porto il nome non è tanto il danno materiale irreparabile, quanto l’orribile tortura morale che mi ha infilata per tanti anni, ostinandosi odiosamente a non voler riconoscere come un debito sacro il denaro della dote carpitia. Carpita, sì, e nessuno meglio di me può saperlo [...]. L’odio per il Portolano lo acceçò fino al punto di fargli perdere ogni pietà per il figlio. È ora piange? Tardi piange, e le sue lagrime non possono spietarmi il cuore mai più”. Solo più tardi i rapporti con il padre rientraran nella normalità.

A contrasto troviamo un Pirandello quanto mai fiducioso, ora trasognato, ora appassionato e quasi delirante, o nell’imminenza delle nozze: “Antonietta mia [...] immaginavo la vita come un immenso labirinto, circondato tutt’intorno da un mistero impenetrabile [...] il male è nella vita, un male privo di senso – mi dicevo. Ora il sole è per me nato! Ora il mio sole sei tu, e tu sei la mia pace e il mio scopo”, o più ancora per la nascita del figlio “la mia esultanza, il mio delirio di gioia non ha limiti [...] Io temo veramente d’impazzire”.

Purtroppo la pazzia della moglie ricoverata in una casa di salute porrà presto fine a questi momenti di grazia. L’epistolario testimonia essenzialmente una visione tragica della vita. Di particolare rilievo l’episodio del tentato suicidio della figlia Lietta vittima anch’essa della gelosia della madre. La lettera più commovente rimane senza dubbio quella indirizzata alla madre nell’imminenza della sua fine, lettera che sarà poi seppellita insieme a lei. “Mamma mia santa [...] io non so staccare un solo momento il mio pensiero da Te e ti vedo come se ti fossi davanti e mi struggo di non poterti baciare codeste sante mani, che tante cure e tante carezze mi diedero quando forse d’un tuo conforto e d’una tua carenezza non sentivo il disperato bisogno che sento adesso! Tu, Mamma, che hai più animo di tutti noi, tu che tanta virtù hai saputo trarre dalla tua vita fortunosa, piena di gravi momenti, nei quali il tuo cuore s’è profondato in abissi di sacrificio e la tua mente s’è levata a considerazioni supreme di là dal male e dal bene di questa meschiniissima esistenza terrena, Tu, Mamma, per tutti noi, comanda ancora al tuo corpo stanco e tormentato di resistere”.

A presenza di questo epistolario quanto mai avvincente e illuminante dell’uomo Pirandello, Elio Providenti affronta e discute il problema dell’estetica pirandelliana. Partendo dal saggio del 1893 Arte e coscienza d’oggi e inserendo Pirandello nelle polemiche letterarie del tempo, il Providenti identifica il lento evolversi dell’arte pirandelliana fino alla definizione dell’umorismo. Anche se il saggio non fa esplicito riferimento all’epistolario vero e proprio ne diventa un eccellente complemento in quanto coevo alle lettere di questo periodo. Non c’è dubbio che questa ennesima, preziosa documentazione del Providenti costituisca una delle fonti basilari e più importanti della bibliografia pirandelliana.

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As part of the new trend of historical studies on fascism’s cultural and entertainment policy, Staging Fascism. 18 BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses brings to light
the colossal and forgotten spectacle 18 BL, which had been staged outside Florence as part of the 1934 *Lditoriali della cultura e dell'arte* of the GUF (Gruppi Universitari Fascisti). Jeffrey Schnapp sees 18 BL as a fascist myth-making experiment and a converging-diverging centre of modernist culture, opposing and emulating the bolshevik mass theater. Bolshevism and fascism, Schnapp says, considered culture in general, and theater in particular, as a "laboratory in which the new mass subject could be shaped and new forms of mass organization tested" (2).

The purpose of a fascist mass theater was, then, political, or better, an indoctrination of the masses, as Hal Foster points out in his brief but lucid foreword to *Staging Fascism*: "it was to bind a disparate people into a linguistic group that was also a political mass, one national-ideological body" (xiii). The fascist process of indoctrinating the Italian people began first by means of "adunate oceаниche" in the large cities; then itinerant cinema and theater, which (mounted on a fleet of tracks as the Thesopian theater, for example) bought propaganda spectacles to small villages and mountain towns.

The idea of a fascist theater of masses for the masses was launched by Mussolini, who, speaking to the SIAE (Società Italiana Autori ed Editori) on 28 April 1933, appealed to playwrights to do away with the "famigerato 'triangolo' [of the bourgeois theater] che ci ha ossessionati finora" and to bring to the stage the sentiment of the modern Italian nation "che è quello della rivoluzione fascista." Further, a theater appealing to the nation should be, Mussolini remarked, "un teatro di massa" capable of housing "quindici o ventimila persone."

Spurred on by these words and organized by the hierarch Alessandro Pavolini, a collective of young playwrights (Luigi Bonelli, Sandro De Feo, Gherardo Gherardi, Nicola Lisi, Raffaello Melani, Corrado Sofia and Giorgio Venturini) decided to create a revolutionary fascist theater of "essential words and actions," bringing to the stage fascism’s ideals of man and life. The collective wrote a three-act spectacular play titled 18 BL. It was modelled on the paradigm that fascism had imposed on recent Italian history: the Great War, the fascist revolution, and the emergence of "metallized man." Called to direct this spectacle was a young but already successful film director, Alessandro Blasetti.

Emulating the bolshevik mass theater, 18 BL was as grandiose as the authors’ youthful imagination and fascist pompous rhetoric could conceive. The stage-site alone was a "sculptured" stretch of land as large as seven baseball fields. On this huge stage over two thousand people performed, in the midst of 50 trucks, an infantry brigade and a cavalry brigade, four machine-gun battery units, and an airplane squadron. Flood lighting, loud-speakers, music, and all the paraphernalia of modern technology were employed to create sound and visual effects.

The protagonist was 18 BL, the first assembly-line truck produced by FIAT, named Madre Cimberna (Mother Cartridge-Pouch). She played the role of a caring nurse during the war and of a supportive mother during the *spedizioni punitive* of the *squadrists*. Madre Cimberna died at the end of the second act after a long, active, and heroic life. In the third act the "metallized man" appeared on horse-back and Mussolini’s voice was heard on the loud-speakers, equating the one with the other.

Schnapp speaks at length of the social and philosophical connotation of 18 BL’s Madre Cimberna. For example, being an instrument of work and a means of transportation for proletarians, the truck 18 BL symbolized the entrance of working people into
the mainstream of national life, obviously implying an anti-bourgeois stand. The name
Madre Cimberna given to the character of a caring nurse points to the sacrifice of the
common soldier in the trenches as well as the dynamism of national determination.

Philosophically, 18 BL symbolized the emerging "metallized man" as an "alternative
to bolshevism's 'mechanical' mass subject" (7). Schnapp makes a distinction
"between Soviet mechanization and fascist metallization." Unlike bolshevism, which
had a solid Marxist-Leninist philosophical basis, fascism compensated for its "unsta-
ble ideological core" by stimulating an "aesthetic overproduction - a surfeit of fascist
signs, images, slogans, books, and buildings. Symbols - symbols like the fasces, open
to an infinity of modernist, classical, or Romantic restyles, capable of sustaining a
multiplicity of genealogical links between the new regime and the Roman imperial
state, the faisceau of the French revolution, and the fasci risorgimentali - were a
privileged site of self-definition for fascism" (6).

The use of machines in the bolshevik theater was a means to demystify the artificial-
ality of the bourgeois stage and life and ultimately it was an instrument for emancipat-
ing mankind from the slavery of work. On the other hand, fascists gave militaristic
anthropomorphic attributes to the 18 BL Madre Cimberna to show an heroic way of
life: "it would be inconceivable that Mother Cartridge-Pouch's motor simply be re-
placed or rebuilt, because it is quite literally her own distinctive mechanical soul or
heart" (89-90). Madre Cimberna, symbolizing the first generation of fascists, would
heroically go through the hardship of toil, sacrifices, physical decadence, and death.
Then the "metallized man," Mussolini, takes her place in the third act.

The metallized man's "ancestor - says Schnapp - is the dandy: [...] a creature who
is all masks and impenetrable surfaces [...]" (103). Marinetti's sketch of Mussolini
depicts such surfaces well: "Quando s'alza per parlare tende in avanti la testa domina-
trice, proiettile quadrato, scatola piena di buon esplosivo, cubica volontà di Stato. Ma
l'abbassa, per concludere, pronto a colpire nel petto o meglio sventrare la questione
con la forza di un toro. Eloquenza futurista bene masticata da denti d'acciaio, plastica-
mente scolpita dalla sua mano intelligente, che sbriciola la plastilina inutile degli argo-
menti avversari" (221-22). He, the metallized Mussolini, would mould the metal-
lized nation, on the road to a new civilization, fascist civilization.

The 18 BL spectacle was presented on 29 April 1934, and it was a colossal flop.
The twenty thousand spectators could not relate to a truck as protagonist; and on the
huge stage, coupled with many technical shortcomings, the story-line was lost in a
meaningless chaos of noise, explosions, and military manoeuvring. Not even one of
the authorial collective, Corrado Sofia, could "make heads or tails out of it" (197).
Most reviews were negative and only very few lukewarm. Even supporters of a new
theater, such as Giulio Bragaglia and Massimo Bontempelli, did not approve of the 18
BL production.

Fiercely against the production were Telesio Interlandi and Corrado Sofia. Sofia
claimed that Blasetti did not listen to his and De Feo's suggestions. Blasetti candidly
admitted that "the spectacle that was supposed to be performed on April 29 [...] did
not coincide with the spectacle that [...] was actually performed" (135). The fascist
idea of mass theater was, then, dead at birth, forgotten and erased from pre-war and
post-war historical memory.

In analyzing 18 BL as a play, the author notes quite accurately that it was not the
epic work it appeared to be, with its nationalist motif and gigantic staging of man and
material; rather, it was a tragedy because the death of Madre Cimberna at the end of the second act left the continuation of the fascist revolution open and uncertain. Inspired by fascist ideology, 18 BL could only have expressed a tragic vision of existence. Fascism conceived life as an endless war where individual energy had to be channelled for the common good, which was equated with the well being of the nation. Thus for fascism individual lives were not marked by a series of immanent tragic as well as joyous events, but by an endless war, a metaphysical tragedy with neither end nor solution. From this nihilist view of existence ensued the fascists' cult of war and war heroes like Madre Cimberna and their contempt for the comfort of life and peace, as one of the fascist songs goes: “ce ne fregammo un di della galera, / ce ne fregammo della brutta morte, / per preparare questa gente forte / che se ne frega adesso di morir” (A. Virgilio Savona and Michele L. Straniero. Canti dell'Italia fascista (1919-1945). Milano: Garzanti, 1979. 108-9).

In closing the book (in which a substantial selection of photographs and drawings reinforces visually the arguments treated), the reader is left with the dubious impression that a theater of masses for the masses failed in Italy because of the flop of 18 BL. However, this was not the only reason, nor even the main reason for the failure. Rather, from 1926 on, fascism had become increasingly a regime paradoxically enveloped in populist rhetoric, but entrenched in a semi-feudal socio-cultural structure. Radical fascists, who did not conform, were sent to isolated and distant places; such was the fate of Italo Balbo who was dispatched to Libya, as governor of that northern African colony, far away from the centre of power.

The lack of a serious evaluation of these historical facts is unfortunately a shortcoming of this otherwise fine and enlightening study – a study that, centring on the development and failure of 18 BL, explores synchronically and diachronically the evolution of modernist theater in Italy and beyond, between the two world wars.

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Following his excellent critical presentation of Franco Fortini in the Dictionary of Literary Biography (volume 128. Twentieth-Century Italian Poets. Second Series. Detroit: Bruccoli Clark Layman, 1993. 142-49), with the present publication Thomas Peterson establishes himself as an authority on this important modern poet who died in 1994. Peterson’s contribution functions on at least three levels: on one, his study contributes to the growing appreciation of the poetry of a figure better known in his own country for his political, journalistic and literary essays; on another level, it accomplishes the primary objective of the author, which is “to advance the appreciation and understanding of Fortini among the English-speaking public” (1); and finally, the text provides extensive English translations of unrivalled clarity and precision of a difficult and often impenetrable poetic diction. Peterson himself, in his Introduction, provides a statement of his methodology which consists of a chronological approach