: Reflections on Roosevelt's America, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, 1933–1939* (New York, 2006).

the Italian path to a new economy and politics – an innovation that would overcome the duality between collectivism and individualism. At the same time, it was seen as a break with the liberal economic policies pursued by Giolitti's government, as well as an alternative to the highly combative and conflict-ridden Italian trade unions.

'Missed revolution' was the subject of Pellizzi's 1949 book, where he stated that the fascist progressive revolution had been interrupted because there was 'no clarity, will, courage or possibility, to proceed onward'.⁹² According to Pellizzi, fascist corporatism would have given Italy the chance to develop a new economic model, one that could overcome the duality of capitalism and communism and lead to an efficient society, governed in accordance with technocratic principles – 'a revolution of the technicians'.⁹³ The book's thesis was that fascism had tried to change the old and static Italian State and society, riven by class conflicts and lacking any responsible or efficient elite. The revolution Pellizzi had in mind was Spirito's corporate revolution, which had the capacity to mould and develop the technocratic elites.

The selection of elites had a pivotal role in the corporatist system and in corporatist thought. The absence of efficient and strong elites had already become at the turn of the century one of the most controversial questions debated in the political and academic literature. This issue, which was intertwined with the discussion about 'missed revolutions', acquired a technocratic connotation in some fascist literature and in particular in Spirito's corporatism. Ugo Spirito, who was the main thinker behind the fascist corporations, had imagined a society that was not divided into classes, but rather into levels of organisation, ruled by strict technocratic criteria. Technical ability should in his view be the pivotal factor in the management of the economy and the conduct of politics. Spirito went so far as to propose in the famous Ferrara Congress the end of individual ownership and the control of industries by corporations. Yet, as Lanaro and Acquarone acutely see, even in his most ambitious idea of an 'owner corporation', in which the corporations – workers – owned the capital invested, the final structure of capital ownership was highly hierarchical and technocratic. The workers could become owners of industries only according to their hierarchical degree – a kind of technocratic aristocracy constituting the new elite. And in their turn, their hierarchical degrees should be dependent on their technical competence, which had to be decided on allegedly neutral criteria. In this technocratic utopian vision, technique was assigned the task of resolving at the same time issues of

⁹² See: G.M. Bravo, 'Sindacalismo fascista e corporativismo (1922–1945)', *Annali della Fondazione L. Einaudi*, Turin, 3 (1969), pp. 207–26; G. Santomassimo, 'Ugo Spirito e Il Corporativismo', *Studi Storici*, 14/1 (1973), pp. 61–113. E. Santarelli, 'Studi recenti sull'economia del corporativismo', *Quaderni Di Storia Dell'economia Politica*, 1/1 (1983), pp. 191–200. On the relations between Pellizzi and Spirito, see G. Longo 'Corporazione Parito e stato: Il dibattito fra Ugo Spirito e Camillo Pellizzi (1931–1939). Carteggio fra Ugo Spirito e Camillo Pellizzi', *Annali della Fondazione Ugo Spirito*, 7 (1995), pp. 149–87.

⁹³ C. Pellizzi, *Rivoluzione mancata* (Bologna, 2009), p. 94.

social justice, as well as questions regarding the formation of new, efficient elites and the mitigation of social conflict.

Even if at first glance Pellizzi's argument seemed to echo Gobetti's call for an aristocracy of workers, his idea of the revolution diverged markedly from that of the Turinese liberal. In Pellizzi's short-term interpretation, the 'missed revolution' was a concept pitted against liberal governance and parliamentarism – the politics of a weak government without any dominating elite. All discussions about the chronic underdevelopment of the Italian economy, about Italian corruption and the separation between masses and elites in the post-Risorgimento governments were, in marked contrast to Gobetti, simply disregarded. Fascism faced, in Pellizzi's view, three paramount questions, which were indeed the central concerns of a generation in revolt: '1. a better distributive justice and more participation of the workers in the political life; 2. greater energy and efficiency of the government [...]; 3. use and enhancement of competences in the public sphere'.⁹⁴ Fascism had the capacity to resolve them – had the revolution not been interrupted by the war. So, the creation of a solid technocratic aristocracy could have been then the best contribution made by the fascist government to the enhancement of Italian and European progress – and therefore to addressing the main issue, namely, the gulf between technical elites and political elites. Pellizzi, by the way, in contrast to Gobetti and Cantimori, did not consider the gulf between masses and elites.

In Pellizzi's judgement, Fascism was thus the only political force that could successfully realise the programmeme of technocratic development: on the one hand, because it was a strong government, directed by a centre of decision, and, on the other hand, because it meant a minimal state, which was supposed only to coordinate the corporations, without planning economic activity.⁹⁵ In this sense, fascism was, according to Pellizzi, 'real socialism', proceeding along the same path without destroying the social unity of the society – as socialism and trade unions had done before the fascist seizure of power. Socialism had aimed, in Pellizzi's idiosyncratic interpretation, at giving welfare and a greater power to the workers and therefore creating an aristocracy of the best workers, not at enhancing their consciousness and leading to a radical change in the actual structure of power.

The reason for the failure of the fascist revolution lay, in this view, in the gradual disappearing of the aristocratic *élan* of the fascist movement, in the transformation of the corporations into bureaucratic organs of the state, in the prevailing 'democratic mentality', the 'popular attitude' that the party acquired after the murder of Matteotti and in the advent of the war.⁹⁶ Technocratic fascism therefore represented, according to Pellizzi, a convincing solution to all social questions, whereas democracy could be better achieved by the education of the elites, not by a representative

⁹⁴ Ibid., 93.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 64–5.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

system. A government and an economy based on the hierarchy of producers, and a state which was minimal represented the best conditions for the citizens' welfare and well-being.⁹⁷ All in all, Pellizzi's view of missed revolution was based on a mixture of arguments, ranging from the fascist continuity thesis, to the technocratic short-term view on the missed revolution.

V

Pellizzi and Cantimori both belonged to the same fascist younger generation striving for a total revolution: both believed – Cantimori for a relatively short period – that fascism was the only way out from liberal, provincial Italian politics. Nonetheless, their way of being fascist would come to diverge, until in the end their political positions were irredeemably opposed. Our investigation into the context surrounding the debate on missed revolutions and their respective positions has revealed two distinct trajectories, albeit with a common starting point – a revolutionary idea of fascism and a rebellious generational war – which led to opposed views, whereas the genesis of their divergent paths has been clearly found in their interpretation of the concept of missed revolution.

Cantimori aimed at a revolution that would entail the creation of a culture common to the masses and to elites, and that would achieve social cohesion, from below – from the masses – and from above – from elites and intellectuals, and that would create a genuinely unitary national state. He mixed fascism, republican thought, anarcho-syndicalism and a firm commitment to historiographical work. He absorbed the different strands of the 'missed revolution' debate, elaborating upon and then, after a while, refusing its ideological assumptions, coming to forge a complex and open interpretation of the missed revolution, proceeding from his early belief in Gentile's ethical state to Gramsci's idea of passive revolution – through Croce, the historiography about the heretics, Gobetti, Oriani, De Sanctis, and many others.

Pellizzi's aim for his part was to enhance the role of Italy, and by the same token Italian efficiency, in Europe and to reinforce the elites by turning them into an aristocracy of technicians. In his view, the complex political and social issues, rooted in the long history of the Italian peninsula – the social question, justice between classes and the disparity between North and South – could be resolved outright and from scratch through the creation of a technocratic government in politics and the economy. He ended his political assessment with a plea for a technocratic society, in which the economy might become the irradiating centre of progress, the role of the state would be based on education, and any idea of democracy and representative institutions would become secondary. His missed revolution had to be accomplished from above, through the

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 258 ff.

agency of an efficient elite of technocrats, whose task it was to educate the people and not represent them.

That Pellizzi's interpretation of missed revolution represents not only a fascist's nostalgic memory but also a technocratic, illiberal project, can be seen in his call for a managerial revolution, a concept originally formulated by the American ex-Trotskyist intellectual James Burnham.⁹⁸ Pellizzi's technocratic utopia seems partly to mirror Burnham's conception of the future developments of capitalism, involving the emergence of a class of managers, who would really control politics and the economy.⁹⁹ Yet, contrary to Burnham's anxieties about the managerial control of the economy and politics, Pellizzi for his part welcomed the future technocratic society and traced back its beginnings to fascist corporatism. He exalted the role of a technocratic ruling class in a future society and de facto legitimised fascism as the first example of a process that would have happened anywhere – the managerial revolution.

Conversely, to Cantimori, after his youthful advocacy of fascism, any plea for a revolution and any new beginning from scratch had come to appear suspect. In the end, he avowed that his only possible role in society would be to continue his work as a historian, as a critical historian, instilling doubts, deconstructing triumphalist narratives, and possibly discovering new underground histories. The deconstruction of the idea of missed revolution may well have been one of his first attempts to exercise his critical thinking: taking seriously the idea of missed revolution and reversing it, he found out that the losers of history, the heretics and the Jacobins, were also deserving of a place in history.

The reconstruction of the missed revolution debate, occurring as it did in a period of crisis – during Italian Fascism – has perhaps served to show how history became a terrain for political and intellectual debates and appropriations. It has revealed not only the uses of history by political adversaries, but also the intertwining between history and politics in a particular genre of historical writing, which is at the border between historical reconstruction and the telling of hypothetical tales. The political meanings of the historical issue of missed Reformation and failed Risorgimento were at stake in the intellectual and political revolt of the fascist and antifascist generation in the 1920s and 1930s. All in all, the missed revolution and its fulfilment were both a test and a challenge for the young people belonging to Cantimori's, Pellizzi's, Gramsci's, and Gobetti's generation: their response to this challenge mirrored and stimulated their political and intellectual consciousness,

⁹⁸ *The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World* (New York, 1941). Published in Italian as *La rivoluzione dei tecnici* (Milan, 1946), translated and introduced by Camillo Pellizzi.

⁹⁹ C. Pellizzi, *Premessa all'edizione italiana*, in J. Burnham, 'La rivoluzione dei tecnici' (location, date). See also: Pellizzi, *La tecnica come classe dirigente* (Rome, 1969). On Burnham, see A. Salsano *Introduzione* in Burnham, *La rivoluzione manageriale* (Turin, 1992); *Ingegneri e politici, Dalla razionalizzazione alla rivoluzione manageriale* (Turin, 1987); G. Borgognone 'L'itinerario politico e intellettuale di James Burnham', *Studi storici*, 40/3 (1999), pp. 755–95; *James Burnham. Totalitarismo, managerialismo e teoria delle élites* (Aosta, 2000).

as well as their historical and political imaginations. No matter what Croce claimed, narratives about missed revolution may not have been merely idle issues. Indeed, narratives of this kind will perhaps bring to light some of the pivotal political interests and values as well as the imagining of a better society. As Sheldon Wolin remarks, history could be seen as something more than merely a description of facts: ‘because facts are more multifaceted than a rigid conception of empirical theory would allow, they are more likely to yield to the observer whose mental capacities enable him to appreciate a known fact in an unconventional way. As one philosopher has said, ‘Given the *same* world it might have been construed differently. We might have spoken of it, thought of it, perceived it differently.’¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ S. Wolin, ‘Political Theory as a Vocation’, *The American Political Science Review*, 63/4 (1969), p. 1073.