

Milan is in a state of absolute anarchy.

On this sun-drenched Sunday morning, April 29th, the populace of the city, the very city wherein Mussolini launched his concept of fascism, is reacting with the kind of speed that breeds terror. As Victor and his friends arrive downtown, their attention is immediately riveted on the riotous commotion of a large mass of people in Piazzale Loreto, since renamed as the Piazza Quindici Martiri, in honor of the 15 anti-Fascists having been executed there.

Out of their car now, having parked some distance away, they are swept along with the crowd, curious as is everyone regarding this uproarious bedlam of civil chaos. But the scene that finally confronts them is beyond anyone's believing.

From the overhead framework of a gas station; surrounded by a crowd of shouting, cursing men and women; hanging upside down as if so much meat in an unsanitary barbarian slaughterhouse, are the dead and bloodied bodies of Benito Mussolini and his mistress, Claretta Petacci. Strewn carelessly about on the ground, ropes attached to their feet in preparation for hoisting them up in a similar fashion, are the blood-smeared bodies of an additional 16 high-ranking fascist leaders.

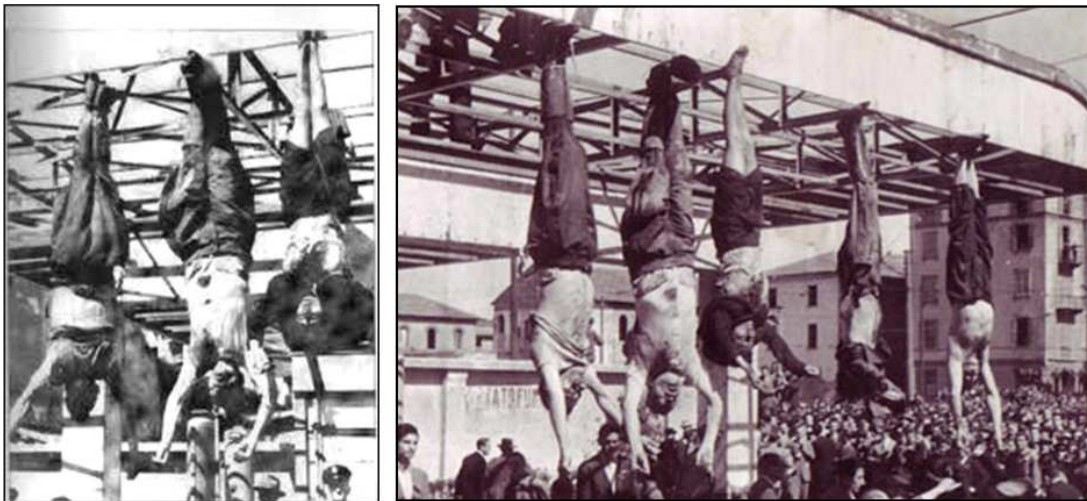
But the crowd is not yet satisfied. Smarting from years of war and privation, having forgotten perhaps what measure of good Mussolini may have brought about for Italy, the crowd is growing ever more vicious. As Victor and his friends look on, the enraged mob surging and swaying about them like an angry sea, the absolute savagery of the moment holds them in a state of unwilling fascination, Suddenly shots ring out; a woman not far away emptying her pistol into IL Duce's body.

"Five shots!" she screams. "Five shots for my five murdered sons!"

Others were shouting also. “He died too quickly!” said one. “He should have suffered!” But the hatred of many was far beyond the words of contempt or animosity to be found in any lexicon. And now the people begin spitting on the corpses. Then stones and other objects are thrown at them.

And finally, as though not altogether capable of fully venting an anger that knew no depth; as though the hanging bodies were little more than grisly piñatas; they begin beating on Mussolini’s unfeeling head with sticks and clubs.

Were it not so before, it now devolved to an indescribably gruesome scenario, a veritable feast of fury. The face of Mussolini ceases to be recognizable. Indeed, it ceases to be a face, having become but a bloody, gelatinous mass of battered flesh and shattered bone. It is a scene of unfathomable depravity, of unconscionable horror. A veritable carnival of carnage.



It is demonic!

And now Victor’s nausea has risen beyond his control. Looking away, he vomits. And hardly had that occurred before Padre Michele – having done nothing but look on in grief and revulsion – is threatened by an enraged communist partisan.

Brandishing a handgun the man shouts, “Don't even think it; don't even think of giving IL Duce his last rites, or even a blessing!”

Quietly and wisely ignoring the man, André says, “Come. It's time for us to go. We've been here far too long.”

With emotion tortured faces, sober faces, they make their way back through the heaving, jostling crowd. Behind them they can hear the wordless roar of the angry mass crescendo. Without a backward glance, they know that the other bodies are being raised up to hang in ignominious disgrace; perhaps, indeed likely, to undergo a similar beating.

While in Berlin, shortly after midnight of the very same day – in the Reich's Führerbunker and with hypocritical solemnity, Adolf Hitler marries his mistress, Eva Braun.

Adolf Hitler: the man who in 1941 told his General, Gerhard Engel, “I am now as before a Catholic and will always remain so.” Adolf Hitler, the friend of the pope, and who by him was never called to answer for his crime; who according to his cousin, Anton Schmidt of Spital, Austria, was the man who at age seven wanted to be a bishop; Hitler the child, who built an altar with benches and pretended to officiate a mass; Hitler the little boy, who demanded that all his playmates kiss his hands.

Hitler the man: aware now that Germany's defeat is a foregone conclusion, is also aware of the public's growing disenchantment, as well as that of many of his officers. If it is not yet so, within hours he will learn of the fate of Benito and Claretta. Realizing in that knowledge that a similar fate may well await him and Eva, they have planned their marriage to be a mutual suicide. Loyal SS officers will oversee their secret cremation and burial.

The Hitlers' marriage will last but a matter of hours. As a baptized Roman Catholic, his last act in life will be to make a mockery of marriage The Beast of Berchtesgarden is to be no more.

*Sic transit gloria mundi* – thus passes the glory of the world.