

# Books

## MYTHOLOGY, AN ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA

edited by Richard Cavendish

(Rizzoli; 302 pp.; \$35.00)

Robert J. Myers

"Mythology is the dust of former beliefs. It is man's first effort to know his God." So says the editor's preface to an 1898 edition of Bulfinch's mythology. Bulfinch claimed no other aim for his work than to "extend the enjoyment of elegant literature" by presenting myths and fables of Greece, Rome, and the Nordic regions. This new splendid encyclopedia, replete with photographs, catalogues the myths of the world with separate sections on Asia, the Middle East, the West, Africa, the Americas, and the Pacific—a total of thirty chapters. Here, then, we have the essence of world culture suggesting, like Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, a broad similarity of the human condition.

The book has been compiled by a variety of scholars—professors of religion, social anthropologists, archaeologists, linguists—who have aimed at a clear and readable text that is at once a pleasure to the eye and stimulating to the mind. The quality of production is exceptionally high, including clear type, wide margins, and handsome artwork. Unlike most encyclopedias, *Mythology* can be read straight through like Bulfinch, as well as serve as an important reference work.

In his introduction Cavendish stresses the parallel patterns of many cultural myths, seeing them as a common reaction to man's efforts to cope with his own sense of reality and his relationship to the world of fact and fancy. "A great myth, like a great poem," says Cavendish elsewhere, "contains truth more profound than the literal." When, for example, the new "high criticism" of the nineteenth century undermined a literal interpretation of Genesis, the core of the creation myth remained: that the world was created by God and therefore life is not without meaning. Two common threads that unite myths of widely separated peoples are "the feeling of living in a world dominated by the mysterious, non-human agencies, gods and spirits and supernatural entities," and "the tendency to concentrate on the

evils of the human condition, on the unfairness of life and its dangers." Myths are at the root of societal moral functions, delineating acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

The section on the West is familiar, to be sure, although a chapter on "Mystery Religions," the myths of certain societies and their dark rites of initiation, is novel. The section on Africa is timely and appears to reverse the Christian missionary attitude that African religions are no more than "tribal superstitions" (though at the same time the recent success of Christianity in Africa contradicts that observation).

North American Indian myths, notably that of the "Corn Woman," are explored, and here one might wish to refer to the more elaborated treatment of the same myth in *The Golden Bough* under "The Corn Mother of many lands," including the Greek myth of Demeter, goddess of agriculture and fertility.

Contained in the Asia section is a considered chapter on the religious tradition of China, especially Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. When one places this tradition alongside the Maoist brand of Marxist ideology, a dilemma appears. With Mao dead and Russia now the enemy, Chinese political leaders have cut themselves off ideologically from both the more distant and immediate links to their country's sustaining myths, thus raising serious questions of their ultimate political legitimacy. The substitute myth of Marx, Engels, and Stalin—the vision of progress and the historical inevitability of communism—may be the first casualty.

Man has always required myths, and these have evolved under the constant tension of new truths, empirical or revealed. "The moral code by which we regulate our conduct," says Frazer, "is being constantly revised and altered; old rules are being silently expunged and new rules silently inscribed in the palimpsest by the busy, the unrelenting hand of an invisible

scribe." The process is reciprocal. New moral codes evolve from cultures and their myths and, in turn, reshape them. Myths and morals become inseparable, reminding us of our common humanity. The question arises, however, just how far these myths result in a common interpretation of ultimate concerns: creation, good and evil, reward and punishment, death and resurrection. Some might hope to see in this crosscultural affinity a certain ecumenical progression. Others would say that to push this reductionist process on a religious plane destroys the essential character of a particular religion, which is composed of interacting but disparate vestiges of common ancient myths.

Frazer was moved to say in the introduction of his volume on *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul* that it might be possible to go beyond the comparison of cultural myths to a comparative study of ethics. "The moral distillation of each community would do for morality what the same method applied to religious [cultural] phenomena is now doing for religion." He considered his findings and interpretations the rough stones for such a study. *Mythology* pro-



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### **THE YOUNG MUSSOLINI AND THE INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS OF FASCISM**

by A. James Gregor

(University of California Press,  
xii + 270 pp.; \$16.50)

### **ITALIAN FASCISM AND DEVELOPMENTAL DICTATORSHIP**

by A. James Gregor

(Princeton University Press; xiv + 427  
pp.; \$27.50/9.75)

*Anthony James Joes*

From his post at the University of California, A. James Gregor has been waging a protracted campaign to change the way in which we think about fascism. To appreciate the magnitude, as well as the value, of the task Gregor has taken on, one should recall the state of Fascist studies in the middle and late 1960s. Serious works on fascism had been produced by scholars such as Paul Einzig, Herman Finer, and William Welk during the 1930s. But for two decades after the end of the Second World War, American images of fascism, even in the academy, were redolent of wartime propaganda and the crudest sort of class-war monism. Political convenience allowed "Fascist" to be used synonymously with "Nazi"; professional convenience allowed primary sources to be neglected, with predictable results. Any academician would have been hooted out of his academy had he offered such analyses of Russian communism as: "The Bolsheviks were pawns in a German plot to dominate the world" or "Stalin was a Georgian bankrobber who imposed himself on a servile and masochistic people." Yet analogous "explanations" of Mussolini and fascism had become all too common among U.S. historians and political scientists. Thus one of the most complex and important political movements in modern history was caricatured into incomprehensibility.

Determined to change all that, and armed with a profound knowledge of primary source materials on fascism,

Gregor has produced a series of books which by themselves constitute a graduate education in the theory and practice of fascism. Among these works, *The Ideology of Fascism* (1969) exposed the deep roots of fascist thought in European sociology and philosophy of the nineteenth century; *The Fascist Persuasion in Radical Politics* (1974) analyzed the pre-1914 crisis of Marxist thought from which fascism eventually emerged and established the family resemblance among Italian fascism, Maoism, and Castroism.

Gregor has just produced two new works. *The Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism* shows how Mussolini, between 1909 and 1922, combined elements of Marxism, syndicalism, and nationalism into a coherent and attractive doctrine. *Italian Fascism and Developmental Dictatorship* establishes the connection between that doctrine and Fascist policies between the March on Rome and the Second World War.

By 1914, Mussolini was Italian socialism's most prominent personality. He was well acquainted with the works of Marx and Engels, writing numerous articles on them as editor of the party's national newspaper. *The Young Mussolini* traces the growing influence on Mussolini and other Socialists of the "syndicalists," a little-known but fascinating group of Marxist heretics, the most prominent of whom was Georges Sorel. Finding much of classical Marxism irrelevant to the preindustrial Italy in which they lived, the syndicalists also distrusted the official Socialist party, with its largely bourgeois leadership and its tendency to play parliamentary politics while waiting comfortably for "inexorable economic laws" to bring revolution. Some syndicalists evolved a new theory of revolution emphasizing the mobilization of the masses by a dedicated élite who would employ morally compelling symbols and myths. Some of these syndicalist revolutionaries, called "national" syndicalists, went further. The proletarian revolution could not occur in Italy until the bourgeoisie completed its task of industrialization, but industrialization was stalled because Italy was starved of natural resources. Hence, the proletarian revolution required that Italy acquire these resources through a colonial empire. The Italian proletariat, in a word, could expect no real improvement in its lot so long as most of Italy remained poor and

powerless. National syndicalists therefore supported Italy's war of aggression against Turkey in 1911 (as Engels had cheered Bismarck's Prussia against France in 1870 and upheld the British raj in India).

Mussolini felt increasingly attracted to these ideas. Like Lenin, he had long before given up his faith in the "spontaneous revolutionary uprising of the masses," and his experience as a Socialist organizer in the Austrian-ruled Trentino had kindled sparks of nationalism within him. Confronted by the war of 1914, Mussolini tried to move his Socialist party away from its sterile non-policy of neutralism to his own vision of the struggle as a people's war that would drive the apathetic masses into the national mainstream and help complete Italy's industrial revolution. Mussolini failed to convince the majority of his Socialist comrades and, indeed, was expelled from the party. Forced to construct his own political organization, building on syndicalist insights, Mussolini by the end of 1917 "had begun to articulate the first coherent, mass-mobilizing, nationalist and developmental ideology of the twentieth century." Thus, fascism—a heresy of Marxism by way of national syndicalism—went on to triumph over both orthodox socialism and political Catholicism after 1918 because the Fascists had preempted the themes of nationalism and modernization.

The first part of *Italian Fascism and Developmental Dictatorship* presents a summary of the main ideas found in *The Young Mussolini*; in the rest of the book Gregor is concerned with the policies of the Fascist regime after 1922. Roberto Michels, a leading national syndicalist thinker (whose *Political Parties* has become a political science classic in the United States), was officially charged with the elaboration and propagation of Fascist ideology. Gregor establishes—in interesting chapters on Fascist economic, labor, and social policies—the influence of syndicalist thought on Fascist action.

Another major theme of the book is the similarity between major policies of fascism and Stalinism. Soon after seizing power, the Bolsheviks discovered (like Italian syndicalists before them) that the writings of Marx had little to guide a leadership bent on the rapid modernization of a peasant society. Thus, in its regimentation of labor, in its appeals to nationalism, and in its