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The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue, Survival by Susan Zuccotti

Nancy Harrowitz

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this reality and to other signs—so that, as in the case of d'Annunzio, for example, it can be seen how what he says makes a connection, not only between language and reality, but also among many different discourses, such as those of religion, politics, literature, and personal feeling. Thus, Valesio argues, d'Annunzio's relation to fascism is that of the creator of an original poetic idea, specifically one that envisioned the fusion of "heroics" and "erotics", to a "corrupted" version thereof. So, too, for d'Annunzio's relationship to those Italian writers who came after and were in a variety of ways inspired by him. Ungaretti, in his early war poetry, and Vittorini in his novels, Pasolini in his critical writing—all take up d'Annunzian themes and give them typically modernistic treatments of a d'Annunzian kind. But all of them, in Valesio's estimation, represent a "declension" from—a fading or paling of—the d'Annunzian "idea."

The last chapter of Valesio's book is a *tour de force* of critical imagination. Here he examines what he calls a "number of points of contact between the territory of the d'Annunzian imagination and the territory of the North American imagination" especially as the latter is represented by the "poetic prosings" of Walt Whitman. Although d'Annunzio's allusions to Whitman and to North American writing in general are minimal. Valesio insists upon the possibility of "objective" affinities—both stylistic and thematic—between these two territories as well. The point here seems to be that d'Annunzio's futuristic, prophetic,

metamorphic, and magical—in a word, his hypermodernist—style resembles in more than a superficial way the poetic "effusiveness" of such American writers as Poe and Whitman and, later, Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe. Valesio suggests that this conjunction of poetic territories points to the formation of an "international", even transcontinental style which, once the fad of minimalist writing has passed, will recognize in d'Annunzio its annunciatory angel.

HAYDEN WHITE

The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue, Survival

By Susan Zuccotti.

1996 paperback edition, Lincoln:
University of Nebraska Press,
1996.

New York: Basic Books, 1987.

For a post-Holocaust understanding of the function of moral complicity, we need to examine several post-war myths regarding the relationship between Italian culture and the Jews of Italy. Without explicitly stating such a project, Susan Zuccotti, in her well-researched and intriguing historical study, *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue, Survival*, quietly examines these myths for veracity as she sets out to document what happened to the Jews in Italy during the war. The first myth, probably the most prevalent one, has to do with a purported lack of anti-Semitism in the Italian tradi-

tion, before the Fascist era. The second myth is the complete lack of enthusiasm on the part of virtually all Italians for the Racial Laws of 1938-39. And the third myth is that the partial destruction of Italian Jews which took place after the German invasion of Italy had everything to do with the Nazis and nothing to do with Italian Fascists. Zuccotti's compelling book is now available in a new paperback edition with an introduction by Furio Colombo.

Any study of the Holocaust is more than likely to engage in the dangerously unselfcritical finger-pointing found in any overt or implied moral critique. To study the Holocaust in Germany, Poland or France, from this point of view, seems almost simple: there was much overt anti-Semitism before the war, and a lot of complicity with the Nazis. To evaluate the situation in Italy is more difficult: there was much more resistance to the deportation of Italian Jews, and much less complicity with the Nazis on the part of citizens. The situation is compounded by a high level of guilt regarding the Racial Laws and also a certain level of denial on the part of Italian Jews during the war, who had trouble believing that their country had betrayed them in this way. Zuccotti, in her balanced assessment of this complex situation, points out the denial on the part of some Italian Jewish writers regarding Italy's attitudes towards the Jews while at the same time carefully documenting the history of anti-Semitism just before and during the war, noting for example the violence committed against Jews and against synagogues by Italian Fascists in

cities such as Trieste and Ferrara before the German occupation. Zuccotti's welcome study is unique in English and differs significantly from Renzo De Felice's landmark history published in 1961, *Storia degli ebrei sotto il fascismo*, in that the former is intended for a general readership.

The preface to the book states Zuccotti's position clearly: she is not only interested in finding out why the relatively high number of eighty-five percent of Italy's Jews survived the war, but why it was that fifteen percent were destroyed. This insistence on commemorating the loss of individual lives puts Zuccotti's work well within the context of Holocaust commemorative projects, such as the study which followed Zuccotti's: *One, By One, By One: Facing the Holocaust*, by Judith Miller.

Zuccotti states from the outset that "this book examines the behavior of men, women and children, Jewish and Christian alike, living in the shadow of death." In choosing to include survivor testimony as evidence and to supplement her factual rendition of the history with the stories of individual lives, Zuccotti enriches her text and at the same time enters into a debate regarding the proper place of individual testimony in historical narrative. What could be viewed as a weakness of this text, as it presents first- and even second-hand testimony alongside empirical facts, is also its greatest strength, as these testimonies eloquently demonstrate the effect of the war on individual lives. The effect of this intermingling of styles is, less than harmonious for the narrative itself,

however: at times the writing is uneven and overly anecdotal.

Chapter 3, entitled "The Racial Laws," documents the anti-Semitism found in Italy before the war and its relationship to the appearance of the Racial Laws, when Italy became "officially" antisemitic. Zuccotti asks how a country such as Italy, which had some of the worst Jewish ghettos in the world fifty years prior to this, could have no anti-Semitism embedded in its culture. Unfortunately she limits her discussion of anti-Semitism largely to the Fascist era, outlining for example the history of the anti-Zionist campaigns of 1928 and 1934. Of particular interest is the recounting of the history of the production of racist texts within Italy, such as "La difesa della razza", which began publication in August of 1934. Zuccotti points out that expressions of overt prejudice such as this were not confined to "La difesa della razza" or the antisemitic newspaper of Giovanni Preziosi, "La vita italiana," published since the 1920's. She informs us that almost every major national newspaper eventually picked up the theme of anti-Jewish sentiment. In the context of discussing the reception of anti-Semitism in Italy, Zuccotti neglects to mention the history of the influence of the antisemitic and misogynist theories of Otto Weininger, documented by Alberto Cavaglione in *Weininger in Italia*. Weininger's text *Sex and Character* was translated into Italian in 1912 and his theories regarding the inferiority of what he called the "Jewish tendency of the mind" and the "absolute Woman" were enthusiastically received by many intellectuals.

Zuccotti, while she carefully examines incidents of anti-Semitism and cases of the complicity of Fascists with the Nazis during the roundups of the Jews in 1943, is also careful to recount many cases of heroism as both ordinary citizens and officials in the army tried to save Jewish lives at home and in the occupied territories. *The Italians and the Holocaust* is characterized by its relentless attempts to give a balanced, accurate and fair picture of what happened to Italy's Jews during World War II, and Zuccotti succeeds admirably in achieving this goal.

Colombo's introduction, which first appeared in the Italian translation of this book and is now available in English, furnishes a compelling reaction to the text which is both personal and historical. Colombo makes the point that the Italian refusal to come to firm grips with its Fascist past has had long lasting repercussions, such as the Catholic Church refusing to formally acknowledge the state of Israel until 1994. Colombo asserts that "Italian intellectuals have not evaluated the damage that their silence caused, not only to Italian Jews, but to themselves." His introduction provides additional information through which Zuccotti's subject and the way in which she engages it are brought into sharp focus.

NANCY HARROWITZ
Boston University