Matteo Brera. *Novecento all'Indice. Gabriele D'Annunzio. I libri proibiti e i rapporti Stato-Chiesa all'ombra del Concordato*. Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2016. Pp. 359. ISBN 978-8-8637-2951-1.

The Index of Forbidden Books was a list of books that were once forbidden by the Roman Catholic Church. Official Church censors edited the *Index*, the goal of which was to protect the faith and morals of Catholic readers from theologically incorrect or immoral books. The first catalogue of forbidden books was published in 1559 by the Sacred Congregation of the Roman Inquisition. The twentieth and last edition of the *Index* appeared as late as 1948, and the publication of the list terminated in 1966. During the more than 400 years of the *Index's* existence, the Church censored thousands of authors and books.

The archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the former Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition and now also called the Holy Office) were opened to researchers in 1998, thanks especially to the open-mindedness of Pope John Paul II. Since then, many academic studies about the Holy See's censorship have appeared. Access to the archives permits to analyze the ideological motivations that led the Church to ban certain authors and books. These include some major works of Western thought from the beginning of the modern age, such as those of Galileo, Giordano Bruno, and Campanella. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, censorship hit the two idealist philosophers Croce and Gentile, along with many novelists and popular writers.

These premises make Matteo Brera's work extremely intriguing. In particular, Brera studies the reasons why the Catholic Church found Gabriele D'Annunzio so dangerous that practically his entire production was put on the *Index*, by three different popes, and the last time this occurred after his death. The book is divided into five chapters and contains, in addition, forewords, a conclusion, and an appendix of various relevant documents.

In the first chapter, titled "I libri proibiti dal Cinquecento al Novecento," Brera presents a historical overview of the activity of the Holy Office from the creation of the *Index* until the beginning of the twentieth century. Special attention is given to the *Index* of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the Church, as a reaction to the secularization of society, started a vigorous crusade in order to re-establish its authority and the Catholic religion in society. Brera pays particular attention to the case of Antonio Fogazzaro, whose two novels, *Il Santo* and

Leila, were both put on the *Index*, the first one in 1906 and the second in 1911. Fogazzaro's case was pivotal in the Church's battle against literary modernism. Namely, in Fogazzaro the Church identified "i sintomi di una debolezza psichica della generazione nostra" that together with "germs of sensuality" were considered to be "a dangerous manifestation of modernism" (24). More or less, the reasons were the same for D'Annunzio's indexation.

The second chapter, "Gabriele D'Annunzio all'*Indice*. Il *Martyre de Saint Sébastien* e la condanna del 1911," is dedicated to D'Annunzio's play *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*. The play was premiered in Paris in 1911, and it was D'Annunzio's first work to be put on the *Index*. Through the case of the *Martyre*, Brera illustrates D'Annunzio's approach to Catholicism and especially to Saint Francis of Assisi. Following the general canons of the *fin de siècle's* literature, D'Annunzio extensively used the Catholic religion in his literary works as a parameter for aesthetic and sensual experiences that undoubtedly reached their peak with the *Martyre de Saint Sébastien* and caused D'Annunzio's inclusion in the *Index*.

The third chapter, titled "D'Annunzio e il dannunzismo nel quadro della letteratura mistico-sensuale," is dedicated to the debate of the Holy Office and the Roman Curia against the modern literature defined as obscene, from 1917 until 1927, when Pope Pius XI published *Inter mala*. The latter is a pastoral letter to the episcopate of the entire world against so-called sensual and mystic publishing houses and immoral books. With this document, the Church aimed at taking over the control of the ever-growing publishing industry and, as a consequence, of public morality. An example provided by Brera is Guido da Verona, a *dannunziano*, whose books sold thousands of copies until the author was placed on the *Index* in 1920.

The publication of D'Annunzio's *Opera omnia* between 1927 and 1936 is at the fore in the fourth chapter, titled "D'Annunzio tra Pio XI e Mussolini." In this chapter, Brera analyzes the relationship of the Church and the regime, and D'Annunzio's position in between. With the consolidation of Fascist power and the proclamation of dictatorship in 1925, the 1920s testified the beginning of the bitter battle over Italian souls and their moral education between the Church and the Fascist State. The Church was especially concerned about the so-called Fascist religion and reacted against it in 1924 by putting *Il Catechismo del Balilla* on the *Index*. In 1926, a national institute for the edition of D'Annunzio's complete works was established under the patronage of King Victor Emmanuel III and Il Duce. The enterprise, funded by the state with five million lire, served as obvious

recognition of D'Annunzio both as a writer and a patriotic hero. Nevertheless, the enterprise was not approved by the Church, and Pope Pius XI personally supervised the evaluation of all of D'Annunzio's works. In 1928, the Holy See made the final decision D'Annunzio's and placed almost his entire opus on the *Index*.

The fifth and final chapter, titled "Le ultime condanne all'*Indice*. Il *Libro segreto* e *Solus ad solam*," is dedicated to the fate of D'Annunzio's last two autobiographical works. In his late production, religious rhetoric, present since his early short stories and poems, persists and becomes ever stronger with analogies between D'Annunzio and Jesus Christ. Not surprisingly, *Libro segreto* and *Solus ad solam*, were also placed on the *Index*, the first one in 1935 and the second in 1939, a year after the author's death in 1938. D'Annunzio's case in the history of the *Index* is thus crucial in order to understand the difficulties met by literary modernism in Italy. As Brera righteously concludes, "[...] D'Annunzio, degno rappresentante di quella modernità che la Chiesa combatté su tutti i fronti, non fu mai perso di vista dal Sant'Uffizio che, per espressa volontà di Pio XII, lo censurò anche dopo morto" (xvi).

Along with the religious rhetoric and the bold aestheticization of the Christian religion, the reasons for D'Annunzio's indexation were sensual mysticism and the cult of the Superman (xv) that are so peculiar to his production. This is what Brera convincingly demonstrates in his fascinating narration. Brera's clearly and vividly written book is a result of serious research of ample archival material. I only regret that the author did not include a bibliography or primary sources, which definitely would have been useful. The book investigates three major issues: the role of the Church as a moral educator in unified Italy; the painful birth of literary modernism as a consequence of the former; and the ecclesiastic reception of D'Annunzio's works. For these reasons, Brera's book will be of interest to a wide readership.

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