

THE “POLITICS OF POETRY”:
THE INFLUENCE OF
FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE UPON
GABRIELE D’ANNUNZIO’S
LEADERSHIP OF FIUME

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Chapter I: Introduction

Proposal

The aesthetics of Fascism are relatively ubiquitous: parades, uniformed paramilitaries, quasi-religious political symbolism, balcony speeches and massed crowds that blur the line between the individual and the state. These seemingly hallmark attributes did not begin with Hitler's speeches in Nuremberg, or even Mussolini's march on Rome. They began, in fact, with the Italian poet, novelist, playwright, aviator, journalist, statesman and socialite Gabriele D'Annunzio. Though today he is hardly a household name, D'Annunzio had enormous influence over the European cultural and political sphere. Perhaps his most consequential endeavor, though, was his occupation of the city of Fiume (now Rijeka) in modern-day Croatia, where he, along with thousands of loyal followers, founded a rogue city-state that would lay the groundwork for later 20th century political movements, and Fascism in particular.

D'Annunzio's Fiume was a microcosm of proto-fascist political ideology, attracting writers, artists and philosophers from across Europe and the world. Fiume's constitution was a unique document that exemplified the unique fusion of ideologies that D'Annunzio embodied. This charter, the adoption of political symbolism, the massed rallies, the oratory and the use of balcony speeches greatly influenced the leadership of Benito Mussolini, and other 20th century leaders that followed. It was German professor and philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, however, that had one of the most profound influences upon D'Annunzio, and by extension, his leadership of Fiume.

The "Fiume endeavor" provides a fascinating and often overlooked view into the rise of extreme nationalism in 20th century politics. The ripple effects of this event are far-reaching:

there are countless instances of symbolism, language and pageantry that were first used in Fiume and later adopted by the Italian Fascist and German National Socialist movements, such as the use of symbols like the Fasces and the Roman salute.

Much of the accreditation for the Fascist and National Socialist use and contortion of Nietzsche's writings may be attributed to D'Annunzio. Nietzsche's philosophy had a deep influence upon D'Annunzio's worldview, and many Nietzschean themes appear throughout his novels and poems.

While Nietzsche was undoubtedly a significant force upon D'Annunzio's personal philosophy, the ways in which his theories and ideology materialized in the "Fiume endeavor" are hardly discussed in much of the literature on the subject. Therefore, an exploration of the ways in which Nietzsche's ideas (of, for example, the *Übermensch*, religion, grand politics, eternal return and the "will to power") were present in D'Annunzio's Fiume would offer insight into his true influence upon the polity, as well as latter 20th century political movements.

The Significance of Gabriele D'Annunzio

Gabriele D'Annunzio was a fascinating figure in his own right. His fame as a writer was widespread: English writer Osbert Sitwell believed that he was "the man who has done more for the Italian language than any writer since Dante,"¹ and Irish author James Joyce called him one the most "naturally talented writers" of the 19th century.² D'Annunzio's famous "flight over Vienna," a daring mission whereby he dropped propaganda pamphlets over Austria in one of the longest recorded flights at the time, made him a war hero. His exploits and works made him

¹ Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Gabriele D'Annunzio: Poet, Seducer and Preacher of War* (New York City: Alfred Knopf, 2013) p. 34

² Ibid 8

wildly popular in Europe and Italy in particular, where he was often in reverence referred to simply as “The Bard.”

His eccentric socialite status and his many love affairs gained him both fame and notoriety from European artists and elites. His later political ventures, though unprecedented, were not all that out of the ordinary for a figure of such spontaneity and narcissism. By no means a politician by training, he was often called “The Pike”³ for his propensity to snatch up ideologies and discontents and add his own unique qualities to them. A warmongering, hedonistic, egocentric, spendthrift poet, he considered himself an embodiment of modern European literature and the Italian people.

D’Annunzio also did something many 20th century political theorists, philosophers and writers did not: he acted. Unlike many of his contemporaries and predecessors who theorized how change might befall Europe (i.e. George Sorel and the myth of the general strike, Karl Marx and the proletarian revolution, etc.), D’Annunzio took it upon himself to bring about this change, not by his writing alone, but through action. Instead of theorizing, he decided to bring about a revolution himself. Perhaps this exemplifies D’Annunzio’s political motivations best of all, a contempt for the tedium of legislating and a literal attempt to reform the European political landscape of the time.

The Significance of the “Fiume Endeavor”

After the First World War, and going back further to before the *fin-de-siècle* and the French Revolution, radical discontent was widespread in Europe. Theorists such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx and Georges Sorel

³ Ibid, 5

observed how modern social institutions had the potential deprive people of their humanity.⁴ For many of the discontented, only a paradigm-shifting “total revolution” would accomplish what the French Revolution could not: an end to dehumanization.⁵

In the early 20th century, ideologies of all forms had a presence on the European political stage. Philosophers like Rousseau, Hegel and Marx became “high priests” for what historian Jacob Talmon called a “revolutionary religion.”⁶ In the half-century since the 1848 revolutions, for example, socialist movements gained widespread popularity among the heavily disenfranchised working classes of France, Germany, and Russia. At the same time, nationalism became a widespread phenomenon among the many different ethnicities scattered throughout the European empires of the time. The urgency for change among these movements was a primary factor for their growth in popularity. They all demanded some sort of action, albeit for different reasons: many socialists and Marxists hoped that a crippling general strike would force a transfer of the means of production to the working class, while nationalists touted uniting ethnicities in one land under one banner.

The peace terms decided at Versailles in 1919 only fanned the flames of this political radicalism. Italian socialists (and European socialists in general) received many votes and seats in parliament due to the conditions brought about by the subsequent economic depression, and Italian nationalists fed off the discontent of unredeemed territory promised to Italy by France and the United Kingdom. D’Annunzio, ever the “pike,” fed off this wide array discontents in his native Italy, and used it to open perhaps the most famous chapter of his life: the “Fiume endeavor.”

⁴ Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 24

⁵ Ibid, 20

⁶ Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution*, p. 13

In 1919, D'Annunzio and many of his followers, irredentists, veterans and adventurers took over the then Yugoslav city of Fiume, eventually declaring it an independent state. The Italian annexation of Fiume had been a talking point among nationalists for some time, but D'Annunzio envisaged a city of his own tastes, and declared himself the figurehead of this unique political experiment, independent of the Kingdom of Italy.

D'Annunzio then went about writing the constitution of Fiume, entitled the "Charter of Carnaro." The charter proclaimed universal suffrage, division of society into distinct "corporations," and even made music an integral part of the state.⁷ D'Annunzio also made use of public rituals and parades, popularized the use of the Roman salute, and gave grandiose balcony speeches on an almost daily basis.

Mussolini became a great admirer of D'Annunzio during the occupation. He even commissioned a biography of D'Annunzio entitled *John the Baptist of Fascism*.⁸ Just as John the Baptist served as a harbinger for the arrival of Christ, so too did D'Annunzio (according to Mussolini) serve as a predecessor to the Fascist movement. Mussolini's admiration is clearly seen in his mimicry of D'Annunzio's style of leadership: the Roman Salute, Fasces, the demigod-like cult of personality, the rallies and cries used in Fiume were later adopted by the National Fascist Party after its accession to power in 1922, and later by the National Socialists and other Fascist movements

⁷ [*The Charter of Carnaro*](#), 27 August, 1920

⁸ Hughes-Hallett, *Gabriele D'Annunzio*, p. 5

Nietzsche and D'Annunzio's Fiume

Just as D'Annunzio was a source of inspiration for Mussolini, so to was Nietzsche an inspiration for D'Annunzio. Even before the zenith of his success as a writer, D'Annunzio admired the Nietzschean ideals of "Darwin's struggle for life," and praised "unchristian maxims."⁹ D'Annunzio believed himself to be a prime example of an "*Übermensch*," and lived what he believed to be a Nietzschean (and fully hedonistic) lifestyle. Throughout his speeches and works he praised power, condoned violence, and revered the lifestyle of the ancient Greeks.

Nietzsche's influence on Mussolini and Hitler stemmed from the same sources as influenced D'Annunzio. However, while the role of Nietzsche's philosophy in later regimes like Nazi Germany is clearly visible and well-known, its impact its predecessor, D'Annunzio's Fiume, is rarely noted. This thesis seeks to correct that, by exploring Nietzsche's influence on D'Annunzio and his short-lived revolutionary state in Fiume, by an overview of D'Annunzio's and Nietzsche's respective world outlooks, and an analysis of how Nietzsche's philosophy was present in Fiume.

⁹ Ibid, 131

Chapter II: Gabriele D'Annunzio

An Overview of D'Annunzio

I. Early life

Gabriele D'Annunzio was born in Pescara, in the central Italian province of Abruzzo, in 1863. The son of a wealthy parents (his father was a mayor and a wine merchant), he began writing poetry at age 16, which would eventually blossom into his lifelong passion.¹⁰ Though he would later lament his childhood, he grew up in relative comfort, and was always at the top of his class during his time in school. He continued his interest in writing after graduating from the University of Rome in 1885.

D'Annunzio later became extremely influential in the “Decadent” art movement, an artistic style that relied heavily on strong emotions, excessive human expression and hedonism, all of which can be found throughout much of D'Annunzio's poems and novels. For example, one of D'Annunzio's first novels, *Il Piacere* (literally “The Child of Pleasure”), is semi-autobiographical, depicting a hedonistic Roman count named Andrea Sperelli, the “last descendent of an intellectual race,” and his carnal pursuits.¹¹ D'Annunzio's works would only increase in eccentricity, sensuality, and later, towards nationalism.

In the middle of his writing career, D'Annunzio started to come under the influence of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. D'Annunzio especially admired Nietzsche's praise of strength and power, criticism of democracy, appreciation for art and pre-Christian ideals, and especially his exaltation of the *Übermensch*, or “superman.”

¹⁰ Charles Kopp, *Gabriele D'Annunzio*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988) p. 4

¹¹ Ibid, 37

After the publication of *Il Piacere* in 1889, D'Annunzio's soon became a literary household name, and a wildly popular one at that. He became an even more prolific writer, settling in Paris, possibly to escape his debtors. He surrounded himself with the company of many of his well-regarded contemporaries, such as Marcel Proust, who praised his writing,¹² and Claude Debussy, with whom he collaborated to write the musical play *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*.¹³ English writer Osbert Sitwell considered him to be the greatest Italian writer since 13th century poet Dante Alighieri, author of the *Divine Comedy*.¹⁴

Despite his harsh criticisms of Italian democracy, D'Annunzio won a parliamentary nomination in his home province of Abruzzo in 1897. Upon the acceptance of his nomination, he stated that "the world must be convinced that I am capable of everything," and in true Nietzschean fashion, declared "I am beyond right and left, as I am beyond good and evil."¹⁵ For a democratic representative, this was quite an affirmation. Not only was he invoking Nietzsche, an anti-democratic theorist, but he was declaring himself above the traditional democratic form of government. Despite his electoral victory, D'Annunzio was only a Member of Parliament for one term; he found statecraft tedious and dull. Regardless, by the early 20th century, D'Annunzio had made his presence known on the political and literary stage.

II. D'Annunzio the Hedonist

D'Annunzio was well known for his eccentricity and hedonism, which often culminated in extravagant purchases and his many affairs. He praised beauty, pleasure and excess in many of

¹² Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Gabriele D'Annunzio: Poet, Seducer and Preacher of War*, (New York City: Alfred Knopf, 2013), p. 284

¹³ Ibid, 282

¹⁴ Ibid, 34

¹⁵ Ibid, 201

his works, and his lifestyle was clearly reflective of it. "I am intoxicated by the eternal feminine,"¹⁶ he said in a letter to a friend. With his growing popularity as a poet came megalomania and his affinity for sexual conquest. He claimed to have slept with over 1,000 women,¹⁷ including actress Eleonora Duse,¹⁸ dancer Ida Rubenstein¹⁹ and a Neapolitan Duchess.²⁰

Despite his reputation as a Don Juan, D'Annunzio was anything but handsome. He stood about 5 feet and 6 inches tall,²¹ was balding by his twenties,²² and had yellow teeth and sloping shoulders.²³ Futurist artist and theorist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (who would eventually come to admire D'Annunzio) said of him that he looked like "a little ebony idol with a head of ivory."²⁴

His lavish lifestyle was just as important to his image as his sexual escapades. His wardrobe supposedly contained over 250 shirts,²⁵ and would only be by the finest spirits, cigars, flowers and hats. He was in debt most of his life, running from creditors as often as he could (many of whom he also had affairs with). "By temperament and by instinct, I have need for the superfluous,"²⁶ he said.

¹⁶ Judy Gahagan, "Gabrielle D'Annunzio's Astonishing Power Over Women." *Ambit*, no. 114 (1988), p. 42

¹⁷ Gahagan, "Gabrielle D'Annunzio's Astonishing Power Over Women," p. 143

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Hughes-Hallett, *Gabriele D'Annunzio: Poet, Seducer and Preacher of War*, p. 28

²⁰ Ibid, 132

²¹ Irving Wallace, et. Al, *The Intimate Sex Lives of Famous People*, (New York City: Delacorte Press, 2008), p.143

²² Ibid

²³ Hughes-Hallett, *Gabriele D'Annunzio*, 23

²⁴ Ibid, 22

²⁵ Gahagan, "Gabrielle D'Annunzio's Astonishing Power Over Women," p. 42

²⁶ Hughes-Hallett, *Gabriele D'Annunzio*. p.126

III. D'Annunzio the Daredevil

It is not surprising that D'Annunzio, by his own admission, lived a life of few regrets or fears. "My whole life has been a risky game"²⁷ he said in 1915. Even in his old age he ventured into the trenches of the First World War. "Everything appeared beautiful to me"²⁸ said D'Annunzio about his time on the Western Front, an opinion shared by few soldiers fighting in the trenches themselves.

D'Annunzio's love for aviation perhaps best displays fondness for risk and danger. He attended flying lessons taught by Wilbur Wright in 1909,²⁹ and wrote about his personal flight experience in his novel *Forse che sì forse che no* ("Maybe Yes, Maybe No"). His daring wartime air raids earned him far greater fame, though. In his famous flight over Vienna in early August of 1918, D'Annunzio flew from Venice to Vienna in one of the recorded longest flights at the time without refueling.³⁰ Instead of dropping bombs, D'Annunzio dropped propaganda leaflets urging the Austro-Hungarians to surrender. An excerpt from the pamphlets reads as follows:

"On the wind of victory arising from the rivers of liberty, we have come only for the joy of the daring deed... Viennese! We could now be dropping bombs on you! Instead we drop only a salute."³¹

D'Annunzio viewed war as an artistic and aesthetic affair. He believed it could serve as a catalyst for the development of new forms of technology, art and culture. It showcased the beauty, brutality and resilience and that human beings are capable of. The airborne excursion

²⁷ Ibid, 61

²⁸ Ibid, 306

²⁹ Ibid, 263

³⁰ Ibid, 375

³¹ Ibid, 376

was only one of several raids that D'Annunzio participated in, but the Flight over Vienna was one his most defining moments as a public figure until the occupation of Fiume.

IV. D'Annunzio the "Warrior Poet"

While a true renaissance man in many ways, D'Annunzio was first and foremost a poet and an author. D'Annunzio fame as a writer began with the publication of his first novel, *Il Piacere*, in 1889. His works, like many of those in the Decadent movement, incorporated his hedonism, megalomania, and later, Italian nationalism. D'Annunzio praised the ancient Greeks for their appreciation of the arts, and stated that "Hellenism has penetrated me to the marrow... I should have been born in Athens."³²

Trionfo della Morte (literally "Triumph of Death"), published in 1894, is one of D'Annunzio's most famous and influential novels, with Nietzsche's influence on D'Annunzio's personal philosophy clearly discernable throughout. The semi-autobiographical novel follows Giorgio Aurispa, an Italian man who has a troubled relationship with his mistress, Ippolita Sanzio ("Ten, twenty months of intimacy are all as nothing" [D'Annunzio 8]), and an even more turbulent one with his family in Abruzzo. The novel ends with Giorgio and Ippolita dying in each other's arms after committing suicide.

As D'Annunzio further embraced nationalism, so too did his works and poems. Though D'Annunzio had always been a proud Italian patriot, he started to envisage himself as an artistic personification of Italy itself in his later life. "The voice of my race speaks through me,"³³ he said. On the eve of Italy's entrance into the First World War, D'Annunzio delivered the following poem to a large crowd during a speech near Genoa:

³² Ibid, 185

³³ Ibid, 8

“Blessed are the young who hunger and thirst for glory,
For they shall be satisfied...
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be called upon
To staunch a splendid flow of blood, and dress a
wonderful wound...
Blessed are they that have most, because they can give
most, dare most...
Blessed are they who return with victories, for they shall
see the new face of Rome.”³⁴

D’Annunzio’s ability to enthrall crowds was infamous. A firsthand account by Irishman Walter Starkie of a speech D’Annunzio later gave in Venice states that D’Annunzio had the ability to connect with the crowd “as a supreme violinist does upon a Stradivarius.”³⁵ Starkie later went on to say that “the tones [of the speech] rose and fell in an unending stream, like the song of a minstrel, and they spread over the vast audience like olive oil on the surface of the sea.”³⁶

Another account of one of D’Annunzio’s pro-war speeches in Rome by the pacifist writer Romain Rolland illustrates the dramatic and nationalistic fervor that D’Annunzio had the ability to stir in large crowds. As D’Annunzio departed after his speech, “disheveled boys, their faces crazy, dripping with sweat as though after a fight,” followed him. By now, the eve of the First World War, D’Annunzio (often now referred to as *Il Vate*,³⁷ or “Bard”) was regarded as one of Italy’s most beloved sons.

³⁴ Ibid, 45

³⁵ Ibid, 33

³⁶ Ibid, 33

³⁷ Ibid, 1

D'Annunzio and Italian Political Sentiment Surrounding World War I

I. Italian Unification

During D'Annunzio's lifetime, Italy was a relatively new country, having only been unified in 1861 (two years before his birth). Before unification, or the *Risorgimento* (literally “resurgence”), the Italian peninsula was comprised of several small kingdoms, including the Kingdom of Sardinia, the Kingdom of Naples, the Papal States ruled by the Vatican from Rome and Austrian-controlled states in the north. With the rise of nationalism on the European continent following the 1848 revolutions, calls for unification on the peninsula came about, with Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi emerging as figureheads for Italian unification. After years of warfare, unity and independence came when Garibaldi handed his conquered territories in the Italian peninsula over to Sardinian King Victor Emmanuel II, thus establishing the Kingdom of Italy in 1861.

II. Pre-WWI Italian Political Sentiment

Political sentiment in Italy in the decades following unification (and especially in the years leading up to the First World War) was tense. When World War I broke out in mid-1914, Italian attitudes towards involvement were strong, but mixed. Originally, Italy had been a member of the Triple Alliance, a defense alliance, with Austria-Hungary and the German Empire, but eventually remained neutral before joining forces with the Entente.

During this short period of neutrality, many Italian nationalists extolled the possibility of entry into the war as a means to culturally unite a relatively new and divided country, as well as gain “unredeemed” territory in Austria and on the Adriatic Sea, specifically the Alpine regions in

the Northeast, much of the Dalmatian coast and the port city of Trieste. D'Annunzio's irredentist sentiment would become commonplace in Italian politics until the end of the Second World War.

D'Annunzio enthusiastically supported Italian entry on the side of the allied powers. He was living in France during the outbreak of the fighting to escape his debtors and continue his writing,³⁸ but returned to Italy in 1915 to rouse support for the war. He was met by rapturous crowds upon his return, and was hailed as a national savior upon his arrival: Italy's national bard had returned to stir drum up support for a national sacrifice and the redemption of Italian lands. D'Annunzio gave numerous stirring and inciteful speeches in favor of intervention on the side of the Entente. Quoting Garibaldi, he declared "here we make Italy, or we die."³⁹ At a speech in Rome in 1915, his inflammatory and violent remarks encouraged Italians to "form squads" and mercilessly beat objectors to a war with Germany and Austria-Hungary.⁴⁰ On May 24, 1915, D'Annunzio's hopes had materialized: Italy had declared war on Austria-Hungary.

III. Political Environment in Italy after WWI

Though Italy would later emerge victorious by joining the Entente, it would have little to show for its victory. Around 1 million Italians died in the carnage,⁴¹ and peace talks in Versailles offered little consolation to rapidly polarizing and often radicalized populace. Though Italy did annex a significant amount of territory from Austria in the Northeast such as Tyrol and Trento, as well as Trieste on the Adriatic, it lacked control of much of the Dalmatia and the eastern coast

³⁸ Ibid, 311

³⁹ Ibid, 45

⁴⁰ Ibid, 51

⁴¹ Graziella Parati, *Italy and the Cultural Politics of World War I*. (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 2016), p. 14

of the Adriatic. Italian critics of the talks in Paris believed that though victorious, Italy's victory was a "mutilated" one.

Radical elements of Italian politics were represented in Rome well before the outbreak of WWI, but it was after the armistice when they started to gain widespread support from vast portions of the populace and representation in Parliament. Economic conditions following the war led to a rise in unemployment, and the lack of substantial territorial gains led to a renewed sense of irredentism. Political, social and economic unrest soon followed.

D'Annunzio was a firm critic of the talks at Versailles and Italy's "mutilated victory," believing, as many others did, that Italian speaking territories on the Adriatic lay "unredeemed," now part of an independent Yugoslavia. As unrest continued, D'Annunzio not only promoted the annexation of these territories, but the renewal of violence. After the armistice, he said, came the "stench of peace."⁴² The unrest and dissatisfaction would only subside after Mussolini's march on Rome in 1922.

Radical Political Philosophy in Europe (1900-1920)

D'Annunzio was hardly the only figure in Europe to be disillusioned with results and chaos brought about by the war's end. While Nietzsche profoundly affected D'Annunzio personal philosophy and his later political pursuits, the opinions D'Annunzio harbored regarding Europe's post-war disorder resounded in many other public intellectuals. To understand the sentiment shared by D'Annunzio and his fellow Italian nationalists in the years following the end of WWI, it is important to consider the unique way in which their contemporaries tended to view and even glorify violence. To that end, I will briefly consider three figures who exemplify this

⁴² Hughes-Hallett, *Gabriele D'Annunzio*, p. 378

way of talking about political action: Georges Sorel, Ernst Jünger, and Fillippo Marinetti. The fact that they represent the attitudes of the French, Germans and an Italians gives some sense of how widespread these sentiments were in D'Annunzio's Europe.

I. Georges Sorel

One of the most significant promoters of political and revolutionary extremism in D'Annunzio's Europe was the French philosopher Georges Sorel. Originally an orthodox Marxist, Sorel's later beliefs were characterized by an amalgamation of Marx's views of historical progression and Nietzsche's beliefs regarding morality.

Central to Sorel's philosophy is the "myth of the general strike." In this context, the general strike would be a demonstration whereby workers across the world would violently strike without the influence of trade unions, paralyze the country and usher in a revolution. While Marxism posited that a worldwide workers revolution was inevitable, Sorel believed that direct action on behalf of the people was necessary, and that national and historic myths were powerful enough to catalyze the masses. Material interests are not enough to motivate workers to a general strike and worldwide revolution, thought Sorel: national and cultural myths (no matter how false or irrational) had the power to change this. They should therefore be given an almost religious reverence.⁴³

One of the most significant aspects of Sorelian philosophy is the importance of violence. In order for true change to occur (e.g. through a socialist proletarian revolution), violence from

⁴³ George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 12

the masses is a necessity. In *Reflections on Violence*, Sorel laments the decline in violence and promotion of peace; he even calls moralists a “bleating herd.”⁴⁴

Violence also plays an important part in the myth of the general strike. He elaborates in the first chapter of *Reflections on Violence*:

Every conflict which gives rise to violence thus becomes a vanguard fight, and no one can foresee what will come out of such skirmishes; the great battle never materializes, but each time that they come to blows the strikers hope that it is the beginning of the great Napoleonic battle.⁴⁵

The power of myths, no matter how realistic they may be, is enough to foment the insurrection needed to invoke radical change. Progress occurs through action, not compromise, thought Sorel, a position echoed by later 20th century intellectuals.

II. Ernst Jünger

The exaltation of violence among Europe’s intellectual elite only grew after the First World War. German author Ernst Jünger, for example, wrote extensively on the glorification of war and national honor in his works. An infantryman during his service in German military in WWI, Jünger regularly saw combat and was wounded several times.⁴⁶ He later co-mingled with figures that would become the Nazi elite, with whom he would help develop Germany’s “new nationalism.”⁴⁷

Jünger’s most famous work, *Storm of Steel*, was published in 1920. The novel is an autobiographical account of his life in the trenches, and showcases not only the brutality of the

⁴⁴ Georges Sorel, 1908, *Reflections on Violence*, Edited by Jeremy Jennings, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 187

⁴⁵ Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, p. 63

⁴⁶ John Klapper, "Ernst Jünger: Spiritual Opposition as Resistance?" In *Nonconformist Writing in Nazi Germany: The Literature of Inner Emigration*, (Boydell and Brewer, 2015) p. 279

⁴⁷ Ibid, 280

war, but as Jünger sees it, its beauty. Like D'Annunzio observing the trenches in France (where “everything appeared beautiful”), Jünger’s view of war was one of aesthetics. Throughout the book, the war is portrayed poetically, as an art form. Jünger refers to bombs as “iron birds,” or “devil’s eggs,” and compares the act of throwing a grenade to ballet.⁴⁸

Throughout his works, Jünger’s praise of conflict is just as evident as his distaste for the democratic institutions of the Weimar Republic. He criticized the “proselytizing”⁴⁹ ideology of parliamentary democracy in his essay *Battle as Inner Experience*, and believed in a revolution to bring about a hierarchical, militaristic society.⁵⁰ As he began writing prolifically in political journals, he increasingly believed his writings to be part of the catalyst to set off this revolution. Many fellow Germans agreed. The disorder that the end of the war and the following economic downturn brought about convinced many Germans that order and national pride needed to be restored, a sentiment echoed by nationalist groups like the *Stalhelm*, German National People’s Party, elements of the *Freikorps*, and later, the NSDAP.

III. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti was the figurehead of the Futurist movement, a school of Italian art and philosophy, rose to prominence at the beginning of the 20th century. Marinetti and his Futurists believed in the inevitable triumph of technology and violence, as well as their societal consequences of lifting Italy (and Europe as a whole) from the spirit of its past.⁵¹ Beauty lay in the technological triumphs of utility and warfare, like airplanes and machine guns, just as D'Annunzio believed.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 280

⁴⁹ Ibid, 283

⁵⁰ Ibid, 284

⁵¹ Anthony Rhodes, *D'Annunzio: The Poet as Superman*, (New York: McDowell & Obolensky, Inc. 1959), p. 65

In 1909, Marinetti published the *Futurist Manifesto*, the codification and explanation of the Futurist ideology. “It is in Italy that we are issuing this manifesto of ruinous and incendiary violence, by which we today are founding Futurism, because we want to deliver Italy from its gangrene of professors, archaeologists, tourist guides and antiquaries,”⁵² Marinetti declares.

Like Jünger, Marinetti and the Futurists believed that violence was not to be discouraged: he stated that war ought to be the “hygiene of Europe,”⁵³ cleansing the continent of undesirable and destructive sentiments, and creating fertile grounds for a new and refined society of men to arise. “We want to sing the love of danger”⁵⁴ states Article I of the *Futurist Manifesto*. Article 9 continues, “we want to glorify war - the only cure for the world - militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas which kill, and contempt for woman.”⁵⁵

Traditional European art and culture were to be forgotten and should be subject to iconoclasm, the Futurists believed.⁵⁶ The new Europe would be one of violence, autocracy, efficiency, technology and anti-liberalism. Article 10 of the Manifesto states: “We want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice.”⁵⁷ “Beauty exists only in struggle. There is no masterpiece that has not an aggressive character. Poetry must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown, to force them to bow before man,”⁵⁸ Article 8 continues. The last Article of the Manifesto ends with a description of the ideal new world: “We will sing of the great crowds agitated by work, pleasure and revolt; the multi-colored and polyphonic surf of revolutions in modern capitals... , and the gliding flight of

⁵² Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Futurist Manifesto*, 1909, p. 3

⁵³ Hughes-Hallett, *Gabriele D’Annunzio*, p. 51

⁵⁴ Marinetti, *Futurist Manifesto*, 1909, p. 2

⁵⁵ Ibid, 3

⁵⁶ Rhodes, *D’Annunzio: The Poet as Superman*, p. 66

⁵⁷ Marinetti, *Futurist Manifesto*, p. 3

⁵⁸ Ibid, 3

aeroplanes whose propeller sounds like the flapping of a flag and the applause of enthusiastic crowds.”⁵⁹

Marinetti and the Futurists both influenced and admired D’Annunzio, and later, Mussolini and the Fascists. While originally critical of D’Annunzio, Marinetti eventually came to admire his adoration of violence and his belief that art should have a place in politics. Marinetti even organized a pro-D’Annunzio Futurist rally,⁶⁰ and years later was arrested at a pro-war rally led by D’Annunzio himself.⁶¹ Futurists enthusiastically supported Italian entry into the First World War, believing it to be a *cause celebre* that could bring about the new society it envisioned. Disdain for post-war European society, anti-liberalism, love of war, and the fusion of politics and art became sentiments shared not only between Marinetti and D’Annunzio, but across the Italian peninsula.

The Fiume Endeavour

I. The “Sacred Entrance”

As D’Annunzio and Italian nationalists espoused irredentism in the peninsula, so too did ethnic Italians in “unredeemed” lands. A microcosm of these beliefs existed in Fiume, a mostly Italian-speaking port city on the Adriatic, that had become part of the newly independent Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Fiume, which had a substantial population of pro-Italian separatists, had been on the mouths and minds of irredentists and nationalists since before the outbreak of

⁵⁹ Ibid, 3

⁶⁰ Hughes-Hallett, *Gabriele D’Annunzio*, p. 262

⁶¹ Ibid, 30

war in 1914, and it was here where D'Annunzio would open the most famous chapter of his public life.

On September 12, 1919, a ragtag ensemble of war veterans, irredentists, *Arditi* (an elite corps of Italian shock troops) and D'Annunzio enthusiasts, led by D'Annunzio himself, entered and captured the city of Fiume in the name of Italy, encountering little resistance. In fact, mimicking Napoleon on his return from Elba, he repeatedly told Italian soldiers sent to stop him: "All you have to do is order the troops to shoot me."⁶² At this remark, many Italian officers left their posts and joined D'Annunzio on his march.⁶³ D'Annunzio's ranks swelled from a few hundred to over 2,000 men by the time he reached the city's outskirts.⁶⁴ Upon entering the city, D'Annunzio was met by thousands of cheering Italian Fiumeans, eager for his arrival. Though D'Annunzio's original intentions were to conquer the city to pave the way for an Italian annexation, Italian Prime Minister Francesco Nitti and his government refused to do so, as this would be a violation international law, and would likely stir an already tense and divided political atmosphere.

In response to the Italian government's refusal of annexation, D'Annunzio declared himself ruler (or as he called himself, *Il Comandante*) of a newly formed rogue city-state. D'Annunzio, along with anarcho-syndicalist Alceste De Ambris, then went about writing the constitution of Fiume, entitled the "Charter of Carnaro." After this "liberation" of Fiume, D'Annunzio appeared on a balcony in the main square, pontificating unto the inhabitants of his new city: "Italians of Fiume, Here I am!... *Ecce Homo*."⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid, 411

⁶³ Ibid, 411

⁶⁴ Ibid, 412

⁶⁵ Ibid, 415

D'Annunzio, likening himself to Christ by quoting Pontius Pilates's infamous verse, had yet again become a savior of the Italian people. The phrase had additional significance, however: Nietzsche's semi-autobiographical work carried the same title. D'Annunzio, the self-styled "Italian Nietzsche" at the height of his international fame, was now Fiume's *Übermensch*.

Fiume would become a political laboratory of many different ideologies and political persuasions. Anarchists, socialists, nationalists, authors, philosophers, intellectuals and artists all ventured to Fiume to take part in D'Annunzio's personal experiment of statecraft. These included Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Guglielmo Marconi (the inventor of the radio), English writer Osbert Sitwell and Alceste De Ambris, among others. Vladimir Lenin was the only foreign leader to officially recognize the statelet, and even called D'Annunzio the "only revolutionary in Europe."⁶⁶

While indeed an eccentric act, D'Annunzio's leadership of Fiume is both historically and politically significant. It showed D'Annunzio's willingness to act on his espoused beliefs, exemplified the synthesis of popular sentiments that would later manifest as Fascism and influenced the state structure of various regimes to come. However, the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy upon the entity (whether or not intentional on the part of D'Annunzio) is also clear, and ought to be expounded further.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 5

Chapter III: The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche

Introduction

While Friedrich Nietzsche and Gabriele D'Annunzio were indeed influential intellectual figures in *fin-de-siècle* Europe, neither were first and foremost political philosophers.

Nietzsche's works and influence were both social and cultural, but the ways in which he believed his own philosophy should apply to the political realm have been mired in much controversy.

Much of the controversy surrounding Nietzsche is due to his association with the Third Reich, which has been the subject of considerable discussion since the years after its downfall in 1945. After his death, Nietzsche's sister, Elizabeth Forster-Nietzsche (the wife of noted anti-semite Bernard Forster) published deceptively chosen selections from Nietzsche's works to showcase her brother's alleged anti-Semitism. She also retained exclusive rights over her brother's writings well into the 20th century,⁶⁷ and continued to publish passages that supposedly praised German nationalism while deliberately ignoring writings that criticized it. It was this version of Nietzsche's philosophy that inspired Nazi misinterpretations of Nietzsche's theories on the "Will to Power" and the *Übermensch*.

After the Second World War, academics like Walter Kauffman, among others, took it upon themselves to disassociate Nietzsche from the burden of his past perceptions. In 1950, Kauffman published *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist and Antichrist*,⁶⁸ a work which

⁶⁷ Frank Turner, "Nietzsche, " In *European Intellectual History from Rousseau to Nietzsche*, Edited by Lofthouse Richard A., (Yale University Press, 2014), p. 245

⁶⁸ Hugo Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 1

repainted Nietzsche as an antipolitical humanist.⁶⁹ The effort to dissociate Nietzsche from the Nazis had been so successful that by the end of the 20th century Nietzsche's greatest disciples were often radical philosophers, such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.

The following chapter will be an introduction and overview of Nietzsche's philosophy as it pertains to Gabriele D'Annunzio in Fiume, and will include various scholarly interpretations of Nietzsche's works.

Biography

Friedrich Nietzsche was born in Prussia in 1844. The son of a Lutheran minister, he was an excellent student and especially excelled at classics, so much so that he was offered chair at the University of Basel in Switzerland. As a student in Leipzig, his professor described him as "an idol, and without wishing it, the leader of the whole younger generation of philologists here in Leipzig who cannot wait to hear him as a lecturer."⁷⁰ His writing style and musical abilities were also praised by his contemporaries. He had a profound love for Wagner, with one of his favorite operas being *Tristan and Isolde*.⁷¹

After retiring from the University of Basel in 1879, he soon became disenchanted with his work on classics, and thereafter sought a life of solitude. It was at this point in his life when Nietzsche started to produce his most well-known works, such as *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Due to his declining mental health

⁶⁹ Ibid, 1

⁷⁰ The Viking Press, *The Portable Nietzsche* (375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014: Penguin Books, 1976), p. iv

⁷¹ Ibid, v

and later physical collapse and insanity in 1889, Nietzsche moved in with his sister who acted as his caretaker. He died in 1900, at the age of 56.

It was only after Nietzsche's death that the various exogenous interpretations and misinterpretations of his philosophy began. He was, of course, "anti-political in nature,"⁷² according to his professor at Leipzig. It was perhaps this stance that made his ideas fluid enough to be both interpreted and misconstrued by individuals of all political affiliations, including D'Annunzio.

Nietzsche's Philosophy

I. On Christianity

Throughout his works, Nietzsche offers numerous scathing criticisms of Christianity. He believed that morality was not universal or innate, but rather a subjective set of beliefs developed by early Christians under the reign of the early Roman Emperors. In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche theorizes that the word "good" originally meant "egoistic action" done to benefit oneself.⁷³ What the modern world considers "good" or "moral" today, however, comes from what Nietzsche calls "Slave Morality."

After the crucifixion of Christ, early Christians (whom he calls "slaves") began to resent their "masters" (rich Roman nobles), because these masters possessed many qualities that the slaves themselves lacked. For example, the masters were wealthier, stronger, braver and less concerned with the affairs of their fellow man or woman. Nietzsche calls this resentful fusion of anger and jealousy "*Ressentiment*" (French for "resentment"). The Christian slave resents his

⁷² Ibid, v

⁷³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1887, Edited by Keith Ambell-Pearson, Translated by Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. xxi

master not only because of his dominance, but because the master possesses immediate satisfactions that the slave does not have. It is this resentment which is the primary reason for slave morality.

As Nietzsche states in Essay 1 of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, “slave morality first has to have an opposing, external world, it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all, – its action is basically a reaction.”⁷⁴ In other words, slave morality is mainly concerned with thinking negatively and resentful towards others, such as masters and sinners who adhere to “master morality.”

In addition to *ressentiment*, another fundamental aspect of slave morality is asceticism, or the practice of refraining from pleasurable activities. Though the masters may enjoy a considerable amount of pleasures in this life (wealth, sex, power, etc.), the Christian slave will be rewarded in the afterlife with pleasures abound if he or she refrains from these activities while they are on earth. In this way, these ascetic slaves have the ability to seek a non-violent revenge on their masters by constructing a moral high ground. Since asceticism runs against the values that many of the masters consider “good,” non-ascetic ideals were later considered “evil” by Christian slaves. The word “good,” then, started to refer to the morality of the Christian slaves from thereon after. “[The Christian Slave] has conceived ‘the evil enemy,’ ‘*The Evil One*,’ and this in fact is his basic concept, from which he then evolves, as an afterthought and pendant, a ‘good one’ – himself!,”⁷⁵ Nietzsche says.

Nietzsche offers an analogy to exemplify this paradigm shift in morality in Section 13 of the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality*. In his analogy, Nietzsche uses birds of prey and lambs (their pray of choice) to illustrate how slave morality makes people view strength as a vice

⁷⁴ Ibid, 37

⁷⁵ Ibid, 39

rather than a virtue. Since birds of prey will often kill and eat lambs to survive, it would make sense that lambs would view these birds as “evil.” However, from the bird’s perspective, eating lambs is often nothing more than a necessity for survival. Claiming that the actions of these birds are “evil” implies that the birds have the option to choose whether or not they survive: “...for thus they gain the right to make the bird of prey *accountable* for being a bird of prey.”⁷⁶

Claiming that these bird of prey (or anyone in a position of power, for that matter) have a choice in whether or not they should express their power is naive and false. “To demand of strength that it should not be a desire to overcome... is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength,”⁷⁷ says Nietzsche. An innate internal drive for power indeed exists within everyone, a characteristic he called the “Will to Power.”

Nietzsche therefore believed that power should be considered a virtue, as it had been in the days of ancient Rome, not a vice. It was Christianity and 19th century European society that changed this perception of power, criticizing the drive for strength, and glorifying weakness. Despite the rise of slave morality, Nietzsche believed that the “Will to Power” could not (and must not) be suppressed: it is an internal instinct necessary for individual and collective progress.

II. On Democracy

Nietzsche’s criticisms of democracy are well-known and well documented, and stem from many of the same sources as his criticisms of Christianity. He believed that democracy, like Christianity, has the potential to make people morally weaker on the whole. Democracy gives political influence to those undeserving of such decision-making power. Liberal democracy and the socioeconomic egalitarianism associated with it makes for a complacent citizenry, free from

⁷⁶ Ibid, 45

⁷⁷ Ibid, 45

struggle, and therefore encourages the weak to become weaker. Such equality is “hostile to life, an agent of the dissolution and destruction of man”⁷⁸ he says in *On the Genealogy of Morality*.

Liberal democracies encourage citizens to become “weak willed,” but they also discourage the strong from wielding power. As with Christianity, strength is seen as a vice in a democracy. There is, however, an unintended consequence to this: as societies become weaker, their desire for a strong leader grows. This “brings to light the weaker and less secure among them and thus produces an order of rank according to strength,”⁷⁹ he says.

Democracy, then, is the downfall of the state. It erodes the reverence to the state by putting the people on equal status with the legitimacy of the state, therefore leading to its degeneration. “Modern democracy is the historical form of the decay of the state”⁸⁰ says Nietzsche. This decay of the state then has the potential to lead to tyrannical governance and chaos: “The democratization of Europe is at the same time an involuntary exercise in the breeding of tyrants-- understanding that word in every sense, including the most spiritual,”⁸¹ he explains in *Beyond Good and Evil*.

Christianity and Judeo-Christian values promote complacency and the acceptance of all who adhere to the gospel, no matter their background. Both democracy and Christianity promote what Nietzsche viewed as a destructive and detrimental herd mentality. Nietzsche therefore perceived democracy as a political manifestation of Christianity. He elaborates in *Beyond Good and Evil*: “[Herd] morality is increasingly apparent in even political and social institutions: the democratic movement is the heir to Christianity.”⁸²

⁷⁸ Frederick Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) p. 139

⁷⁹ Ibid, 130

⁸⁰ Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, p. 62

⁸¹ Ibid, 79

⁸² Ibid, 80

III. On the *Übermensch*

Nietzsche feared that with democracy and Christianity, along with the values and comforts that come with them, mankind would surely meet its end. One of his most famous works, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, exemplifies this belief perfectly.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the ancient Persian religious figure Zarathustra (Nietzsche's literary alter-ego) descends his mountain after ten years of solitude to share his wisdom with the people below. He presents to them two alternative outcomes for the future of mankind: the "last man" and the *Übermensch*.

The "last man," Zarathustra explains, is content to a fault. He is jaded by the wealth, extravagance and freedom from discomfort that characterize progress. "[The last man] abandoned the regions where it was hard to live: for one needs warmth. One still loves one's neighbor and rubs up against him: for one needs warmth,"⁸³ says Zarathustra. Though his audience is tempted by the comfortable conditions of "the last man," Zarathustra offers them a stern warning: "Beware! The time of the most contemptible human is coming, the one who can no longer have contempt for himself."⁸⁴

In contrast to the "last man" stands the *Übermensch* (literally "overman" or "superman"). A figure that appears throughout Nietzsche's works, the concept of the *Übermensch* has been interpreted (and misinterpreted) in various ways. The definition and importance of the *Übermensch* are elaborated on at length in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

⁸³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, (Edited by Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 10

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 9

After warning them of the “last man,” Zarathustra introduces the *Übermensch* to the people. “I teach you the *Übermensch*,”⁸⁵ he proclaims. “What is the ape to a human? A laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. And that is precisely what the human shall be to the *Übermensch*: a laughingstock or a painful embarrassment,”⁸⁶ Zarathustra continues. Ultimately, the people reject the *Übermensch*, wishing instead for the comforts of the “last man.”

To Nietzsche, the *Übermensch* is the ideal form of being that people can and should become. It is the anticipated result of eschewing the slave morality and herd mentality of Christianity and democracy. In addition, the *Übermensch* is someone that will accept moral and emotional discomfort as a necessary means to overcome and grow stronger (“self-overcoming”), a message Nietzsche strove to convey among his readers,⁸⁷ according to academic Hugo Drochon. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche elaborates that “the self-overcoming of Zarathustra as the prototype of mankind's self-overcoming for the benefit of Superman. To this end the overcoming of morality is necessary.”⁸⁸

IV. Eternal Return and *Amor Fati*

While a concept of eternal return has been discussed at least as far back as the ancient Greeks, Nietzsche made it a core concept in his understanding of the human condition. In its simplest form, eternal return is the belief in the circularity of time in the universe (that is, time is cyclical and will repeat itself). Everything is bound to happen again and again, and will for eternity. Nietzsche used eternal return as a thought experiment throughout his works: he did not

⁸⁵ Ibid, 5

⁸⁶ Ibid, 5

⁸⁷ Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, p. 45

⁸⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, (1888) Edited by Oscar Levy, Translated by Anthony Ludovici (T.N. Foulis 13 & 15 Frederick Street Edinburgh and London, 1911) p. 263

necessarily believe that time or life will repeat themselves anew, but that human beings ought to live their lives as if it will.

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes of an instance where a demon appears to his reader while they find themselves in a moment of loneliness. He says:

This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, in the same succession and sequence...⁸⁹

While Nietzsche acknowledges that a scenario such as this may seem terrifying at first, it is a chance to overcome and grow from the hardships of the past, and cherish the moments of joy.

Nietzsche believed joy to be inseparable from loss, as Drochon notes.⁹⁰ Pain is essential for both joy and “overcoming.” Embracing adversity is therefore an important step in direction of a more fulfilled life. Human beings ought to live with *Amor Fati*, or “love of one’s fate.” By doing so, they are helping close the divide between mankind and the *Übermensch*. As Nietzsche says in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “All things are chained and entwined together, all things are in love; if you ever wanted one moment twice, then you wanted everything to return!”⁹¹

V. “Grand Politics”

Nationalism and democracy were beginning to take root in Europe during Nietzsche’s lifetime. The revolutions of 1848 and the unification of Germany, which culminated in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, were clear examples of the rise in nationalism, which, like democracy, Nietzsche regarded as nothing more than an ideology of the “herd.” Nietzsche

⁸⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, (1887), Translated by Walter Kauffman, (New York City: Random House, 1974), p. 274

⁹⁰ Drochon, *Nietzsche’s Great Politics*, p. 5

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 9

referred to late 19th century European politics as “petty politics,”⁹² since it encouraged values like democracy and nationalism, utilitarianism, bureaucracy, general welfare, and (as Nietzsche believed) a prolonged acceptance of slave morality. It therefore satisfies a dangerous “feeling of power” among the masses,⁹³ and hastens the arrival of the “last man.”

To do away with the societal atrophy that “petty politics” enabled, Nietzsche believed in what he called “Grand Politics.” In this hypothetical realm of “grand politics,” “political and economic affairs are not worthy of being the enforced concern of society’s most gifted spirits.”⁹⁴ In other words, the most intellectual, artistic and gifted individuals should be awarded the privilege of not having to worry about the state of affairs for the masses. “The time for petty politics is past; the next century will bring the struggle for the mastery of the world-- the compulsion to great politics,”⁹⁵ Nietzsche claimed.

The *Übermensch* is one of the most important components of “grand politics”; in “grand politics,” it is individuals like the *Übermensch* that have the right to leadership. He is a “noble individual who embodies a modesty, innocence and freedom from revenge that makes him utterly different from a merely liberated spirit; his freedom is classical but his individuality is modern.”⁹⁶

Nietzsche firmly believed in the importance of order and rank in society: in “grand politics,” hierarchy takes precedence over equality. The hierarchy Nietzsche imagines, however, is not one of race or wealth, but of status and power. The highest status individuals are the “perfect caste,” who “rule out of something deeper than will and... desire to dominate.”⁹⁷

⁹² Ibid, 2

⁹³ Ibid, 157

⁹⁴ Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy*, p. 118

⁹⁵ Drochon, *Nietzsche’s Great Politics*, p. 159

⁹⁶ Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy*, p. 76

⁹⁷ Alex McIntyre, *The Sovereignty of Joy: Nietzsche’s Vision of Grand Politics*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 85

To Nietzsche, the ancient Greeks embodied an entity similar to what he considered to be a state centered around “grand politics.” In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche mentions that Plato’s *Republic* is hierarchical, with one of its main purposes of producing philosophers and Olympian athletes. There is the “cruel sounding truth” that some form of slavery and hierarchy must exist to produce both philosophers and Olympians.⁹⁸

Though Nietzsche agreed with Plato on the role of the State, he believed that the role of art and culture in the state was not elaborated on enough. Artists and geniuses, believed Nietzsche, need a class of slaves to free them from the trivialities and tedious work of everyday life so that they may create and inspire a “small number of Olympian men”⁹⁹ worthy of influence. This was one of the most fundamentally important aspects of “grand politics.” A caste system is therefore necessary for the development of culture, a function of the state which was perhaps the most important to Nietzsche.¹⁰⁰ The aestheticization of politics is essential in making grand politics truly “grand.”

The philosopher-statesman creates “order out of man” (what Nietzsche calls “*Rankordnung*”),¹⁰¹ and delegates tasks to the masses. In Nietzsche’s vision of *Rankordnung*, there ought to be a high caste (an inner circle, the “perfect caste”) as well as a lower caste (the outer circle: guardians of the law and the masses). It is the responsibility of the guardians of the law to relieve the “perfect caste” of duties and direct rule, so that the latter may pave a path for cultural and societal revolution and development.

A search for leadership in “grand politics” is not a task fit for the masses. It is a process given to time and certain exogenous conditions. Zarathustra elaborates: “Human society: it is an

⁹⁸ Drochon, *Nietzsche’s Great Politics*, p. 37

⁹⁹ Ibid, 58

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 88

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 82

experiment, this I teach-- a long search: but it searches for the commander!-- an experiment, of my brothers! And not a 'contract!'"¹⁰² These leaders ought to be capable of bridging the gap between man and *Übermensch*. As academic Daniel Conway explains, the task of leaders in "grand politics" is "neither to destroy nor transcend the all-too-human within us, but to bring the all-too-human to completion and perfection."¹⁰³

Thus, an individual or a group of individuals that possess qualities akin to the those of the *Übermensch* are the most fit for leadership. A strong figurehead must therefore create a state where the inner circle of those that are fit to lead are "beyond the law," but "equal in rights"¹⁰⁴ between themselves. Dominance, violence and power are inescapable features of the human condition, and it is therefore futile to do away with these forces. It is important for leaders to embrace these conditions to cultivate and shape a strong citizenry and lower caste. However, while Nietzsche believed in the leadership of the strong, he speaks out against despotism and extreme cruelty. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he writes: "mistrust all in whom the urge to punish is strong."¹⁰⁵

Unlike petty politics, "grand politics" should represent something greater than bureaucracy and statecraft. There ought to exist a "divine order in the realm of politics"¹⁰⁶ thought Nietzsche. A secular "religion" with its own myths and legends about the state must exist. Like a religion, the state must have its own "priestly" class.¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche wanted Europe to "acquire one will by means of a new caste that would rule Europe, a persistent, dreadful will of its own, that can set its aims thousands of years ahead."¹⁰⁸ There ought to be a unification of

¹⁰² Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 170

¹⁰³ Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, p. 118 (quoting Conway)

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 140

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 144

¹⁰⁶ Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, p. 62

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 62

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 167

Europe through a trans-racial, trans-ethnic and trans-national caste system. This new leading caste will be tasked with creating a new trans-European culture.

For this to come about, Nietzsche introduces two principles of “grand politics” that codify its necessary conditions:

- a. *First Principle*: The overarching goal of grand politics is to be powerful enough to create a new type of man. “It wants to create a power strong enough to breed a superior type of man.”¹⁰⁹
- b. *Second Principle*: Grand politics believes in war against vice and the church. It also seeks to create a “party of life.” It seeks to “breed mankind as a whole; it measures the order of races, people and individuals according to their future, according to the guaranty of life that their future contains.”¹¹⁰ This is how the goal of grand politics is to be fulfilled.

Years later, it would be D’Annunzio who would attempt to bring about these conditions himself in Fiume. The aesthetics of grand politics, the implementation of hierarchy and *Rankordnung*, and the importance of “gifted individuals” like the *Übermensch* were to be central tenets of the Fiume endeavor.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 167

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 167

Chapter IV: Nietzsche in Fiume

Nietzsche and D'Annunzio: A Personal Influence

If there is one individual that had the greatest influence on D'Annunzio's life, works and leadership, it was Friedrich Nietzsche. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche states that "Man is no longer an artist; he has become a work of art"¹¹¹; D'Annunzio, in his own words, believed that "one must make one's life as one makes a work of art,"¹¹² and certainly strived to do so. Even before the conquest of Fiume, Nietzsche's philosophy rings abundantly clear in D'Annunzio's literature and personal life

The preface of *Trionfo della Morte*, one of D'Annunzio's most famous novels, exalts the imminent arrival of the *Übermensch*. "We prepare ourselves, in art... for the coming of the *Übermensch*, the superman,"¹¹³ as well as the "voice of the magnanimous Zarathustra. Besides from being clearly influenced by many details from D'Annunzio's own life (his mistresses, his home province and his family history). *Trionfo della Morte* is also one of D'Annunzio first works where Nietzsche's influence is noticeably evident. D'Annunzio specifically dedicated this work for the arrival of the *Übermensch*.¹¹⁴ He wanted this novel to serve as a cautionary tale,¹¹⁵ by trying to convince his readers to become "supermen," and of the failure if one does not strive to do so, much like Giorgio. Other Nietzschean themes include *Amor Fati*, Eternal Return and making one's life a work of art.

¹¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Translated by Clifton P. Fadiman (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2012), p. 6

¹¹² Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Gabriele D'Annunzio: Poet, Seducer and Preacher of War*, (New York City: Alfred Knopf, 2013), p. 8

¹¹³ Ibid, 175

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 48

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 51

In another novel, *Le Vergini delle Rocce*, the Zarathustra-esque Claudio Cantelmo says: “I am grateful to my ancestors, an ancient and noble race of warriors, for having given me their rich and fiery blood, for the beautiful wounds and beautiful burnings they inflicted me in the past, for the beautiful women they raped, for all their victories, their drunkenness, their magnificence...”¹¹⁶ Admiration for Nietzschean themes like the “Will to Power” are evident here as well.

Nietzsche’s influence on D’Annunzio’s life later moved beyond the literary and into the political (recall that D’Annunzio, evoking Nietzsche and his ambiguous political beliefs, declared “I am beyond right and left, as I am beyond good and Evil”¹¹⁷ during his run for parliament in the 1890s). It is not surprising that D’Annunzio truly thought himself to be an Italian Nietzsche. The history of his people, he believed, was one of brutality and beauty, and should not be suppressed. He alone could transform the “great unwashed”¹¹⁸ masses of Italy into a new and advanced society. This was, as he thought, the duty of the *Übermensch*, a title which D’Annunzio bestowed upon himself with great conviction. Just as Nietzsche emphasized struggle as a tool for human growth, so too did D’Annunzio believe that Italians needed to become harder and more aggressive.¹¹⁹ It was this worldview that acted as his basis for pursuing Italian involvement in the First World War.

Like Nietzsche, D’Annunzio was keen to point out the flaws in democratic institutions, but his relationship with democracy as a whole was more complicated. While originally believing that the state should be run by the elite few, he gradually drifted towards a more liberal outlook after his brief term as a Member of Parliament. Still, his political beliefs remained fluid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 39

¹¹⁷ Hughes-Hallett, p. 201

¹¹⁸ Michael Ledeen, *The First Duce: D’Annunzio at Fiume*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p.

¹¹⁹ Ledeen, *The First Duce*, 6

He believed in a “gradual elevation of the privileged class towards its ideal form of existence”¹²⁰ This was the beginning of D’Annunzio fusion of ideologies, a skill that he would carry to Fiume. His politics would become more syncretic, and at the same time more spiritual.

The Charter of Carnaro

Once in power in Fiume, D’Annunzio envisioned the city not only as an autonomous entity, but as a political spectacle that could inspire Italians and indeed the world to embrace his unconventional (albeit ambiguous) brand of politics. Pagan rituals, parades, concerts, fireworks and civic ceremonies showcasing D’Annunzio’s cult of personality were commonplace, and performed on an almost daily basis. The “politics of poetry” that D’Annunzio had envisioned for so long was for the first time being implemented.

On August, 27, 1920, D’Annunzio introduced the “Charter of Carnaro,” the new Fiumean constitution. Co-authored by D’Annunzio and syndicalist Alceste De Ambris, the charter is not solely a legal code: it is a monumental document in itself. While it is in one sense revolutionary and egalitarian, it is simultaneously Nietzschean (despite it being revolutionary and egalitarian), as well as nationalistic and even proto-fascistic. D’Annunzio’s influence is clearly present in the charter: his flowery writing is clearly discernible, and his unique views on statecraft are as well.

I. Preamble

The Preamble of the Charter, titled “The Enduring Will of the People,” solidifies Fiume’s status as a wholly Italian entity, recognizing its special status:

Fiume, with will unwavering and heroic courage, overcoming every attack whether of force or fraud, vindicated her right, two years ago, to choose her own destiny, her own

¹²⁰ Ibid, 6

allegiance on the strength of that just principle declared to the world by some of her unjust adversaries themselves. This is her claim founded on Roman right.¹²¹

II. Basis

The next section, titled “Basis,” lays out the geographic and administrative regions of Fiume and the rights and responsibilities of its Citizens. For its time, the charter was an extremely progressive document. It granted women the right to vote and even serve in the military¹²² years before Italy did so. It also guaranteed a minimum wage, even before the United States implemented one at the federal level, as well as instituted universal healthcare. Other civil rights and civil liberties were granted as well:

- 6. All citizens of the State, of both sexes are equal, and feel themselves equal in the eye of the law.
- 7. Fundamental liberties, freedom of thought and of the Press, the right to hold meetings and to form associations are guaranteed to all citizens by the Constitution.
- 8. The Constitution guarantees to all citizens of both sexes: primary instruction in well-lighted and healthy schools; physical training in open-air gymnasiums, well-equipped; paid work with a fair minimum living wage; assistance in sickness, infirmity, and involuntary unemployment; old age pensions; the enjoyment of property legitimately obtained; inviolability of the home; ‘habeas corpus’; compensation for injuries in case of judicial errors or abuse of power.¹²³

Interestingly, the charter does not acknowledge the ownership of property as a given natural right, but regards it as a societal benefit:

- 9. The State does not recognize the ownership of property as an absolute and personal right, but regards it as one of the most useful and responsible of social functions.¹²⁴
- 14. Life is a good thing, it is fit and right that man, reborn to freedom, should lead a life that is noble and serious; a true man is he who, day by day, renews the dedication of his manhood to his fellowmen; labour, however humble and obscure, if well done adds to the beauty of the world.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Charter of Carnaro, Preamble

¹²² Charter of Carnaro, Article 47

¹²³ Charter of Carnaro, Articles 6-8

¹²⁴ Charter of Carnaro, Article 9

¹²⁵ Charter of Carnaro, Article 14

III. Corporations

The Charter divided society and labor into 10 distinct “Corporations.” Each corporation acted as a sort-of union of societal affiliations, a model later adopted by Mussolini and the Fascists. This is enumerated in Article 18:

18. Whatever be the kind of work a man does, whether of hand or brain, art or industry, design or execution, he must be a member of one of the ten Corporations.¹²⁶

Article 19 of the charter further elaborates upon the different corporations. These included a corporation for small-scale farmers, business staff, public servants and maritime professions, to name a few. The Tenth corporation has a special status within the charter:

19. The tenth [corporation] has no special trade or register or title. It is reserved for the mysterious forces of progress and adventure. It is a sort of votive offering to the genius of the unknown, to the man of the future, to the hoped-for idealization of daily work, to the liberation of the spirit of man beyond the panting effort and bloody sweat of today.¹²⁷

It is clear that D’Annunzio believed in creating the tenth corporation as a tribute to himself and his leadership.

IV. The Commandant

A clause in the charter also laid out the foundations for a position akin to a dictator in ancient Rome:

43. When the province is in extreme peril and sees that her safety depends on the will and devotion of one man who is capable of rousing and of leading all the forces of the people in a united and victorious effort, the National Council in solemn conclave in the Arengo may, voting by word of mouth, nominate a Commandant and transmit to him supreme authority without appeal.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Charter of Carnaro, Article 18

¹²⁷ Charter of Carnaro, Article 19

¹²⁸ Charter of Carnaro, Article 43

While it is unclear if D'Annunzio used this clause as a justification for his absolute authority, he maintained the position of commandant for the entirety of Fiume's existence. However, despite ruling as dictator, D'Annunzio acknowledged the right of any citizen to hold commandantship in Article 46:

46. Any citizen holding political rights, whether he have any office in the province or not, may be elected to the supreme office¹²⁹

V. Public Instruction

D'Annunzio was keen on promoting the creation of art and culture as a primary function of the state. The role the state was to play in the promotion of art is enumerated in the section titled "Public Instruction," Articles 50-54:

50. For any race of noble origin, culture is the best of all weapons.

51. There will be in the city of Fiume, a School of Painting, a School of Decorative Art, a School of Music free from any legal interference.¹³⁰

The state-sponsored creation of art and culture the essence of his "politics of poetry," and the status that the charter gave the institutions of art was almost above the law.

VI. Music

Being the savant of art and culture that he was, D'Annunzio saw a special place in his new state for music and performance, so much so that he made it an official part of civic life:

64. In the Italian province of Carnaro, music is a social and religious institution.

65. In every commune of the province there will be a choral society and an orchestra subsidized by the State.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Charter of Carnaro, Article 46

¹³⁰ Charter of Carnaro, Articles 50-51

¹³¹ Charter of Carnaro, Articles 64-65

VII. The Influence of Nietzsche on the Charter of Carnaro

Various examples of Nietzsche's influence upon D'Annunzio's Fiume are clearly visible in the Charter of Carnaro. There is none more obvious, however, than that of the Tenth corporation. In the clause that established the Tenth corporation in Article 19, D'Annunzio tried to create a separate corporation for *Übermenschen*, such as himself. The "man of the future" that the Tenth corporation is devoted to is clearly an homage to the *Übermensch*. It also represents Nietzsche's idea of the "perfect caste."

Just as "the overman shall be the meaning of the earth,"¹³² so too shall members of the Tenth corporation be "men of the future." In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes "I love the one who justifies people of the future and redeems those of the past."¹³³ These are the tasks of the Tenth corporation: to be promoters of culture, effective leaders and in effect bridge the gap between man and the *Übermensch*.

Nietzsche and D'Annunzio also both believed that promotion of culture ought to be a key function of the state. Nietzsche presumed that the state maintained its legitimacy by both power and its potential to create a space where culture can grow,¹³⁴ and D'Annunzio made sure to emphasize the latter by making music a state institution.

Under the section titled "Music," Article 64 states that "in the pauses of music is heard the silence of the tenth corporation."¹³⁵ Here, D'Annunzio is solidifying the *Übermensch*'s role as the protector of culture and music. Nietzsche, himself a music lover himself, would have undoubtedly approved. In *The Case of Wagner* (Wagner being one of his favorite composers),

¹³² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Edited by Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin, Translated by Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 6

¹³³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 8

¹³⁴ Hugo Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016) p. 56

¹³⁵ Charter of Carnaro, Article 64

Nietzsche writes: “Has any one ever observed that music emancipates the spirit? gives wings to thought? and that the more one becomes a musician the more one is also a philosopher?”¹³⁶

Music and art play important roles in the lives of millions because it is life-affirming. “Art is the great stimulus to life,”¹³⁷ he says in *Twilight of the Idols*. If, according to Nietzsche, enhancing culture ought to be a duty of the state (which in Fiume it was), then mandating music as a whole to be a social institution would bolster its legitimacy.

It is important to note that even though the charter was quite egalitarian, and in that sense revolutionary, it was *also* Nietzschean. Equality and revolution are two concepts that are seldom attributed to Nietzsche’s philosophy. However, in the case of Fiume, they actually helped to serve a Nietzschean objective. By giving the masses a significant amount of political participation (but not necessarily power), D’Annunzio was able to solicit help in creating and bolstering a caste of higher men, “men of the future.” Though the egalitarian message of the charter may have run counter to Nietzsche superficially, it ultimately served to further his theory that a closed circle of elite men should shape the culture and trajectory of the state.

Grand Politics in Fiume and the Significance of the *Übermensch*

I. Nietzsche, D’Annunzio and the Greeks

Like Nietzsche, D’Annunzio admired the ancient Greeks. He often incorporated Greek themes and myths in his work, idolized Greek playwrights and cherished his visits to the Greece in the early days of his literary career. However, D’Annunzio’s Greco-philia extended beyond an appreciation for art and philosophy.

¹³⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *I. The Case of Wagner; II. Nietzsche Contra Wagner; III. Selected Aphorisms* (1888), Third Edition, Translated by Anthony M. Ludovici (T. N. Foulis 13 & 15: Frederick Street Edinburgh and London. Released April 7, 2008), p. 20

¹³⁷ Daniel Came, *Nietzsche on Art and Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 14

D'Annunzio was inspired by Greece's tragedians not only because of their immortal works, but how these works shaped mass sentiment. Tragic playwrights like Aeschylus of Athens would often put on magnificent and harrowing performances that would inspire fellow Athenians to go to the temples or take up arms for the cause of the city.¹³⁸ After reading about the dramatic and patriotic effects that Aeschylus's tragedies had on Greek citizens, D'Annunzio supposed that the process of shaping hearts and minds could begin with his writing and poetry.

In Fiume, where the political stage and the artistic stage were to be melded into one as its Charter specifies, the task of shaping public ideology through performance was put into direct effect through massed rallies and public spectacles. It was, as D'Annunzio said, the "first example of direct communication... between people and their ruler... since Greek times."¹³⁹ By doing so, D'Annunzio hoped to bring back the conditions of ancient Greece that Nietzsche favored as well.

II. D'Annunzio Relationship with the Crowd

D'Annunzio's reputation as a fiery orator peaked as commandant of Fiume. He employed the open space of Fiume's central square as a political and theatrical amphitheater. It was here where he announced his takeover of Fiume in the name of Italy, as well as where many other rallies and rancorous speeches were held. He would give speeches here almost every day in front of the square from the balcony of the Governor's Palace.¹⁴⁰ Instances of poetry were scattered throughout his addresses, regardless of how mundane or inflammatory the subject matter was. In

¹³⁸ Hughes-Hallett, p. 209

¹³⁹ Ibid, 426

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 425

a September 1919 speech railing against the Nitti government, for example, D'Annunzio harangued:

In Rome, struck with the plague the likes of which visited the city when it was covered in medieval darkness, in the lugubrious Rome were the snail speaks like a buffoon of his narrow rescue from the throngs of death... in the Rome of moles without eyes and of geese without wings, they believe that we are most upset and that the streets of Fiume are crossed but by sad shadows.¹⁴¹

He would also employ the use call-and-response throughout his speeches, creating a dialogue between D'Annunzio and his subjects:

D'Annunzio: "To whom the victory?"
 Crowd: "To us!"
 D'Annunzio: "To whom the victory?"
 Crowd: "To the heroes!"¹⁴²

D'Annunzio also helped popularize the battle cry of Achilles in Fiume, which had been used by members of the *Arditi* in WWI:

D'Annunzio: "Eia, Eia, Eia, Alala!"
 Crowd: "Eia, Eia, Eia, Alala!"¹⁴³

Before the proclamation of autonomy, D'Annunzio addressed the crowd from the balcony of his residence. Unfurling an Italian flag from the balustrade, he asked:

D'Annunzio: "Do you confirm your vote of October thirtieth in front of the banner of the Timavo?"
 Crowd: "Yes!"
 D'Annunzio: "After this renewed act of will I proclaim: I, a soldier, a volunteer, a wounded veteran of the war, believe that I interpret the will of all of the people of Italy, proclaiming the annexation of Fiume."¹⁴⁴

Proclaiming himself an interpreter of the will of the Italian people in Fiume may have been a fit of megalomania, but for many in Fiume, it may not have been far from the truth. D'Annunzio

¹⁴¹ Natalia Skradol, "Carnival of Exception: Gabriele D'Annunzio's 'Dialogues with the Crowd,'" *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, (vol. 30, no. 1. 2012) p. 80

¹⁴² Hughes-Hallett, 425

¹⁴³ Ibid, 425

¹⁴⁴ Ledeen, 71

was above the crowd, conducting it, turning the “unwashed masses” into the “men of the future.” He was playing the role of a “superman” rather well. D’Annunzio therefore did what Nietzsche’s Zarathustra could not: affirm the participation of the people in creating a more perfect world, with himself at the vanguard.

II. Hierarchy and *Rankordnung* in Fiume

By employing these techniques, D’Annunzio believe he was transforming the crowd before him into an almost individual entity.¹⁴⁵ He presumed, according to historian Michael Ledeen, that “citizens can be drawn together into an emotional unit that was, in turn, a given symbol of importance.”¹⁴⁶ D’Annunzio wanted to create a regime that was not only independent, but revolutionary. He wanted to create a “superworld”¹⁴⁷ where a new, superior society would be born, and he was to be its creator. He was doing away with “petty politics,” creating a theatre and sensory experience for the masses, while stripping them of dangerous “feelings of power.” Perhaps he was the great “commander” that Zarathustra spoke of.

The importance of societal hierarchy to both D’Annunzio and Nietzsche was well reflected in Fiume, not solely because it was essentially mandated by its constitution. Though there was no official hierarchical “pyramid” in place, the Charter of Carnaro’s section on corporations (Articles 18 through 21) enumerated strict societal re-organization. Article 20 states: “Each Corporation is a legal entity and is so recognized by the State.”¹⁴⁸

The special status of D’Annunzio and the Tenth corporation exemplified the hierarchy in Fiume that was implied, but not codified. As commandant, D’Annunzio served as a moderator

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 71

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 150

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 84

¹⁴⁸ Charter of Carnaro, Article 20

between the corporations, while simultaneously being the figurehead of all of them. In addition, as a member of the Tenth corporation (by virtue of being himself, a “man of the future”), he had the distinct qualities that gave the Tenth corporations a higher degree of reverence than the other nine.

D’Annunzio wholeheartedly concurred with Nietzsche’s views on hierarchy and *Rankordnung*, and by observing the way he lived his own life (and the way he viewed others), this is abundantly clear. “Am I of the same species as those men chattering as they carry the trunks?” D’Annunzio asked about the men moving his furniture one day while living in France.¹⁴⁹ His status and image in Fiume, a cultured ruler and a member of the elite Tenth corporation, was of the philosopher-statesman, the “inspired artist”¹⁵⁰ that Nietzsche imagined would “make order out of man” and finally embrace “grand politics.”

Even though the hierarchy in Fiume never fully amounted to a clear caste system, the implementation of such a system was proposed on a number of occasions. A Fiumean political association called “YOGA,” which praised Nietzsche, Hinduism and eastern philosophy, endorsed a full adaptation of a caste system similar to that of India.¹⁵¹ While these ideas never came to fruition, the group had support from D’Annunzio’s trusted advisor Guido Keller, and to a certain degree D’Annunzio himself.¹⁵²

Nietzsche wanted to recreate the societal conditions which brought about Plato,¹⁵³ a thinker who, like Nietzsche, believed that the “perfect state” necessitated the subjugation of inferiors.¹⁵⁴ In order to recreate these conditions, he believed that the concept of eternal return

¹⁴⁹ Hughes-Hallett, 175

¹⁵⁰ Drochon, 38

¹⁵¹ Hughes-Hallett, 462

¹⁵² Ibid, 462

¹⁵³ Drochon 122

¹⁵⁴ Frederick Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) p. 136

should be emphasized, as should a social hierarchy and/or caste system.¹⁵⁵ Though a caste system in a strict sense was never implemented, hierarchy and *Rankordnung* were important motifs in D'Annunzio's regime, whether through the Charter of Carnaro or massed rallies.

The League of Fiume

D'Annunzio saw the Fiume endeavor in a context larger than the city limits. It was the responsibility of this new entity, he thought, to export the ideology and struggles that were present within its borders.

To D'Annunzio, the League of Nations "was nothing more than another instrument of Great Britain for oppression."¹⁵⁶ The mutilators of Italy's victory ought not to have the final say in international affairs, he thought. To right this, D'Annunzio hoped to create an "anti-League of Nations" in Fiume, an organization he called the "League of Fiume." He wished to bring all the oppressed peoples of the world under the banner of Fiumeanism: "From Ireland to Egypt, from Russia to the United States, from Rumania to India. It gathers the white races and the colored peoples, reconciles the gospel with the Koran,"¹⁵⁷ he said. D'Annunzio's government remained in covert contact with various stateless oppressed groups and political organizations around the globe, such as Sinn Fein in Ireland, Indian and Turkish nationalists, Catalan separatists, and even Chinese-Americans in California.¹⁵⁸

The mission of the League of Fiume was to expand the revolution in Fiume to the world. Though the League never calcified into a separate entity from the Fiumean government, it served

¹⁵⁵ Drochon, 127

¹⁵⁶ Anthony Rhodes, *D'Annunzio: The Poet as Superman*, (New York: McDowell Obolensky, Inc. 1959), p. 215

¹⁵⁷ Ledeen, 120

¹⁵⁸ Hughes-Hallett, 448

served as a goal for a D'Annunzian ideological world view, to both supporters in Fiume and abroad.

Here, too, is Nietzsche's influence in Fiume. The vision of a trans-European and in this case trans-continental "party of life," one that could rid the world of "petty statism and its dynastic as well as democratic splinter wills,"¹⁵⁹ was to be brought to fruition by the League of Fiume. Just as Nietzsche envisioned, the politics across Europe would be changed by a band of elite men, across religions and across ethnicities. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, Nietzsche promotes cohesiveness in the qualities of European Jews and Teutonic Knights, for the purpose of "rearing of a new caste for Europe."¹⁶⁰ The League of Fiume would not merely seek the creation of a new caste for Europe: it would seek one for the world.

The most important goal of this endeavor to Nietzsche is "guidance and guardianship of universal culture."¹⁶¹ To D'Annunzio, the very existence of Fiume was built upon the preservation, continuation and spread of culture. As Article 50 of the Charter of Carnaro states: "For any race of noble origin, culture is the best of all weapons."¹⁶² Though never fully established, the League of Fiume would have been the organization that wielded this weapon.

Symbolism

I. A New Religion

The neo-pagan civic rituals and cult of personality that developed around D'Annunzio in Fiume were famous, and clearly influenced later Fascist and nationalist movements. The

¹⁵⁹ Drochon, 160

¹⁶⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, (1886) Edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, Translated by Judith Norma. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 196

¹⁶¹ Drochon, 160

¹⁶² Charter of Carnaro, Article 50

pageantry of regime was not only for show: it played an important part in what was essentially a Fiumean civic religion

A Fiumean administrator later said of his time there: “The life of Fiume, agitated, tumultuous, torn by diverse political currents that were a mix of idealism and materialism, was already sufficiently pagan without it having been necessary to publicly proclaim a humanistic cult.”¹⁶³ The revival of pagan cults and veneration of the Greeks was something both D’Annunzio and Nietzsche encouraged. For D’Annunzio, it was to become a reality promoted by the state. However, instead of Greek deities, D’Annunzio was to become the recipient of worship.

The Fiumean civic religion was *the* Fiumean religion. Certain elements of D’Annunzio cadre, such as Marinetti himself, even talked of “devaticanization.” Whether or not this was the vision of D’Annunzio, the triumph of Fiumean neo-paganism was visible throughout the city. A personal account from a public festival recorded by Leon Kochnitsky, a Belgian poet and confidant of D’Annunzio, describes this phenomenon rather well:

... starving, in ruin, in anguish, perhaps on the verge of death in the flames or under a hail of grenades, Fiume, brandishing a torch, danced before the sea. In the impoverished homes of the old city, the women had removed the sacred images. The tiny lights glowed in front of the figure of Gabriele D’Annunzio.¹⁶⁴

D’Annunzio’s cult of personality went further, with men adopting bald heads and pointed beards, donning white gloves and dressing in fine clothing, all a quasi-religious homage to their *Comandante*.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Ledeen, 148

¹⁶⁴ Ledeen, 151

¹⁶⁵ Hughes-Hallett, 450

This new religion would have likely been looked upon favorably by Nietzsche, who wrote that a “struggle against the Catholic Church is an act of enlightenment, nothing else”¹⁶⁶ (although he would have likely objected to D’Annunzio’s Christ-like glorification of himself). Indeed, the cultural war against the church was a primary purpose of Nietzsche’s “party of life.” Whether or not the civic religion of D’Annunzio’s “city of life” was to intended serve the same purpose is unclear, but per Kochnitsky’s account, it seemed it did so anyway.

The civic religion was also exemplified by the reverence of the Tenth corporation in general. Article 19 of the Charter of Carnaro enumerates what this entailed: “[The Tenth corporation] is represented in the civic sanctuary by a kindled lamp bearing an ancient Tuscan inscription of the epoch of the communes, that calls up an ideal vision of human labour; ‘Fatica senza fatica.’”¹⁶⁷

As the Charter states, the Tenth corporation was quite literally worshipped in a temple. The last three Latin words roughly translate to “effort without effort.” In this context, the phrase refers to how the corporations were to enhance the work and creativity of Fiumeans, regardless of whichever corporation they belonged to.¹⁶⁸ Members of the Tenth corporation, being “men of the future,” were to create and promote culture, and could only do so effortlessly if society were to be fragmented to keep them free of trivialities, just as Nietzsche’s system of *Rankordnung* specified.

This new religion was one with its own myths and rites, as well as its own priestly class (the Tenth corporation). It was one that praised power, unity and aesthetics. It was, in essence, the “divine order of politics” that Nietzsche had envisioned.

¹⁶⁶ Drochon, 171

¹⁶⁷ Charter of Carnaro, Article 19

¹⁶⁸ Ledeen, 170

II. The Flag of Fiume

Despite its short existence and little international recognition (the only state with established diplomatic relations in the city was the Soviet Union),¹⁶⁹ D'Annunzio's Fiume had many of the superficial trappings and symbols associated with recognized states. It had its own army, currency, postage, anthems, mottos and flags, all of which reflected the themes D'Annunzio had been trying to instill in the polity since his takeover.

The flag of D'Annunzio's Fiume, for example, was extremely unique. It was displayed vertically rather than horizontally, and was not rectangular, but a three-tipped swallowtail. In its corners were the Italian and Fiumean tricolors. In the center of its red field lay the emblem of Fiume: an ouroboros (a depiction of a serpent eating its own tail), the Big Dipper and the national motto of Fiume, "Qui Contra Nos" (Latin for "Who is against us?").



Above: Flag of Fiume under D'Annunzio's "Regency of Carnaro"

The ouroboros is perhaps the most striking feature of the banner. An ancient symbol traced back to Egypt and Greece, the ouroboros has long been used to represent eternity and recurrence.¹⁷⁰ Due to D'Annunzio's profound love for Nietzsche, it would make sense that the

¹⁶⁹ Hughes-Hallett, 451

¹⁷⁰ Joobin Bekhrad, "[The ancient symbol that spanned millenia](#)," *BBC*, December 4, 2017

emblem of his state would include an icon of eternal return, one of the most important aspects of Nietzschean philosophy, and an outlook on life that D'Annunzio himself seemed to live by and promote among his followers.

Article 14 of the Charter of Carnaro states that “life is a good thing, it is fit and right that man, reborn to freedom, should lead a life that is noble and serious.”¹⁷¹ Rebirth was an important motif in Fiume. A city with thousands of years of history and numerous occupations under many different banners, it was to be reborn yet again into what D'Annunzio would affectionately call the “City of the Holocaust.”¹⁷² The Fiumean renaissance was to be one of splendor, aesthetics, Italian nationalism and political innovation, a true city of the future. To D'Annunzio and his loyalists, the Fiume endeavor was a vindication of the Italian sentiment of loss in the First World War, a national and cultural rebirth. As exemplified by the banner of Fiume, the tenets of rebirth and eternal recurrence would morph into a much more central part of state ideology.

III. A Fiumean Anthem

One of the most popular songs in Fiume was *Giovinezza* (Italian for “Youth”), which served as a *de facto* national anthem of the city. *Giovinezza* was one of the official marches of the *Arditi*, and the lyrics of its chorus extol youth and rebirth:

Youth, Youth,
Spring of beauty,
In the hardship of life
Your song rings and goes!¹⁷³

The *Arditi* (literally “the daring ones”) were exemplar youth to D'Annunzio. An elite military unit in the Royal Italian Army, their function was to storm enemy trenches armed not

¹⁷¹ Article 14, Charter of Carnaro

¹⁷² Hughes-Hallett, 409

¹⁷³ Ibid, 420

with guns, but daggers and grenades.¹⁷⁴ They wore all black, grew out their hair, and were legendary and infamous for their braveness and brutality. They were also mostly young, achieving praise from not only D'Annunzio but Italian nationalists in general. Futurist Mario Carli described them as “a deep black background against which the musculature of an acrobat glistens... the gay power of a twenty-year-old youth who throws a bomb while listening a song from a Variety show.”¹⁷⁵ It was these “youthful” traits that D'Annunzio believed every citizen of Fiume should possess, one reason why the *Arditi* achieved such a legendary status there.

Youth was an important theme in D'Annunzio's philosophy, Futurism, and Fascism. D'Annunzio praises the young in many of his poems, and Marinetti believed it was the youth that would change the world the most (“Injustice, strong and sane will break out radiantly in their eyes,”¹⁷⁶ he said). The young had little to lose since only their future was ahead of them, and their bravery (or alternatively, their daring brashness and willingness to die for a cause) were attributes of a model citizen.

Giovinezza was also later adopted as the official hymn of the National Fascist Party under Mussolini, albeit with altered lyrics. The song was sung by the Blackshirts during the march on Rome, and was adopted as a *de facto* Italian national anthem from 1922 until 1943.

To Nietzsche, youthful characteristics in this context would be beneficial to the state and the individual. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche praises those who “live dangerously”:

For believe me: the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is-to live dangerously! Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas. Live at war with your peers and yourselves! Be robbers and conquerors as long as you cannot be rulers and possessors, you seekers of knowledge! Soon the age will be past when you could be content to live hidden in forests

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 388

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 388

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 420

like shy deer. At long last the search for knowledge will reach out for its due; it will want to rule and possess, and you with it!¹⁷⁷

These attitudes were exactly the ones that D'Annunzio sought for both his regime and in his poetry. In *Halcyon*, one of D'Annunzio's most famous poem sequences, he declares that he would give anything to be "twenty-seven years old again."¹⁷⁸ Though certainly not still twenty-seven years old (he was fifty-six years old as *Comandante*), he nonetheless took it upon himself to promote his ideals of youth within Fiume. "On the verge of old age," he declared, "I have been reborn as the Prince of Youth."¹⁷⁹ The jubilant strains of *Giovinezza* reflect this sentiment perfectly.

It is clear that D'Annunzio had no issue creating a political entity so emotional and abstract. "Is it a republic? Or is it a monarchy? Names are of no interest to us. Words do not affect us. These institutions are worm-eaten, and must have a radical renovation," he said regarding his newfound statelet. Due to the fact that neither Nietzsche nor D'Annunzio were primarily political philosophers, this sentiment is not surprising. In observing D'Annunzio's attempt to redefine and reinvent these institutions, though, the significance of Nietzsche's influence upon them cannot be ignored.

Was D'Annunzio's Fiume a Nietzschean Regime?

While Nietzschean philosophy clearly influenced Fiume, would it be fair to call Fiume a "Nietzschean regime?" There were many characteristics that were quite un-Nietzschean about Fiume. One of the most salient was the equality that the Charter of Carnaro granted. While the

¹⁷⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1887), Translated by Walter Kauffman, (New York City: Random House, 1974), p. 228-229

¹⁷⁸ Hughes-Hallett, 55

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 420

word “democracy” or any of its variants do not appear anywhere within the Charter, civic engagement and participation are still of the utmost importance. Universal suffrage, granted by the Charter, is not something Nietzsche (a harsh critic of democracy) would have envisioned in his ideal state.

The deification of D’Annunzio was also something Nietzsche would have objected to. While Nietzsche supported a new religion to rid Europe of Christian morals, the cult of personality that D’Annunzio created around himself was not what Nietzsche would have foreseen as an alternative. For example, D’Annunzio would often liken himself to Christ, a savior of the people of Fiume, Italy and the world. Anyone likening themselves to Christ would not be worthy of the title of *Übermensch* to Nietzsche.

Nietzsche, being a virulent anti-feminist, would have also likely had qualms with the rights granted to women in Fiume. “Woman is not yet capable of friendship: women are still cats, and birds. Or, at best, cows,”¹⁸⁰ he says in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. “A man should be raised for war and woman for the recreation of the warrior: everything else is folly.”¹⁸¹ The provisions and rights that the Charter grants women, such as the right to vote and the right to join the military, would therefore be considered unproductive and naïve to Nietzsche. Though D’Annunzio (a notorious womanizer) may have personally agreed with Nietzsche’s views regarding women, his state functioned in a different capacity.

Despite the rights granted by the Charter of Carnaro, Fiume remained a society divided by corporation, a possible failsafe against complete democratic takeover. There was a clear distinction between those in D’Annunzio’s inner circle and the masses of Fiume. The existence

¹⁸⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Edited by Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin, Translated by Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 41

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 48

of the Tenth corporation makes this quite clear. In addition to the societal rank enumerated by the Charter, an unwritten ethnic hierarchy existed between Fiumean Italians and the native Slavic population. He referred to nearby Yugoslavia as a “Balkan pigsty” and called Slavs “swineherds.”¹⁸² Though on paper all citizens of Fiume were equal, this was far different in practice.

Italian nationalism was widespread in Fiume, something Nietzsche (a firm critic of nationalism) would have likely detested. In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche explains why nationalism is something to be overcome, in a section entitled “The European Man and the Abolition of Nations [475]”:

“It is not the interest of many of peoples, as is often claimed, but above all the interest of certain royal dynasties and also certain classes in commerce in society, that drives to nationalism. Once one has recognized this, one should declare oneself without embarrassment as a *good European*, and work actively for the amalgamation of nations.”¹⁸³

Though D’Annunzio preached inter-ethnic unity through the League of Fiume, his regime still discriminated against the native Slavs. To this, Nietzsche would have likely protested.

D’Annunzio, ever the hedonist, tried to make his Fiume an epicenter of pleasure, another reason Nietzsche may have disliked the Fiume of D’Annunzio. In *Twilight of the Idols*, he writes:

It is a noble sense which forbids our being only feasters and gourmets of life—this sense revolts against hedonism—: we want to perform something in return!—But the fundamental feeling of the masses is that one must live for nothing,—that is their vulgarity.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Hughes-Hallett, 463

¹⁸³ The Viking Press, *The Portable Nietzsche* (375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014: Penguin Books, 1976) p. 61

¹⁸⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, (1888) Edited by Oscar Levy, Translated by Anthony Ludovici (T.N. Foulis 13 & 15 Frederick Street Edinburgh and London, 1911) p. 263

Nietzsche was not a hedonist; he believed that humans were not meant to be “feasters” of life. Pain and suffering are necessary for self-overcoming, and therefore important for the arrival of the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche would not only have objected to the profuse amounts of hedonism in Fiume, but likely D’Annunzio’s personal lifestyle as well. The so-called “Italian Nietzsche” would therefore himself be hastening the arrival of the “last man.”

Despite the aspects of D’Annunzio’s Fiume that were quite non-Nietzschean, there were of course many more that were Nietzschean. The implementation of grand politics, the appraisal of art and culture, the *Übermensch* and *Rankordnung* all came to a head in Fiume. While each aspect was melded with pieces of D’Annunzio’s personal philosophy, the attempt to implement them was clearly made.

The use of corporations to fragment society was an attempt on behalf of D’Annunzio to institute some sort of *Rankordnung*. D’Annunzio’s position as venerated leader was a clear analog to the *Übermensch*, and his visions for how art and culture were to be included in civic rites were essential to his own brand of grand politics. In addition, the symbols, banners, songs and general lifestyle of Fiume that D’Annunzio promoted all incorporated Nietzschean elements. Though it would be incorrect to call Fiume a purely Nietzschean regime, it was a state profoundly influenced by Nietzschean ideology, heavily imparted with D’Annunzio’s personal philosophy.

Chapter V: Conclusion

The Downfall and Legacy of Fiume

On Christmas Day, 1920, the Italian invasion of Fiume began. One month earlier in November, the Treaty of Rapallo was signed between Italy and Yugoslavia, carving up the disputed land between. Fiume was to be given the status of a Free City, but with D'Annunzio still in power, this would be difficult to enforce. When Italian ships started to enter Fiume's harbor in December, D'Annunzio rallied his legionnaires and followers to a heroic defense: "Have your weapon in your hand at all times. Be proud to call yourself rebels. Spit in the face of cowards... blessed are the dead."¹⁸⁵ According to D'Annunzio, these last few days of the Fiume endeavor would be the "most glorious in human history."¹⁸⁶ However, by January 18, under heavy mortar fire, D'Annunzio left the Fiume.¹⁸⁷ His self-proclaimed "City of the Holocaust" had fallen.

After D'Annunzio's surrender at Fiume, he retired to his villa on Lake Garda where he lived out his life in relative isolation until his death in 1938. The fragile Italian government, knowing full well the extent of D'Annunzio's popularity and worried about an adverse public reaction, decided to treat D'Annunzio with few punitive measures. Though Fiume had faltered, D'Annunzio still maintained his status as a beloved poet and public figure.

D'Annunzian themes did not disappear with the downfall of Fiume, however. Mussolini considered D'Annunzio a father-figure for the Fascist movement, and later employed many of D'Annunzio's traditions and rules in Fiume in his regime and Fascist party. These included the

¹⁸⁵ Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Gabriele D'Annunzio: Poet, Seducer and Preacher of War*, (New York City: Alfred Knopf, 2013), p. 475

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 476

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 480

stiff-arm Roman salute, the song *Giovinezza*, balcony speeches employing the use of dialogue with the crowd, and the organization of society in corporations. Though they met several times to discuss art and politics, D'Annunzio looked down upon Mussolini, considering him to be a cheap imitator of himself. Nevertheless, D'Annunzio's ideas and traditions became the inspiration for the foundations of the new Fascist regime in Italy, which would in turn influence later Fascist and nationalist movements in Europe and around the world.

Mussolini and other right-wing ideologues would also adopt D'Annunzio's love for Nietzsche. *Il Duce* himself wrote that Nietzsche writings engrained a "spiritual eroticism"¹⁸⁸ within him, and Hitler was also notably inspired by Nietzsche's works and their anti-Semitic interpretations. However, it was D'Annunzio whose appreciation for Nietzschean values was the most salient. Themes such as eternal return, the *Übermensch* and the faults of democracy appear throughout his novels, poems and leadership, and later, in the minds of European nationalists from the 1920s to the 1940s. If not for *Il Comandante*, there would likely be no *Il Duce* or *Der Führer*.

Count Carlo Sforza, a prominent Italian politician and signatory of the Treaty of Rapallo, later wrote about D'Annunzio and his leadership of Fiume in 1938, shortly after the poet's death. "Over the tomb of the poet who was never satisfied with his literary glory (and that constitutes for me his greatest praise) one may truly say that it was not the Italy of Mussolini which annexed Fiume, but the Fiume of D'Annunzio which annexed Italy."¹⁸⁹ Without the influence of Nietzsche on D'Annunzio and his leadership of Fiume, Sforza's words would likely never have been written.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 379

¹⁸⁹ Count Carlo Sforza, "D'Annunzio, Inventor of Fascism," *Books Abroad*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1938, p. 271

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