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This rich, complicated work stands as a testament to the art of historical detection. Reading through the papers of the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars at the New York Public Library, Dr. Guarnieri came across a file on Renata Calabresi, an Italian psychologist who had fled to Italy in early 1939, seeking refuge and work in New York City. Guarnieri was struck by the fact that Calabresi had studied psychology under the direction of one of the preeminent Italian psychologists in the initial decades of the twentieth century, Francesco De Sarlo, at the Institute for Superior Studies in Florence (ISS), which is the same institution where Guarnieri works as a professor of history. Despite her deep knowledge of the history of Italian psychology, psychiatry, women’s history, and the institution itself, Guarnieri had never heard of Calabresi. She had been completely erased from institutional and cultural memory. This book is a chronicle of reclamation and loss. Meticulously constructing her narrative from scattered pieces of evidence, letter fragments, police records, newspapers, institutional records, Guarnieri focuses on two scholars to track how disciplinary struggles within psychology, fascist politics, and anti-Semitism combined with individual professional ambitions and petty egos to remove Renata Calabresi and Enzo Bonaventura from the historical record.

By focusing on Renata Calabresi and Enzo Bonaventura, both promising psychologists, both young untenured professors, both Jewish, whose lives and careers were affected by the neo-idealist attacks on Italian psychology and the subsequent rise of Fascism, Guarnieri enables us to see the choices available to these two young Jewish psychologists under the growing restrictions posed by disciplinary divisions, the rise of Fascism, and anti-Semitism. The ways in which both psychologists utilized professional networks in Britain and the United States, as well as Zionist contacts, to come up with the best possible position given the circumstances reveal new dimensions to
interwar mobility, forcing us to recognize that political refuge is inextricably linked to economic necessity. Bonaventura and Calabresi were ultimately able to carve out careers in Tel Aviv and New York; neither returned to work in Italy after the war.

When Enzo and Renata entered Italian psychology, the discipline itself was fractured and deeply politicized. Since the last decades of the nineteenth century, Italian psychology had struggled to establish itself as a separate, autonomous discipline, with limited success. Francesco De Sarlo, a pioneer in Italian psychology, managed to open the Institute of Psychology in Florence 1903. De Sarlo’s achievement, however, did not secure the place of psychology within the academic world. Caught between psychiatry, neuroscience and philosophy, this “Cinderella of the sciences,” did not succeed in claiming its share of resources including departments, senior professorships, or even a formal academic path to certification. On the eve of World War I, students interested in psychological questions graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy and Philology or the Faculty of Medicine. When Renata and her sister enrolled in the university in 1919, there was still no degree in psychology, and there was much dispute around how one could or should be considered a psychologist. The pioneering work done by nineteenth-century Italian psychologists, the vast number of publications, and the creation of a professional organization in 1910 failed to legitimize the field. The instability of the discipline was exacerbated by the ideological conflicts that divided the discipline between those who insisted psychology was a science, and those who sought to tie it to philosophy. Divisions deepened as the argument between Francesco De Sarlo, who insisted on the scientific and experimental nature of psychology, and Benedetto Croce, philosopher and historian, who, along with Giovanni Gentile, took a neo-idealistic, anti-scientific view of psychology, became more vociferous and violent.

The ascension of Mussolini to power bolstered Giovanni Gentile’s influence over the direction of psychology. In 1922, Gentile became the Minister of Education under Fascism, and a year later De Sarlo stepped down from teaching all but one of his courses, and turned the directorship of the institute over to his student Bonaventura. De Sarlo did not go willingly into semi-retirement; he was pushed out the door, leaving the untenured Bonaventura without the professional standing or resources to protect the institute. Guarnieri’s account of the fascist takeover of the academy is fascinating. Reading through the minutiae of academic appointments, legislative initiatives, and public debates reveals how academics used the opportunities created by Fascism to consolidate personal power within the Fascist institutions, and to eliminate anti-Fascist voices and ultimately expel Jews. It is the inextricable links between political ideals and deep-rooted professional grudges that serve to deepen our understanding of the impact of Fascism on Italian academia in general, and psychology in particular.

The biographies of Bonaventura and Calabresi highlight the presence of anti-Semitism within Italian academia, and how it was used to marginalize and purge the academy, long before the racial laws were passed in 1938. Guarnieri’s analysis of postwar attempts to offer restitution and compensation to exiled academics also
illuminates the lingering influence of Italian fascists and anti-Semitism in Italian universities well into the twentieth century.

Guarnieri made intentional choices to make visible the contingency of archival research. If you follow her path, letting one piece of evidence open up multiple possible explanations, until another letter or article brings clarification or more questions, you will be well rewarded. Guarnieri’s methodological choices make visible the process of historical interpretation and deduction, highlighting the incompleteness of individual pieces of historical evidence. She is masterful at the art of nuanced reading, her conclusions anchored in her extensive knowledge of Italian psychiatry and psychology. The innovative power of this work is also its weakness. The absence of a chronological frame and a conclusion can leave a reader feeling at sea in the wealth of detail. It is also unfortunate that the copy editors failed to eliminate the odd syntactical constructions and typographical errors that leave one stumbling over sentences. This is a creative, and at times, brilliant work; but it is not an easy book to read.

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