

The Fascist Precursor

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The Fiume Crisis: Life in the Wake of the Habsburg Empire, by Dominique Kirchner Reill, The Belknap Press, 312 pp; \$35, ISBN: 978-0674244245

D'Annunzijeve mučenica - L'olocausta di Fiume (d'Annunzio's Martyr - The Holocaust of Fiume), Pomorski i povijesni muzej Hrvatskog primorja, Rijeka, Croatia (September 12th, 2019 to January 31st, 2021)

Disobbedisco: La Rivoluzione di d'Annunzio a Fiume (I Disobey: d'Annunzio's Revolution in Fiume), Salone degli Incanti, Trieste, Italy (July 12th to November 3rd, 2019)

Rijeka's Maritime and History Museum of the Croatian Littoral was packed long before the official opening of its new exhibition on the evening of September 12th, 2019, an event that was to herald the port's forthcoming term (alongside Galway) as European City of Culture in 2020. Many more people waited outside in the grounds of the museum, chatting and enjoying the balmy weather.

Underneath the low hum of these conversations was a sense of anticipation that had been greatly sharpened by events earlier in the day. That morning a small group of black-T-shirted would-be Italian irredentists had hung a large Kingdom of Italy flag on the gates of this museum, and posed with it and a smaller flag of the stillborn Regency of Carnaro. At more or less the same time, seventy-five kilometres away, the city council of Trieste inaugurated a bronze statue of a small bald man, sitting and reading - an event that provoked the government of Croatia into lodging an official complaint with its Italian counterpart, claiming that this action "not only diminishes the friendly and neighbourly relations between the two countries, but also recalls an ideology and activity that is deeply contrary to European values". The statue was of Gabriele d'Annunzio; and the Maritime and History Museum is in Rijeka's Governor's Palace, which is where d'Annunzio established himself for sixteen months after he had led a group largely composed of Italian veterans (the so-called *arditi*) over the border from the small town of Ronchi, near Trieste, and took control of the city exactly a century before (September 12th, 1919).

The exhibition had a bilingual title, D'Annunzijeve mučenica – L'olocausta di Fiume (d'Annunzio's Martyr - The Holocaust of Fiume), appropriately enough for a city that is known to this day by two names, Rijeka and Fiume. For d'Annunzio, Fiume had been martyred on the altar of high political manoeuvring at the post-World War I peace negotiations in Paris, where the US president, Woodrow Wilson, had blocked Italy's claims on this city. It became the crucial symbol of what d'Annunzio and others proclaimed was the *vittoria mutilata* (the mutilated victory) and, in order to repair this wrong, he took it under his poetic dictatorship. He imagined it as "the city of the holocaust": a place in which the old world, where such political compromises held sway, would be reduced to ashes. If this was the origin of the title of this exhibition, it is impossible not to hear the word holocaust without thinking of the savagery of fascism, and many of the seeds of that degenerate ideology are to be found in d'Annunzio's *l'impresa di Fiume* (Fiumian enterprise). As Walter Benjamin noted, at the dark heart of fascism is the aestheticisation of politics, and some of the most recognisable fascist symbols were launched by d'Annunzio in Fiume: black shirts, the "Roman salute", stylised chanting and marches, and daily addresses by *il duce* (the title he gave himself) from the balcony of the Governor's Palace. Benito Mussolini, who carefully studied the exploits of his ally/rival, d'Annunzio, in Fiume, simply adopted these when he displaced d'Annunzio as the leader of Italian nationalist and irredentist sentiment.

The manifold reverberations of World War II and Italian fascism were not far from the minds of the attendees at the opening of this exhibition. In that period Rijeka and most of the rest of the Croatian coast was under Italian fascist rule, and horrors were perpetrated there against non-Italians. Just outside Rijeka, for instance, there is a monument to the massacre at Podhum, where in 1942, in reprisal for the killing of two Italians by the partisans, all the men in that small village were executed (estimates range between ninety-one and 130 people), the village was burnt to the ground and the women and children transported to forced labour camps in Italy. The family histories of many of the members of the Italian community at the museum that night would have been shaped by what is known as *l'esodo*, the exodus of Italians from Tito's new Yugoslavia to Italy in the aftermath of the war, and they may well have viewed d'Annunzio in a more sympathetic light. They would not be the only ones.

Part of the sense of anticipation around the Rijeka exhibition derived from the feeling that it was also a response to the other d'Annunzio exhibition that was running in 2019: Trieste's Disobbedisco: La Rivoluzione di d'Annunzio a Fiume

(I Disobey: d'Annunzio's Revolution in Fiume); 'I disobey' was d'Annunzio's challenge to the Italian state, and to the Italian soldiers who were charged with preventing him from crossing into Rijeka - an order they ultimately decided not to carry out. This was curated by a man with the rather portentous name Giordano Bruno Guerri, who runs the Fondazione Vittoriale degli Italiani, the museum housed in d'Annunzio's estate on Lake Garda, the golden cage that Mussolini provided for him, a playground where he could frolic and act out his fantasies in the amphitheatre or on the prow of the ship that is set into a hill, pointing towards Croatia. Guerri is the keeper of the d'Annunzio flame, and he is very keen to frame his idol as an idealist who has been badly misinterpreted. All visitors to the Trieste exhibition were given a leaflet with their tickets which contained a short statement by Guerri baldly declaring that "[t]he Fiume Endeavour was not a fascist action, as [sic] Gabriele d'Annunzio was not part of the fascist movement"; instead, while this enterprise "started because of irredentism and nationalism, it became a project of social, political, and cultural revolution for a renewed and advanced democracy". This, in short, was the explicit agenda of Disobbedisco, and was developed and reiterated in all the lengthy explanatory panels that accompanied the exhibits, and in the fifteen-minute video of Guerri literally lecturing *ex cathedra* (a somewhat hierarchical take on the notion of a multimedia experience that is available on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/QKsyEGN2we8>).

Describing d'Annunzio and what he got up to in Rijeka as non-fascist relies on limiting the definition of that term to Mussolini and the period after his ascension. D'Annunzio, though, has been justly dubbed the "John the Baptist" of fascism, and most historians and commentators have followed Michael Ledeen (*The First Duce: d'Annunzio at Fiume* [1977]) in seeing unambiguous links between the Fiume adventure and the March on Rome. More recently, Pankaj Mishra begins his 2017 *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* with d'Annunzio and Fiume, and casts him as "an opportunistic prophet for angry misfits in Europe: those who saw themselves as wholly dispensable in a society where economic growth enriched only a minority and democracy appeared to be a game rigged by the powerful". In this reading, d'Annunzio is the progenitor of the violent xenophobic nationalisms that characterised the twentieth century and that have most recently found expression in Trump, Brexit and ISIS.

Seeing this undertaking as, to rehearse Guerri's terms, "a project of social, political, and cultural revolution for a renewed and advanced democracy" requires the ephemeral Carta del Carnaro (the Charter of the Regency of Carnaro) to do a lot of very heavy lifting. D'Annunzio entered Fiume with the intention of provoking the Italian government into following him and taking the city under its wing. It was only after it became apparent that this was not going to happen that he began to see his project in a different light and, in collaboration with Alceste de Ambris, he formulated the Carta in the summer of 1920. This imagined reorganising the would-be regency along corporatist lines, and sounded notes of emancipation in areas such as gender relations, education, art and social welfare. It explicitly aligned Fiume with the oppressed and the colonised of the world - though this did not include what d'Annunzio saw as the uncivilised Slavic populations who actually lived in and around Fiume, whom he subjected to a constant stream of racial invective. Ultimately though, the Carta was nothing more than rhetoric, as it was never applied, and the putative regency (notably not a republic) barely lasted four months before Italian troops finally chased d'Annunzio out of the city in the last week of 1920.

In taking this positive approach to *l'impresa* the exhibition in Trieste followed a strain in Italian historiography (for example, Claudia Salaris, *Alla Festa della Rivoluzione: Artisti e Libertari con d'Annunzio a Fiume* (2002)) that sees what happened in Fiume as the 1960s *avant la lettre*: a hippie utopia that challenged societal norms. In this telling, d'Annunzio's Fiume was the place to be in 1919 and '20 for the young and for artists - a crazy, heady, place of free love and readily available drugs. To an extent, this image of the city was fuelled by d'Annunzio's own reputation. He was not averse to experimenting with narcotics, and his sexual exploits were the stuff of contemporary legend. As Lucy Hughes-Hallett chronicles in her highly readable biography *The Pike: Gabriele d'Annunzio, Poet, Seducer and Preacher of War* (2013), d'Annunzio was "compulsively promiscuous" in his distinctively decadent manner: among other things, he concocted a perfume for his lovers, many of whom were delivered to him in flower-laden carriages, which would also take them quickly away once he had finished with them. Among his close collaborators in Fiume was Guido Keller: a bisexual, naturist, Dadaist, yoga-practising wild man, who, like d'Annunzio, had a passion for daredevil flights, and whose role in Fiume was to organise pirate raids to replenish the always depleted supplies in the city. The stories of hedonism that emerged from Fiume did attract people from around Europe, including Irish nationalists who saw it as a lawless place where guns might be obtained. More famous visitors included Mussolini; the

conductor Arturo Toscanini; the Futurist and poet of war Filippo Marinetti; and the inventor of the radio (and later convinced fascist) Guglielmo Marconi, who subsequently returned to Fiume in 1923 to take advantage of the fact that, unlike in Italy, divorce was available there.

There is a seductive quality to the almost implausible drama of d'Annunzio's Fiume, a chaotic throwing off of shackles that Bruce Sterling/Bruno Argento celebrates in his patchy speculative historical novel *Pirate Utopia* (2016). The Trieste exhibition, though, made manifest the dangers inherent in this enchantment, and showed how the fabrication of this allure depends on a series of key elisions. Guerri repeats time and again that Fiume under d'Annunzio was a "party city", where "one danced and sang", and that, despite the practical problems, the city was a place of *allegria*. At one point he mentions in passing that perhaps the local Croatians did not completely share in this state of bliss. This is notable because it was one of the very few references in the whole exhibition to Croatians. A 1910 census revealed that 49 per cent of the population of Fiume, which d'Annunzio declared to be the most Italian of all cities, had Italian as their mother tongue (Croatian, Hungarian, Slovenian and German were the other languages that one would have heard on its streets every day). Not only was the Fiume presented in *Disobbedisco* almost entirely devoid of non-Italians, but the exhibition, more generally, evinced no real interest in the lives of those who lived in Fiume, be they Italian, Croatian or of any other community. Instead, it luxuriated in broad generalised pronouncements about "Heroism", "Social and Global Revolution", "Emancipation" and "Artistic Revolution", and displayed large photographs of scenes of happiness - men and women smiling and swimming together - or of supposedly profound moment - a uniformed d'Annunzio superimposed over the city. Moreover, although it regularly invoked the epithet that was given to d'Annunzio, *il Vate* (the semi-divine prophet-poet), in order to elevate him above the common political fray, there was not a line of his poetry on show. In fact, the standard of d'Annunzio's rhetoric in his daily speeches from the balcony of the Governor's Palace had more in common with Trump than, say, his almost direct contemporary, WB Yeats. His loathing for the Italian prime minister, Francesco Saverio Nitti, led him to nickname him "Cagoia" ("shitty"), and as Hughes-Hallett put it, "[a]longside his exalted talk of sacrifice and fatherland ran another stream, that of scatological abuse. [...] His invective [was] full of excrement and blubbery flesh, of belches and farts." What was mainly on show in Trieste was a motley collection of more or less military items: guns, knives, uniforms, helmets, medallions, a flying bomb, the car in

which d'Annunzio rode into Rijeka, and a series of flags. An unambivalent celebration of objects that (Charles Manson and his crew excepted) are not readily associated with the sort of hippie commune that the accompanying commentary insisted Fiume was. Instead of offering critical insight into d'Annunzio or Fiume, this exhibition vigorously burnished the myth, and was little more than a city-sponsored display of a fetish. In that, perhaps, it offered a properly d'Annunzian experience, as *il Vate* was well aware of how rendering Fiume, Italy, a uniform, a salute, into fetishised objects exerted a huge simple power that was almost impervious to rational thinking - this was perhaps his key bequest to fascism. A glance through the comments in the visitors' book suggested that Disobbedisco had tapped into this tenebrous energy: the exhibition was uniformly commended, with some people noting how it brought to light an obscured gem in Italy's historical treasury; there were declarations that Fiume and other parts of Croatia were Italian; and a few simply echoed the phrases that d'Annunzio had coined in Fiume and which became rallying cries of Mussolini's fascism: *Fiume o morte* (Fiume or death); the classical Greek-inspired (and untranslatable) battle-cry, *Eia, Eia, Eia! Alalà*; and, *me ne strafotto / me ne frego* (I don't give a damn - the essential "philosophy" of fascism).

One of the fetishised objects on display in Trieste was a metallic eagle's head that had been crudely detached from its body. The Habsburgian double-headed eagle is, to this day, an integral part of the coat of arms of the city of Rijeka, and the most prominent representation of this sits on the clock tower in the centre of the city. In 1919 a member of d'Annunzio's mob climbed up the tower and hacked off one of the heads to render the eagle more "Roman", an act that is captured in the first photograph that greeted visitors to the Rijeka exhibition. While the decapitated head was presented as a prized artefact in Trieste, there was nothing heroic about this grey on black image of a man with a hacksaw ready to behead the eagle; rather, the violence of the act was palpable. Nearby, in the same room, a lump of masonry that had been blown out of the wall of the palace in which one stood was displayed, alongside a contemporary photograph of the destruction that was inflicted on this key site in the city when the Italian army eventually flushed d'Annunzio out of town. *D'Annunzijeve mučenica - L'olocausta di Fiume* did not present *l'impresa di Fiume* as an idealised poetic endeavour, but as a brutal political act that directly impinged on the lives of people in the city.

This exhibition was curated by Tea Perinčić, and its particular focus was on the role of women - as symbols, participants and observers - in d'Annunzio's Fiume. The gender dimensions of right-wing populism are apparent all around us at present, and d'Annunzio could perhaps be seen as a prototype for politicians like Berlusconi and Trump whose frankly improbable assertions of virility, that manage to be both crude and manicured, do little more than highlight their unearned sense of entitlement. Reflecting on d'Annunzio in the course of her monumental account of her travels through Yugoslavia, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941), Rebecca West offered this biting assessment of how his escapade revealed the abyssal gap that exists between the indulgence shown to men and women in public life:

I will believe that the battle of feminism is over, and that the female has reached a position of equality with the male, when I hear that a country has allowed itself to be turned upside-down and led to the brink of war by its passion for a totally bald woman writer. Years ago, in Florence, I had marvelled over the singular example of male privilege afforded by d'Annunzio. Leaning from a balcony in the Lung'arno I had looked down on a triumphal procession. Bells rang, flags were waved; flowers were thrown, voices swelled in ecstasy; and far below an egg reflected the rays of the May sunshine. Here in Fiume the bald author had been allowed to ruin a city: a bald-headed authoress would never be allowed to build one. (*Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*)

There were photos of adoring women at the Rijeka exhibition - lovers of d'Annunzio's, and admirers who wanted to be near their hero. But it also gave space to other stories, and at the centre of the exhibition was an interactive presentation of entries from the diary of Zora Blažić, a daughter of a merchant who was twenty-one when d'Annunzio appeared in Fiume. The pages on display covered the period from 1918 to '21, and from them a sense of the everyday life of the city could be gleaned. Accounts of the large events going on in Fiume, such as the Spanish flu, the deadly scuffles between the different communities in the city, and the Italian bombardment of the city, are interspersed with her stories about neighbours, her feelings for, and accounts of the travels of, her fiancé, Dušan, and the shortage of essential goods that everyone had to endure. The Fiume that Blažić inhabited and recounted had nothing in common with the sort of Woodstock-on-the-Adriatic that was presented in Trieste.

Nor, emphatically, does the Fiume that emerges in the pages of Dominique Kirchner Reill's crucial new study, *The Fiume Crisis: Life in the Wake of the Habsburg Empire*. The fruit of meticulous, multilingual, archival research, this book tells the story of how the smallest of the post-World War I successor states (which is what Fiume was) coped with the disintegration of the Habsburg empire, to which it essentially owed its existence. The Dannunziad (to adopt the title of Viktor Emin Car's historical tragicomic novel set in this period, *Dannuncijada* (1946), which, to anglophone ears, contains serendipitous echoes of Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad*) has dominated accounts of what happened in this city in the years after World War I, be they critical or laudatory of *il Vate* and his band of legionnaires. Reill does something quite different: while this volume covers the period from the end of the war to the eviction of d'Annunzio, it approaches it in a fashion that does not allow the poet and his antics to claim the limelight, and this broader perspective helps to realign the dominant historical narrative about the city and the region that has, among other things, assigned it the role of the incubator of violent ethnic nationalisms.

One of the first steps that must be taken by anyone who wants to come to terms with this city is to clarify the basic physical and legal definition of Fiume - a not uncomplicated matter. Writing in 1947, Hubert Butler introduced the city thus: "Fiume, at the head of the Adriatic where Italy and Yugoslavia meet, takes its name from the river or 'flumen' which divides it from Sushak. This small stream was for twenty years the frontier between the Slav and Latin peoples." ("Fiume, Sushak and the Nugents") Today the city of Rijeka (which like Fiume simply means "river") encompasses both sides of this waterway: the city centre, which some locals still call Fiume, and Sušak, a more residential part of town. However, from the time of the creation of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy in 1867 to World War I, the two sides of this small river had different administrations. Both were under the Crown of Hungary, and so there were no impediments to the flows of people and goods between the two towns, but while Sušak was part of the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia and was administered by Croats and in Croatian, Fiume regained its pre-Napoleonic status as a "*corpus separatum*". This meant that it was a "semi-independent city-state governed by an Italian-language municipal council and a Hungarian governorship directly responsible to Budapest", as Reill notes. In other words, Fiume was directly tied to Budapest but administered by its own business elite. Connected by train (which also ran through Sušak) to Budapest, it was Hungary's seaport, competing with Trieste, under Austrian control, and Italy's Venice. Fuelled by a huge influx of Hungarian investment, Fiume quickly

became a boom town. In 1867 its population stood at ca 17,000; by 1918 it was over 50,000 as people came from all over the surrounding regions and beyond to work in its ever expanding port, and in the new factories, banks and refineries that were springing up in the second half of the nineteenth century. As a result, as Reill points out, by 1890 over the half the population of the city was born elsewhere. Fiume was where, for instance, the torpedo was invented by a former engineer in the Austrian navy with an Italian name, Giovanni Luppis, in co-operation with an English engineer and entrepreneur, Robert Whitehead. It was a multi-ethnic, multilingual site of economic opportunity that quickly grew to be “the ninth largest [industrial port] in continental Europe”. This commercial activity did not halt at the small river, and Sušak also thrived, so much so that, as Reill recounts, “[a]t the beginning of the twentieth century, Fiume was Hungary’s second-biggest capital producer (after Budapest), and Sušak was Croatia’s second biggest (after Zagreb)”. The economic and strategic importance of this town, and the efforts to preserve this, are at the heart of Reill’s understanding of the political shifts that Fiume underwent in the immediate post-Habsburg years.

Determining whether Fiume and Sušak constituted one or two towns was the focus of much debate at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Woodrow Wilson had assigned a set of geographers to help him establish his position on Fiume before entering the negotiations, and his chief territorial adviser took the opinion that “Sušak is as much part of Fiume as Brooklyn is a part of New York”. There were clear demographic repercussions to this: incorporating the mainly Croatian residents of Sušak into a larger Fiume/Rijeka would dislodge the Italian community from its position as the majority nationality in that city.

Italy had joined the Allied war effort on the basis of the “secret” 1915 Treaty of London, which promised it lands in Dalmatia, further down the Croatian coast, but not Fiume. Prompted by the Italian community in Fiume, the city was added to Italy’s list of demands at the Paris negotiations. The US, though, had not signed up to the Treaty of London, and Wilson saw no reason why the Italians should have any claim on the eastern coast of the Adriatic. After all, Fiume/Rijeka had never been Italian - a simple fact of which many Croats and Italians are, to this day, unaware, thanks largely to the way the history of the town has been distorted by d’Annunzio’s histrionic appeals. To be sure, a large number of Italians lived there, alongside many other nationalities, and they had a considerable say in the running of the town, but, apart from a brief Napoleonic interlude, it had been under Habsburg and then Hungarian rule

since at least the seventeenth century. Giving the key port of Fiume to Italy, in Wilson's eyes, would also greatly hamper the economy of the newly-formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes - the first Yugoslavia. Moreover, it would restrict competition: if Italy had both Trieste and Fiume, it would control a lot of international sea trade into and out of Austria and Hungary. Wilson's refusal to countenance their claims on Fiume caused the Italian negotiators to walk out of the Paris Peace Conference and almost brought about a collapse of the whole settlement. Analysing his approach to this issue, Reill astutely argues that Wilson chose to take a principled stand on Fiume, and cleaved to his Fourteen Points because he believed he could afford to take a more moral position with Italy, which he saw as a sclerotic power; his dealings in Paris with more powerful empires such as Britain, France and Japan, were very different, and he allowed them to get away with blatant, unjustifiable, land-grabs.

On the ground in Fiume, where the attention of Reill's book is trained, two national councils emerged out of the rubble of the Habsburg empire: the Italian National Council on the Fiume side of the river, and the Serb-Croat-Slovene National Council in Sušak. Both these groups followed intensely the negotiations in Paris and lobbied representatives there. Read in the wake of d'Annunzio, these competing councils have been seen as preparing the ground for the sort of ethnic nationalism he espoused. However, in Reill's account, what drove the politics of Fiume in the immediate postwar period was the need to attach itself to a powerful polity: a "*corpus separatum*" was not an independent state, and the city's fortune had been entirely dependent on its links with Hungary and its position in the Habsburg empire. Now that the war had obliterated that connection, many in Fiume decided that forging ties with Italy represented the best option for the city, and this led to a dramatic accentuation of its would-be Italian character. However, even during the sixteen months of operatic expressions of *italianità* under d'Annunzio, the city did not simply discard the independence it had enjoyed under the Habsburgs.

What emerges in *The Fiume Crisis* is a thorough and convincing portrait of city striving to come to terms with the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian empire and find its way in an evolving political landscape in which there were new competing forces to its west and east. Drawing on administrative, court, education and police archives that detail interactions between the citizens of Fiume and the evolving political status of the city, Reill has produced a compelling analysis of how fundamental day-to-day issues such as currency, legal codes, citizenship, and school curriculums were dealt with in the city. This

is a scrupulous, sober, history from below that is essential in a context such as d'Annunzio's Fiume, which was all about imposing an image from above; and, as the Trieste exhibition showed, the mythic iteration of those sixteen months still holds considerable sway. In these pages, Fiume is decidedly not the hedonistic utopia that it is accounted to have been by those who have viewed it entirely through the lens of d'Annunzio. For instance, looked at from Reill's perspective, the image of a city populated by sexually liberated women is shown to be associated with the fact that d'Annunzio's Fiume was a city of extreme shortages, in which sex became a commodity. When her attention turns to public expressions of national identity, which became an essential aspect of the daily life of the city, she examines the economy that grew up around the Italian flags that, in d'Annunzio's time, fluttered from almost every window of the city; rather than being distracted by this display, Reill focuses on how and where they were made; the expense involved, and how people got around this by repurposing Hungarian flags, by stealing flags, or by buying them on the black market.

What Reill chronicles with no little *élan* is not a spectacular rupture with the past - the sort of "holocaust" d'Annunzio announced - but rather a series of, sometimes surprising, continuities. Take, for instance, the knotty issue of "pertinency", a legal category that existed throughout the Habsburg empire. At one end of the social scale, being a pertinent was necessary for participation in political life; at the other end, it entitled one to poor relief and immunity from expulsion from the state/city. While other parts of the empire loosened up the requirements for pertinency so that it increasingly came to resemble a form of "permanent residency", the influx of immigrants into Fiume made the elites in that town even more zealous gatekeepers, with the result that "before 1918, in a city of circa 50,000 people, only about 17,000 had the right to live in the city regardless of what befell them, and only a little over 2,300 had active, local political rights". Pertinency did not depend at all on ethnicity or language: one either inherited it as the legal offspring of a pertinent, or a woman could marry into it; an infant abandoned in Fiume was also granted it. One could apply for it, and the rigid conditions determining one's eligibility essentially concerned one's financial and legal status, in the sense of not having a criminal record - there was no mention of nationality at all. This somewhat arcane category did not simply disappear with the empire that created it, but persisted, and pertinents continued to claim the rights it bestowed on them. Even as the city was performing its *italianità* under d'Annunzio, simply being Italian did not give you this status, and requests for pertinency submitted on that basis by his

legionnaires were uniformly turned down by the city authorities. As Reill points out, these refusals did not create too many issues as ultimately the black shirts of the *arditi* allowed them to do pretty much what they wanted in the city. Nonetheless, this indicates that, despite appearances, ethnic nationalism was not woven into the fabric of Fiume's administration in this period: "in Fiume, pertinents not of Italian heritage or not native Italian speakers were not pushed out of the civic order, unless they obstinately refused to play along with the Italianization project". In a commensurate manner, the political, legal and educational institutions in the city were all given an Italian varnish, but in practical terms they were managed in ways that employed tools inherited from the Habsburg empire, as these accommodated the multilingual, multi-ethnic nature of the city and so maintained civic order.

Ridding Fiume of d'Annunzio did not relieve the city of its problems. For sixteen months the Italian government had resisted taking action against his illegal endeavour due to his immense popularity in the country. When they eventually moved against him, at the end of 1920, they removed him with relative ease. As Reill notes, d'Annunzio's description of this event as the *Natale di sangue* ("Christmas of Blood") was "hyperbolic"; moreover, and tellingly, she also points out that the citizens of Fiume did not join in the fight alongside him and his *arditi* but remained at home and tried to stay out of the crossfire. They had had enough. However, there was to be no return to its pre-war prosperity for Fiume: in 1921 it became a Free State under League of Nations and Italian protection, and the river became, as Butler noted above, an international border. To an extent, this sanctioned the situation that had obtained for sixteen months: under d'Annunzio, checkpoints had been set up on the river's short bridges, and that legionnaires blew up these connections between Rijeka and Sušak before they left the city. Following a putsch organised by local fascists, Mussolini annexed the city in 1924, and this is when Italian ethnic nationalism replaced the modes of accommodation that had survived under d'Annunzio. As Reill argues, it is important to get this chronology correct: if this sequence of events is not taken into account, the impression is created that Fiume was either always latently Italian or that d'Annunzio's appeal was so great that he could "brainwash a whole town into serving his will". More generally, the efforts and compromises made by Fiumians in order to find their way in the wake of an empire testify to the fact that while "nationalism was a powerful political ideology in post-WWI Europe, [...] there were other things going on that directly subverted nationalist teachings and blossomed under cover of its emblems".

When Rebecca West crossed over the river from Sušak to Fiume a few years before World War II, she found the city had

the quality of a dream, a bad headachy dream. [...] it has been hacked by treaties into a surrealist form. On a ground plan laid out plainly by sensible architects for sensible people, there is imposed another, quite imbecilic, which drives high walls across streets [...]. And at places where no frontier could possibly be, in the middle of a square, or on a bridge linking the parts of the quay, men in uniform step forward and demand passports, minatory as figures projected into sleep by an uneasy conscience. (*Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*)

In 2018 the artist Damir Stojnić redrew in broad red paint these intricate inter-war borders on the streets of Rijeka. Another recent initiative has been the erection of signs that give not just the current names of some streets in Rijeka, but also list the various other designations (Yugoslav, Italian, Hungarian) they have had in the past. These reminders of the city's complicated history are important, and set Rijeka somewhat apart from the rest of Croatia today. It has long been a Social Democratic stronghold, and is viewed with deep suspicion by HDZ, the right-wing party founded by Franjo Tuđman that wields most political power in the country, and which admits only one, Croatian nationalist, historical narrative. Despite the incredibly violent eruption of ethnic divisions in Yugoslavia in the 1990s that has moulded the subsequent political life of the region, Rijeka still just about maintains its undemonstrative multicultural texture; among other things, it and the neighbouring county of Istria are the areas in Croatia where people from other parts of ex-Yugoslavia are to be found living and working. To an extent, this is due to Rijeka's geographic position: located right on the border with Slovenia, it was out of the firing line in the 1990s, and is less than an hour's drive from Trieste, while the Austrian border is roughly 200 kilometres away. This hinterland continues to play a crucial role in Rijeka's sense of itself, as does the fact that it is an industrial city and a port; "Port of Diversity" indeed was the slogan it adopted for its unfortunately Covid-doomed tenure as a European City of Culture. As the centenary events in Ireland have shown over the past decade, the accommodation and cultivation of diversity are intrinsically linked to probing, questioning and expanding upon given historical narratives. This is precisely what *The Fiume Crisis* does, and its sedulous record of the variety of ways that were employed by individuals and bureaucracies in their struggle to orientate themselves in the postwar period will pose a formidable challenge to future attempts to cast d'Annunzio's adventure in Fiume in a uniform manner.

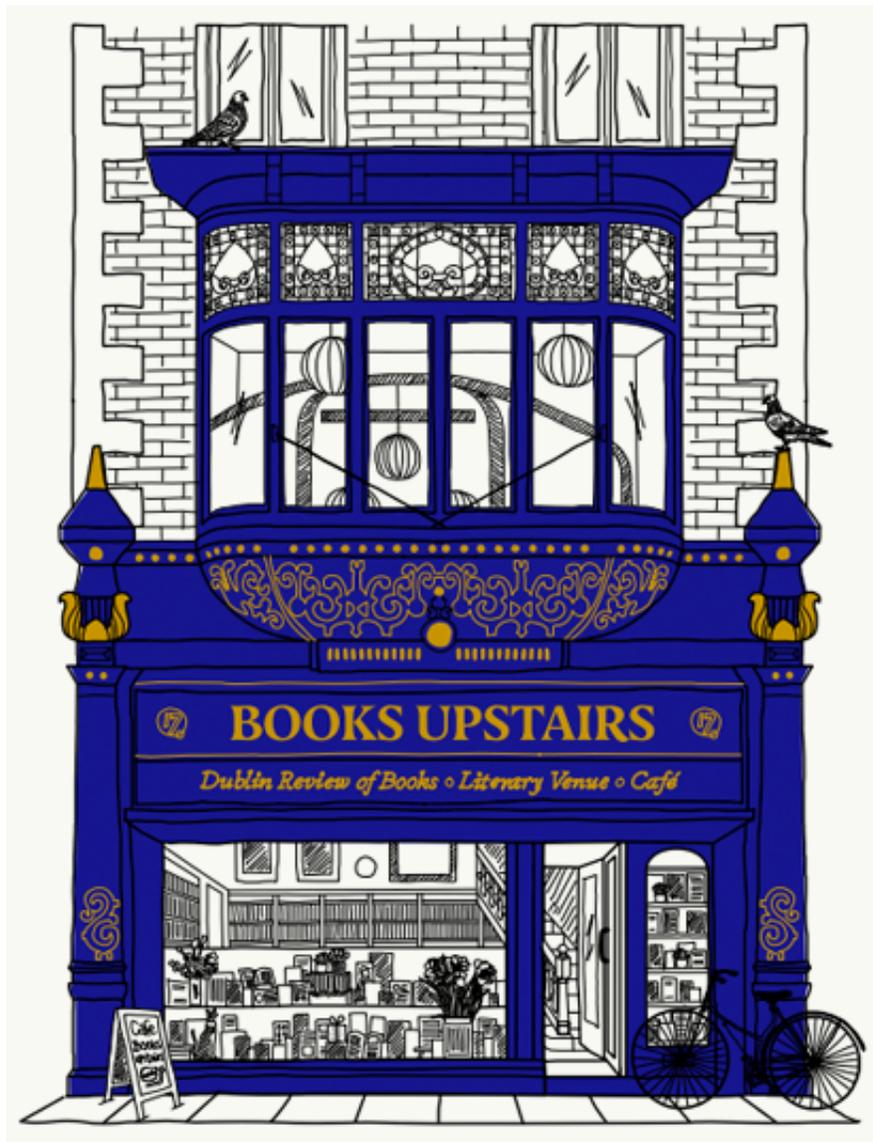
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