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Claudia Baldoli with Brendan Fleming (2014) *A British Fascist In The Second World War: The Italian War Diary of James Strachey Barnes, 1943-45* (New York: Bloomsbury), 264 pp., ISBN 9781472510426, \$29.95, paper cover

This fascinating diary introduces English-language scholars to the wartime observations and personal experiences of Major James Strachey Barnes (1890-1955), an Indian-born Italophile Englishman. Barnes was a notorious pro-fascist writer in the 1920s and 1930s, and became an English-language radio broadcaster for Benito Mussolini's regime during the Second World War.

Claudia Baldoli and Brendan Fleming have edited this previously unpublished diary in a judicious way, despite the challenges posed by the legibility of Barnes's abstruse handwriting. The editors have provided a very helpful introduction (pp.1-25) and numerous annotations, together with extensive bibliographic and sources sections. The diary, which is divided into three parts and covers the years 1943-1945, offers invaluable new insights into why Barnes became, as he described himself to the Germans at one stage, the Italian 'Lord Haw Haw' (diary, 11th September, 1943). Barnes was motivated by a combination of self-interest (the need to survive and feed his family) and an unremitting faith that fascism remained, ultimately, the best hope for Italy and Europe generally. As late as 9th April, 1945, in a private conversation with Mussolini, Barnes told the *Duce* that he wanted to stay by him, repeating his certainty that 'our ideas will triumph', despite the poor military situation (diary, 9th April, 1945).

Barnes, who was raised in an Anglican family but became an enthusiastic Roman Catholic at the age of 23, had spent much of his childhood in Italy. Educated at Eton public school and Cambridge University in England, he served in the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War, and provided expert advice on Albanian affairs to the British diplomat Harold Nicolson at the Versailles Peace Conference. Barnes then returned to Italy in 1923 to work as a freelance journalist. Having fallen deeply in love with Italy, its people, its religion and culture when he was a young man, Barnes later developed a notably strong enthusiasm for Mussolini

and the new creed of fascism, and he spent much of the interwar period doing everything in his power to promote the ideology as a 'universal' creed, portraying it as a model with political prescriptions for all the nations of Europe.

In fact, from the mid-1920s through to the final collapse of the Salo Republic in northern Italy in 1945, Barnes shaped his writing career around his deeply-held conviction that Mussolini was the greatest statesman of the age and fascism was the most important creed of the twentieth century. Barnes saw fascism as an anti-materialist revolution, a radical movement combining ideas with action; it was changing the whole course of European society, and would instil in its peoples a new 'spiritual' approach to life. This was a theme he returned to in his wartime diary, describing his vision of a Europe united around such values (diary, 1st January, 1944).

For Barnes, fascism also shared many of the features of Catholicism, especially its anti-Communism and anti-liberalism, and it rejected the 'decadence' of what Barnes called the 'Anglo-Saxon' liberal democracies. Again, this interwar critique of Italy's enemies is on regular display in the wartime diary, with references to the 'Anglo-Assassins' and complaints that the Allies were instruments of 'the Jews'. Indeed, the fascist beliefs that Barnes espoused in his interwar writings are repeated at key junctures in his wartime diary, where he combines these ideological obsessions with numerous reflections on the everyday course of the war and his anxieties about Italy's increasingly mixed fortunes in the conflict. In one early diary entry, while recognising that the war was not popular with Italians, Barnes nevertheless claimed that they still regarded it as a 'grim necessity'; moreover, in Barnes's view, the war remained 'a fight for freedom and the survival of European civilisation' (diary, 1st January, 1943). Such language can be discerned in various diary entries right through to the very end. In addition, there is interesting new information about the extent of his role at the Ministero della Cultura Popolare, and on the people he worked with there, including Ezra Pound.

For this reviewer, who has spent some years studying Barnes, there are also a number of important revelations. The diary discloses that, despite his oft-stated devotion to Italy, Barnes

still contemplated trying to escape to either Spain or Switzerland after the *Duce* was overthrown in 1943. Furthermore, while Barnes's interwar writings, especially his journalism in the late 1930s, showed evident signs of anti-Semitism, this had tended to be 'cultural' rather than 'biological', and Barnes had expressed reservations about the Nazi obsessions with race. Yet the diary reveals that, in private, he was clearly more anti-Semitic than scholars have assumed.

Above all, the diary helps to clarify the situation regarding Barnes's citizenship. To please his father, Barnes held off from applying formally for Italian citizenship. When his father died in 1940, Barnes immediately made an application, but the diary reveals that wartime difficulties, together with the sheer bureaucracy of the regime, delayed the official approval for this until June, 1943. The sudden crisis of the regime then delayed the formal completion of the paperwork once again, much to Barnes's frustration (diary, 9th and 13th September, 1943). In fact, the process was only concluded ten years later. This wartime failure to secure full Italian nationality is crucial: it helps explain why Barnes felt it necessary to go into hiding between 1945 and 1947, as he was undoubtedly aware that the British authorities could have tried him for treason because he remained a British subject in the war.

All in all, this is an important new primary source. There remains a surprising gap in the historiography when it comes to coverage of the wartime role of Major Barnes, especially his activities as a fascist radio broadcaster, and this diary will enable historians to develop a much better picture of the later phases of his controversial career.

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