Il verbo (e)sangue: Gabriele D'Annunzio and the Ritualization of Violence

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Among the points of agreement found in the correspondence between Georges Sorel and Benedetto Croce is a vehement antipathy to the literature and politics of Gabriele D'Annunzio. Such a shared aversion is hardly surprising, given D'Annunzio's interventionist stance in the First World War and the pair's moralistic reactions to the colorful biographical lore which surrounded D'Annunzio. Yet an ideological link between Sorel and Croce is but one of several interpretations of the rhetoric of Sorel whose Réflexions sur la violence might also be seen as a pallid metalanguage for D'Annunzio's literature of politics. D'Annunzio's language, in turn, becomes a metalanguage for describing the historical context of pre-Fascist Italy, rather than, as Croce would have it, an outrageous falsification. D'Annunzio's "translation" — and we will see to what extent it may be called faithful — is a pre-Fascist one. The proto-Fascist interpretation of Sorel's revolutionary syndicalism was written into the text of Italy's history by D'Annunzio's political rival, Benito Mussolini. The paths of these two metaphorical translations zigzag across the political scene of Italy between the wars, acting out what I suggest is an aporia in Sorel's text itself. Réflexions sur la violence attempts to mythologize the future by mythologizing the past; it attempts to strengthen the proletariat by energizing the capitalist bourgeoisie. This undecidability of political direction is acted out on the stage of Italy. Mussolini moves from his socialist syndicalist beginnings to the Fascist party's anti-proletarian violence in the early twenties. D'Annunzio, on the other hand, had exchanged his Parliamentary seat on the right for one on the left in 1900, and in the years when Mussolini's squads were terrorizing labor unions, D'Annunzio was a tenacious supporter of a worker's federation which was a thorn in the side of the Fascist party. From right to left, from left to right: what is "lost" in the translation of Sorel's text to those of D'Annunzio and Mussolini is the legibility of the political spectrum. The move from the red of proletarian violence to the
black of Fascist violence creates what Dante might have called a “color perso,” at once the color of blood and a color lost. It is this last color which is the focus of my remarks on the ritualization of violence in D’Annunzio’s Fiuman writings, for it is this last, lost and bloody color which continues to characterize the political text of contemporary Italy.

Sorel’s call for violence is based on its symbolic value and grows out of what he calls “the democratic marsh,” that is, the blurring of clearly demarcated class identities. Proletarian violence would re-polarize the classes, restore a binary opposition between bourgeoisie and proletariat. Without that distinction, revolution — and revolutionary narrative — are impossible. By re-staging the barricades of previous revolutions, vigor would be restored to industrialists and inspiration, to the proletariat. If it is true that revolution — and revolutionary narrative — succeed only when the enemy is clearly antagonistic, it is also true that different actors may be inserted into such a narrative model. The anti-parliamentary image of a democratic marsh is itself something of a swamp: as a criticism of the merging of social classes — in Italy, of reformist trasformismo — it is wielded by forces of both left and right. Sorel the proponent of a proletarian general strike is joined in the marsh by both D’Annunzio and F.T. Marinetti whose desires for a re-polarization of classes seem quite differently motivated. Marinetti, in Al di là del comunismo, contests the (predominantly leftist) rhetoric of health and sickness which posits a decaying bourgeoisie and a flourishing proletariat. Such a faulty assessment of social classes should, he asserts, be set right by the insertion of a third term. That third term is not, however, a specific event like a mythic strike, but a social entity which already exists: a vigorous petty bourgeoisie. Marinetti’s praise of violence as the hygiene of the world must be seen in this context, that is, as a proto-fascist gesture which defends the middle ground.

The democratic marsh described by D’Annunzio is an urbanized one. In Le vergini delle rocce, D’Annunzio’s 1895 anti-democratic novel, the image is that of a sewer’s regurgitation:

Come un rigurgito di cloache l’onda delle basse cupidigie invadeva le piazze e i trivii, sempre più putrida e più gonfia, senza che mai l’attra-versasse la fiamma di un’ambizione perversa ma titanica, senza che mai vi scoppiasse almeno il lampo di un bel delitto.

Almost a quarter of a century later, D’Annunzio himself carries the flame of a perverse but titanic ambition — that of annexing the formerly Austro-Hungarian city of Fiume to Italy (or, more
ambitiously, of annexing Italy to Fiume), of provoking the downfall of Francesco Nitti’s government, and of extending the Fiuman flame to colonial nations. It is during the take-over of Fiume that D’Annunzio may be said to be a sort of Sorelian figure. The symbolic action which Sorel’s text desires can be found in the writings and in the new political style which grew out of Fiume. As one text is enacted by another, the problematic nature of Sorel’s text is actualized. Projective mythologization becomes retroactive mythification, if not mystification.

In his speeches and writings from 1919 to 1922, D’Annunzio actualizes not referential but linguistic structures, he literalizes not a proletarian strike but analogies and metaphors employed by Sorel to clarify his conception of mythic violence. Socialists, Sorel had written, could profit from the example set by the early Christians. It was not the brute force of repressive violence which polarized Romans and Christians, for the Romans killed but few. It was instead the theatricalization of that violence, the choreography of martyrdom, which gave strength to the oppressed. Scenes of martyrdom could be magnified so as to infuse an epic quality into an ideological struggle. I do not know whether D’Annunzio had read Sorel — given his voracity as a reader, it is quite possible. Of course it would be interesting to peruse his library, but not essential for a discussion of ideologemes which hover at the edges of Fascism. What is striking about the Fiuman writings, which Michael Ledeen has aptly termed “political passion plays,” is that they are dominated by a Christological rhetoric. Nothing of this kind appears in his novels and poetry where Catholicism is of the decadent eroticized sort and Christian lore is treated with a sneer. It appears as one of many varieties of myth, and hardly the most interesting compared to a more heroic Greek mythology and even to Eastern mysticisms. Here, in the political writings, a Christological rhetoric makes a jarring debut. What is more, it is not a triumphant rhetoric of the Church Militant, but a defeated one of sacrifice and purification. D’Annunzio seems to act out Sorel’s analogy: the fallen Arditi of WWI are martyrs to the Fiuman cause; the banner of Fiume is a sudario, a Veronica’s veil upon which is impressed the face of a fallen soldier. D’Annunzio re-baptizes the city of Fiume, naming it the Città olocausta. The entire city thus becomes a burnt offering, a fire which purifies the violent rather than one which produces violence. Once again, Marinetti’s rhetoric may serve as counterpoint to the Dannunzian strain, for “violence” and “purification” are present in both. For Marinetti it is violence itself which purifies, it is an explosive de-symbolization which is celebrated. D’Annunzio’s Fiume is instead
not a locus of violence but rather a locus of re-symbolization.

D'Annunzio literalizes Sorel's analogy, and that literalization has both political and aesthetic consequences. D'Annunzio's strategy is a perversely archaizing one, and while archaizing strategies are not foreign to proto-Fascist and Fascist rhetorics, the perverse twist of D'Annunzio's choice warrants examination before we too hastily categorize it as proto-Fascist. Such a re-examination is no easy task, for the texts at hand come to us already layered with interpretations, already besmirched by complacent notions of "dannunzianesimo." In "Il poeta e l'esercizio del potere politico: Gabriele D'Annunzio" George Mosse describes the Christological rhetoric which characterizes the Fiuman writings. Mosse's reading, however, filters those writings through the Fascist appropriation of D'Annunzio's political style. In so doing, continuity is reaffirmed and yet another layer is added to the blackened screen which obscures our view of D'Annunzio's texts. It would seem that those most willing to reject Fascism's reading of social and economic realities are also most willing to accept and perpetuate Fascism's reading of D'Annunzio. It is against the background of such assertions of sameness that we would look for differences, for points of resistance to Fascist appropriation. The "perverse twist" of D'Annunzio's strategy may be one such point: that perversity lies not only in the choice of a Christological rhetoric, as opposed to a perhaps more timely anarchist or libertarian one, but in the very linguistic register of D'Annunzio's political discourses. The Renaissance patina of his poetic prose makes D'Annunzio appear a Savonarola — not of the twentieth century, but suddenly transported into the modern world.

On one level, a Christological rhetoric would seem to be the lowest common denominator between the divergent forces of left and right which merged and battled for control in Fiume. The enterprise itself was supported by both industrialists and anarchists, conservatives and socialists. A Christological rhetoric offers itself as an archaizing strategy for maintaining cohesion and consent; it taps the cultural history of individuals and, through recurrent references to Dante, of the nation. The resolution of factional distinctions is thus aimed against new Romans, and D'Annunzio makes explicit the identity of those Romans: they are both the parliamentary government of Italy and the new emperors of the world — the Americans in particular — who at that time were gathered together at Versailles. In fact the Christological rhetoric has a logic of its own: it leads D'Annunzio to a perception of Italy as a second-world nation which can combat the new empire only if it allies itself to the third worlds of Africa and Asia.
In a Catholic country, that rhetoric is also the most sublime of common denominators. D’Annunzio actualizes the epic quality which Sorel recommends, but his is an epic without a future. D’Annunzio chooses the rhetoric of Christus patiens rather than that of the resurrected warrior. Violence made sublime is also sublimated. The violence which D’Annunzio aestheticizes is not that of Marinetti — the destructive hygiene of the world — nor even that of Mussolini’s squads or Fascism’s later imperialist projects. It is instead the violence suffered in WWI, a violence suffered rather than perpetrated which is ritualized in Fiume. It could be said that such a mythification of violence suffered is nothing other than a mystification of violence perpetrated. While I would not exclude the possibility that such a mechanism may be at work, D’Annunzio’s victimistic defeated tone belies such a strong reading. The perpetrators of violence — the Italian government and the protagonists of WWI — have nothing to fear from their victims at Fiume, no reprisals, no physical violence, nothing but symbolic action, sublime but sublimated violence. That symbolic action is part of a semiotic project: if the Allies had transformed Italy’s victory into a defeat (the “vittoria mutilata”), then D’Annunzio’s project is to re-define those terms, relay a message to Versailles and at the same time re-symbolize what had threatened to move beyond language. In Il sudore di sangue, a collection of speeches which preceded the take-over of Fiume, D’Annunzio writes:

Il sangue è silenzioso, fuori delle vene umane. Non è vero che possa gridare, che i vivi l’odano gridare; se fosse vero, l’Italia tutta non dormirebbe più.  

And in L’Urna inesausta, a collection of speeches delivered in Fiume:

Il ferro non parla. Se parla è laconico. L’arme corta ha una parola sola: piuttosto che una parola, un guizzo. E il resto è silenzio. 

Spilled blood and arms are silent, he writes, for if blood could speak, Italy would sleep no more. It is, of course, precisely in order to awaken Italy that D’Annunzio ritualizes violence. Blood already spilled is the focus of this strategy which describes violence in sacrificial terms. That blood is not the blood of a race nor a blood after which to thirst, but the blood of already fallen martyrs. D’Annunzio’s ritualization excludes an aggressive pole; the images are passive, even suicidal ones as, for example, when we
read that soldiers should open up their own veins.\textsuperscript{19} Indeed, D'Annunzio seems to anticipate the themes of Girard's \textit{Violence and the Sacred} insofar as the categories of purity and impurity, of destructive and generative violence appear as oppositions which create meaning out of violence; the very topos of a "democratic marsh" marks what Girard would call a "crisis of distinctions."

I can here offer only a summary of the transformations of blood in the political speeches. The blood of fallen soldiers is metaphorized, transubstantiated, and offered to the audience at Fiume. The names of Dalmatian cities are substituted for that of Christ in what D'Annunzio calls "il rito del buon sangue italiano": "Bevetene tutti. È il sangue che colorò l'Isonzo fino alla Sdobba. È il sangue del San Michele dai quattro gioghi. È il sangue del Dibeli. . . ."\textsuperscript{20} The pre-requisite purification of that blood is worked by Fiume's flames: the so-called city of flames tropes the name for the shock troops, the Arditi also known as the \textit{Fiamme nere}, in order to replace the ravaging potential of their ardor with a ritualistic function. The strategy of this elaborate symbolization runs counter to the theory that violence begets violence, that acts of violence are given meaning only through other acts of violence. Like his flight over Vienna in which D'Annunzio bombarded the Austrian city not with bombs but with pamphlets, the ritualistic strategy first aestheticizes violence suffered, and then replaces violence with aesthetics.

A second blood transformation does just this. If meaning is to be created from violence, then it is not enough that the poet write its history; the victims of violence have already written it with the only material available to them — once again, already spilled blood. If "il verbo è fatto sangue" by an explosion of violence, then that blood must be restored to the word. From the balconies of Fiume, D'Annunzio declares that he must transform his work of art into a work of life — in so doing, the life-work of his public becomes a work of art:

\begin{quote}
Ascoltate ancora voi stessi. 'Il popolo di Fiume, conscio che la storia scritta col piú generoso sangue italiano non si ferma a Parigi, attende la violenza da qualunque parte essa venga.'\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

The poet, interpreter of a text already written into history, places his own words in the mouths of the public (for the voice of the people here cites a previous Dannunzian speech), a public which awaits rather than threatens violence. Both directions of Benjamin's well-known formulation intersect in this undertaking: the poet politicizes aesthetics in order to aestheticize the politics of his
public. But this is not the glorification of a war yet to come which we read in Marinetti's texts; it is instead an attempt to re-interpret a destructive and destroyed past as an "evento lirico, uno scoppio entusiastico della volontà di creazione." The story has already been written in blood. It does not await future installments as seems to be the case in Sorel's text, where a mythic elaboration of violence is presented as a goad (rather than a true goal, since a general strike need never be realized). In fact, the problem for D'Annunzio seems to be that this particular bloody story had gotten bad reviews in Versailles.

The antithetical nature of violence — its movement between the poles of purity and impurity, destruction and generation, is embodied in perhaps the most striking of all the transformations of blood: "La matrice che non sanguina è sterile." The blood shed by a mutilated mother, Italy, becomes generative blood from which a new son can be born: "Più caro è il figlio generato con più spasimi e con più gridi." Woman as metaphor for the state is, of course, not new; remaining within the Italian tradition, we may recall Purgatorio VI where widowed Rome cries out for her Caesar. But the re-symbolization here is not simply an eclectic gathering of topoi; it works a more complicated transformation and places us at an interpretative crossroads where both roads may be taken. Impure blood, violently shed, is figured by another sort of traditional impurity — menstrual blood — which is then linked metaphorically to generation. At the same time, three losses are figured together — the loss of the war, the loss of blood, and the loss of virginity — for we may also read the image as one of violation, of violation as a necessary though lamentable prelude to generation. The aphoristic quality of D'Annunzio's phrase, its semantic richness, separates it from the Marinettiian celebration of war as rape. In fact, D'Annunzio allies himself not with the violator but with the violated "madrepatria." The fruits of this symbolization are several: fertility grows from already shed blood; generation grows from destruction; and a political discourse is engendered in which gender itself is foregrounded. Fiume, grammatically feminine in most of its occurrences in D'Annunzio's texts (and as one would expect for an Italian city-name), becomes the exceptional son born of this new semiosis: "il Fiume maschio." While such a transformation plays upon the common noun, "fiume," it is also part of a network of similar plays in which linguistic gender is both highlighted and transformed, plays such as "una gioia virile, una maschia allegrezza." The masculinization of Fiume is part of a rhetoric of virility which the Fascist regime will perpetuate. Here, as we note continuity, we must move cau-
tiously and note discontinuity as well, for D'Annunzio both contributes to, and is condemned by the Fascist rhetoric of virility. In fact, the very categorization of such a rhetoric as historically Fascist is problematic: critics as diverse and avowedly anti-fascist as Croce and Carlo Salinari employ it in their (anti-)dannunzian criticism, and find D'Annunzio too "soft." In La storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915, Croce tells us that D'Annunzio lacks "la virilità carducciana o foscoliana" necessary for greatness, and Salinari, in Miti e coscienza del decadentismo italiano, informs us that D'Annunzio "svirilizza" Nietzsche. For both critics D'Annunzio comes to represent a sort of Midas who evirates all he touches. That characterization co-exists uneasily with the equally adherent labels "D'Annunzio-sadico" and "D'Annunzio-fascista."

Lest the foregoing discussion appear to reaffirm the commonplace characterization of D'Annunzio as "il Giovanni Battista del fascismo," we must turn to the end of the Fiuman rebellion. D'Annunzio seems almost to anticipate that label and moves to preclude it: D'Annunzio announces only himself. It is only after the Natale di sangue, when government forces routed the Legionnaires, that the poet himself becomes a figura Christi — he had previously figured himself as Ulysses or as but one Christ among many. His supposedly accidental fall from a window in August of 1922, a few days before a would-have-been historical meeting with Mussolini and Nitti, is the last nail in his cross. In Messaggio del convalescente agli uomini di pena (collected in II libro ascetico della giovane Italia), D'Annunzio appears deliriously on the now-Yugoslavian balconies of Fiume in order to display the stigmata of his fall from the "rupe tarpea." His victimistic rhetoric is thus fulfilled: D'Annunzio has no political future except insofar as his corpus is ransacked by the Fascist regime for dismembered slogans (like the notorious Eia Eia Alalà). His pessimistic rhetoric is discarded and replaced by a future-oriented one; his past-oriented ritualization of violence, by Mussolini's off-stage skirmishes. As D'Annunzio disappears from the political scene, so too do many of the progressive aspects of Sorel's influence on the Fascist movement (as distinct from the Fascist regime). The Carta del Carnaro, the constitution which D'Annunzio and Alceste De Ambris had written for the Reggenza di Fiume, had contained progressive clauses — among them the equality of women, a guaranteed wage for all, unionization of workers — which owed much to De Ambris' revolutionary syndicalist background. The Fascist regime will borrow the corporative inspiration and leave aside equality of women, freedom of speech, of press and of religion. An unproblematized identification of D'Annunzio as the John the Baptist of
Fascism owes, perhaps, more to Fascism’s incorporative powers than to D’Annunzio’s own discourse. At the end of the Fiume experience, D’Annunzio himself had a considerable following, and there was ample reason for Mussolini to want him both to “fall” and to stand at his side.

An ideological analysis of Fascist discourse and D’Annunzio’s texts will reveal both similarities and differences: undeniably, some aspects of the political style of Fascism can be found in D’Annunzio’s dialogues with the crowd at Fiume. But just as undeniably, an editorial cutting and pasting was necessary in order to extract some elements and discard other undesirable ones from the Dannunzian “model.” If we are to find a Mussolinian analogue for D’Annunzio’s Christus patiens, it is perhaps to the last years of Fascism (and of Mussolini’s life), to the Republic of Salò that we must look. Only there can we imagine Mussolini echoing D’Annunzio’s words of August 20, 1922 (seven days after his “slip” from a window):

Non sono caduto come un angelo folle né come un angelo stanco. L’Italia m’ha gettato dalla rupe tarpea, m’ha precipitato dal monte della cieca giustizia.”

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NOTES

1 Croce was responsible for the swift translation of Réflexions sur la violence which appeared in Italian one year after its 1908 publication in French with a preface by Croce himself. Croce’s correspondence with Sorel dates back to the 1890’s; for discussions of the Sorel-Croce connection, see Gian Biagio Furiozzi, Sorel e l’Italia (Messina-Firenze: G. D’Anna, 1975) and Jack Roth, The Cult of Violence: Sorel and the Sorelians (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). Furiozzi cites a letter (May 10, 1915) from Sorel to Missiroli in which, commenting upon D’Annunzio’s Sagra dei Mille oration, Sorel manifests an antipathy which is moralistic as well as political: “Il discorso di D’Annunzio è una vergogna per la letteratura italiana; è del pessimo Péguy; è quasi nullo come del Papini. Le beatitudini con cui termina codesta predica sono di un’indecenza rara; lo sporcaccione osa fare l’elogio della castità! L’atteggiamento della stampa italiana, prosternata davanti a codesto ciarlatano, è stato disgustoso” (p. 292). This same oration was called a “bolsa e fumosa e parucchieresca cicalata” by the future supporter of the Fascist regime, Ardengo Soffici.


3 On the political rivalry between D’Annunzio and Mussolini during and after the Fiume experience, see Renzo De Felice, D’Annunzio politico (Bari: Laterza,
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1978), as well as volume 1 of De Felice’s impressive study of Mussolini, _Mussolini il rivoluzionario 1883-1920_ (Torino: Einaudi, 1965).

4 I play, of course, both upon “perso” as the past participle of “perdere” and upon Dante’s use of “perso” in both the _Convivio_ and the _Divina Commedia_. In the _Convivio_, Dante describes it as a hybrid color in which constituent elements battle for control: “Lo perso è uno colore misto di purpureo e di nero, ma vince lo nero e da lui si dinomina; e così la vertù è una cosa mista di nobilitade e di passione . . .” ( _Convivio_ IV, XX, 2). In _Inferno_ V, 88-90 (“O animal grazioso e benigno / che visitando vai per l’aere perso / noi che tignemmo il mondo di sanguigno,”) Francesca addresses the pilgrim, describing the air of her circle in Hell as “perso.” The color thus assumes the bloody tinge which her sin had given the world.

5 I refer to the terrorist blight in Italy, its manipulation by forces of both left and right, as well as to the complex machinery of decodification which is set in motion in order to attempt to determine which political factions are responsible for kidnappings and bombings.

6 “Must we believe that the Marxian conception is dead? By no means, for proletarian violence comes upon the scene just at the moment when the conception of social peace is being held up as a means of moderating disputes; proletarian violence confines employers to their role as producers, and tends to restore the separation of the classes, just when they seemed on the point of intermingling in the democratic marsh.” Georges Sorel, _Reflections on Violence_, trans. T.E. Hulme and J. Roth, with an introduction by Edward A. Shils (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950), p. 106.

7 “In tutti i paesi, e in Italia particolarmente, è falsa la distinzione fra proletariato e borghesia. Non esiste una borghesia tutta franciosa e borbonica, né un proletariato tutto sano e vigoroso. Esistono poveri e ricchi; poveri per sfortuna, malattia, incapacità, onestà; ricchi per frode, furberia,avarizia, abilità . . . È assurdo chiamare borghesia franciosa e borbonica quella massa formidabile di giovani intelligenti e laboriosi piccoli borghesi: studenti, impiegati, agricoltori, commercianti, industriali, ingegneri, notai avvocati ecc., tutti figli del popolo, tutti preoccupati di superare con un lavoro accanito il mediocre benessere paterno. . . . I contadini e gli operai che fecero la guerra, non avendo ancora una coscienza nazionale, non avrebbero potuto vincere senza l’esempio e l’intelligenza di quei piccoli borghesi tenenti eroici.” F.T. Marinetti, “Al di là del comunismo,” in _Teoria e invenzione futurista_, a cura di Luciano De Maria (Verona: Mondadori, 1968), pp. 415-16. Interestingly enough, “Al di là del comunismo” was originally published in 1920 in _La testa di ferro_, 23 (15 agosto 1920), which was “la rivista del fiamanesimo”; its title refers to D’Annunzio’s speech of September 27, 1919, “Cagolà e le ‘teste di ferro’.”


10 Both Michael Ledeen and George Mosse discuss this new political style, laying emphasis on continuity between D’Annunzio at Fiume and the Fascist regime. For both, D’Annunzio represents an unproblematic source of Fascist ideology and rhetoric. In _The First Duce: D’Annunzio at Fiume_ (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. vii-viii, Ledeen summarizes this reading: “The connection between D’Annunzio and Fascism lies at the center of this story, for D’Annunzio has often been described as the John the Baptist of Italian Fascism. There is much truth in this label, for without D’Annunzio the Fascist seizure of power would most likely not have taken place. Virtually the entire ritual of Fascism came from the ‘Free State of Fiume’; the balcony address, the Roman salute, the cries of ‘aiia, aiia, alala’ [sic], the dramatic dia-
logues with the crowd, the use of religious symbols in a new setting, the eulogies to the ‘martyrs’ of the cause and the employment of their ‘relics’ in political ceremonies.” While such a reading lionizes D’Annunzio, thus paying him a back-handed compliment, it remains blind to differences in the employment of rhetorical strategies and is informed by the tacit assumption that any aestheticization of politics is inherently fascist. George Mosse, too, reads D’Annunzio through Mussolini in “Il poeta e l’esercizio del potere politico: Gabriele D’Annunzio” in L’uomo e le masse nelle ideologie nazionaliste (Bari: Laterza, 1982). Originally published as “The Poet and The Exercise of Political Power: Gabriele D’Annunzio,” Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature, 22 (1973).

11 “We may make use here of the great historical example provided by the persecutions which Christians were obliged to suffer during the first centuries. Modern authors have been so struck by the language of the Fathers of the Church and by the details given on the acts of the Martyrs, that they have generally imagined the Christians as outlaws whose blood was continually being spilled. . . . What was of much greater importance than the frequency of the tortures were the remarkable occurrences which took place during the scenes of martyrdom. The Christian ideology was based on these rather rare but very heroic events . . .” Sorel, pp. 204-07.


14 See Mosse, note 10.

15 See, in addition to the above-cited studies by DeFelice and Ledeen, DeFelice, Sindacalismo rivoluzionario e fiumanesimo nel carteggio De Ambris-D’Annunzio (1919-1922) (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1966).

16 Since D’Annunzio’s later support of the war in Africa is often cited as incriminating evidence by the proponents of the “D’Annunzio fascist” line, I wish to emphasize the anti-imperialist stance which D’Annunzio takes throughout the Fiuman writings. In “Messaggio del convalescente agli uomini di pena,” collected in Il libro Ascetico . . . , D’Annunzio’s rhetoric is that of the Church Militant, but the church launching this crusade would seem to have socialist leanings: “L’impero vorace che s’è impadronito della Persia, della Mesopotamia, della nuova Arabia, di gran parte dell’Africa, e non è mai sazio, può mandare su noi quegli stessi carnefici aerei che in Egitto non si vergognarono di fare strage d’insorti non armati se non di rami d’albero. . . . E la nuova crociata di tutte le nazioni povere e impoverite, la nuova crociata di tutti gli uomini poveri e liberi; contro le nazioni usurpatrici ed accumulatrici d’ogni ricchezza, contro le razze da preda e contro le casta degli usurai che sfruttarono ieri la guerra per sfruttare oggi la pace” (pp. 622-23). Sorel, too, came to consider Italy a second-world nation.


18 D’Annunzio, “In alto il ferro” (3 ottobre, 1919), in L’urna inesusta, Prose di ricerca, di lotta . . . , p. 1060.


25 Compare, for example, the following passage from “Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna!”: “Ecco la furibonda copula della battaglia, vulva gigantesca irritata dalla foia del coraggio; vulva informe che si squarcia per offrirsì meglio al terrifico spasimo della vittoria imminente!” Teoria e invenzione futurista, pp. 23-24.