

Morelli's endeavour in this monograph is conciliatory: she points out connections and disconnections between feminist theory and queer theory – and the debts of the latter to the former – and develops a productive literary critical methodology that incorporates both. It is hoped that this methodology will be taken further by other critics and applied to other works by these three authors, and especially Morante, whose work has been curtailed here to *Aracoeli*, and more widely to Italian women's writing in which queer themes are both explicit and covert.

This is an original, rich, and lucidly argued book of criticism. It will be an important addition to the scholarship on Maraini, Sapienza, and Morante for the use of academics, researchers, postgraduate and undergraduate students of Italian and other literatures and of comparative literature, who will find in it a valuable theoretical, methodological, and critical paradigm to follow.

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## ***Il diario politico di Francesco Cocco Ortu (1922–1929). Dalla delegittimazione del sistema parlamentare alla legittimazione della dittatura fascista***

**by Marco Pignotti, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 2021, cxviii + 212 pp., €30.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-3613-186-0**

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Mario Pignotti's book is part of a wave of publications on Fascism prompted by the hundredth anniversary of the March on Rome. The book is based on the diary of Francesco Cocco Ortu (1842–1929), a veteran of the pre-Fascist parliament (elected 14 times as an MP, Minister of *agricoltura, industria e commercio* in 1897, and Minister of *grazia e giustizia* in 1901) who witnessed the fall of the Italian parliamentary regime and took notes on the events as they unfolded. However, Pignotti's work is not merely biographical, nor is it simply the publication of Cocco Ortu's diary. Rather, it is the critical edition of this primary source, and the resulting publication is an enticing read which focuses, as the subtitle states, on the delegitimisation of the parliamentary system and the simultaneous legitimisation of the Fascist regime.

The book is made up of two parts: the first is a detailed historical introduction to the second, which is the diary proper. Significantly, Pignotti does not start his analysis of the historical circumstances which led Fascism to power with the 1919–21 biennium, but with the First World War, examining the effects it had on the Italian mentality and political life. Indubitably, the Italian political world was fractured, after the war, not only by the issue of the so-called *vittoria mutilata*, but also by the divide created, before the war, between interventionists and neutralists. As the author puts it: 'war, although finished, has not ended' (p. xlviii).

In this lacerated climate, the disintegration of the parliamentary system's legitimacy took place. In particular, Pignotti stresses the role of the press in supporting the rise

of Fascism and its assault against Italian institutions. The *Corriere della Sera* appears as a key player in legitimising the Fascist anti-parliamentarian stance. The *Corriere* glossed over the systematic use of violence by Fascism against its political opponents, obsessively required 'governability' from the parliament, demonised welfare programmes and proposed an austerity-driven fiscal policy (p. lxxv).

Moreover, as the author examines, the Italian ruling class, following its instinct of self-preservation, gradually accepted an alliance with Fascism, validating its violence while considering parliament too slow and ineffective. This led to the gradual loss of legitimacy of any kind of political associationism, including trade unions, public protests, and so on, which were seen with suspicion. This process, once more, was accelerated by the press. The result was the wholesale delegitimisation of democratic associationism.

This first section serves the purpose of preparing the reader for the diary, in which all these themes return, as Cocco Ortu noted the events he witnessed. Despite his age (he was 80 in 1922), his analysis is lucid and precise, although sometimes veering towards fatalism and elitism. Cocco Ortu is not slow to denounce the weakness of the parliamentary front, as MPs were constantly bickering among themselves and could only offer an 'ancient' political programme to the electorate. He excoriates those he calls the '*gabbati*' ('duped'), people who had been enticed by Fascism and worked as useful idiots for Mussolini's rise to power. These include the *Corriere's* director, Luigi Albertini, and prominent intellectual figures like Luigi Einaudi. As Cocco Ortu effectively describes them, they were 'lemons', squeezed by Mussolini and then discarded (p. 71). In a few points, Cocco Ortu is almost prophetic, as when he notes that, sooner or later, Pietro Badoglio would be cast aside by the regime. His analysis of Fascist violence is also interesting, as it closely resembles the idea of stochastic terrorism, as expressed in recent times to describe the attacks conducted by white supremacists in the United States.

However, as Pignotti underlines, Cocco Ortu was also a man tied to an obsolete idea of politics and power. The Sardinian MP, despite his early opposition to Fascism, clearly did not understand that the regime would usher in a systemic change in Italy. He urged moderation on the opposition, to avoid scaring the voters, and trusted the King to do the right thing (only with time would his trust in the Crown wither). Moreover, it seems that he greatly underestimated the regime's support among the ruling and the working class (the latter was never properly analysed by him). Cocco Ortu was convinced that the regime was the product of a *coup* organised by a violent minority and hoped that external factors, like the economic crisis, international isolation, or even the King, could topple it. To be fair to him, this was a common mistake made by antifascists, especially in the 1920s.

In conclusion, Marco Pignotti's work is surely commendable. The author uses Cocco Ortu's diary to open a window on the period which saw the Fascist rise to power, exposing the compounding factors which led to the delegitimisation of the parliament and the concurrent legitimisation of the regime. The ever-present risk with sources like this diary is that they either remain unknown or become the basis for a sterile hagiography of the author. But here the use of the diary, coupled with the author's introduction, allows the reader to tie it to the broader historical context, exploiting Cocco Ortu's position as a privileged witness of events.