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Enrico Rocca. *Diario degli anni bui.* Udine: Gaspari Editore, 2005. 289 pp.

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Enrico Rocca's Love's Labor Lost

With *Diario degli anni bui*, Sergio Raffaelli has made a vital contribution to the growing bibliography on the enigmatic figure of Enrico Rocca: a Gorizian, interventionist, *sansepolcrista*, *letterato*, German translator, radio pioneer, disenchanted Fascist, persecuted Jew, and antifascist.[1] Hopefully this fascinating war diary will not go unobserved, especially since the booklist of Gaspari Editore is not on most people's radar screen.

Raffaelli is an eminent linguist at the Università di Roma "Tor Vergata" whose study of linguistic politics in *Le parole proibite* will probably be familiar to many readers.[2] In reproposing Rocca's war diaries, first published in 1964,[3] Raffaelli offers a more complete text, together with extensive diary entries from 1939 in an appendix. Two additional appendices provide the reader with entries from the years 1940 and 1941 that Rocco had subsequently deleted. Thus, Raffaelli's edition supercedes the 1964 edition as the more authoritative of the two texts.

Mario Isnenghi's fine introduction, "Memorie e contromemorie di una 'guerra dei trent'anni,"' provides a useful key for reading the text. He cogently observes that Rocca's diary is both a confession and a historical document. Isnenghi proposes the diary then as a dialogue between two "Roccas." On the one hand, there is the older and jaded Rocca during World War II who finds himself no longer able to belong to a crumbling Italy. On the other hand, there is the younger and idealistic Rocca, who as an *avanguardista* in May 1915 believed himself to embody a regenerated Italy. In offering the diary in terms of the First and Second World Wars as a modern Thirty Years' War, Isnenghi reveals his debt to Gordon Wright.[4] Indeed, Rocca's diary provides fertile ground for studying how intellectuals perceived the two wars. The dialogue of Rocca's two selves reveals the strikingly different reactions provoked by the two wars, exemplified by those of Rocca and his mother. In 1915, Rocca's mother hoped for the victory of Franz Joseph's armies, while Rocca had militated for war and then volunteered for the Italian army. In 1940, Rocca found himself, instead, like his mother, hoping for Italy's defeat. This contrast becomes more poignant if one considers Rocca's status as a victim of Italian antisemitism and the primary reason for his mother's Austrian monarchism. Rocca explains that she was grateful to Franz Joseph "per l'apertura dei ghetti e diffidente degli italiani 'che parlano bene ma non dicono mai la verità"' (p. 34). It is telling that Rocca never seemed able to admit to himself that if World War I begat World War II, then he might have born some responsibility as an interventionist and early Fascist for what came afterwards, even if he had subsequently become disillusioned with Mussolini and Fascism.

Rocca's encounter with a Slovene in August 1942 found the older, disillusioned self coming to terms with an imagined, rather than an organic, conception of the nation:

"Gorizia? Che rappresenta questa città nella mia vita? Forse il destino .. m'ha fatto nascer sul limite dei popoli perchè quel brano della carne viva di una nazione m'insegnasse non l'attaccamento campanilistico in cui si esauriva il quietismo dei lealisti, ma la passione di un'Italia non vera, più bella del reale come, agli occhi dell'amante, la creatura del primo amore, di un'Italia per unirsi alla quale sarebbe stato bello e desiderabile sacrificare la vita ... Gorizia: un pretesto per conquistare una patria a me stesso" (p. 196).

The reality of Fascist Italy, however, did not tally with this imagined earlier Italy; nor did the way Rocca saw himself throughout his life tally with the Fascist image of the foreign Jew. With intense bitterness he describes how Fascist Italy was a place where a Gorizian interventionist friend could find himself condemned by a Fascist police commissioner, who as an anti-Italian Gorizian police commissioner in 1915, had condemned the friend for his pro-Italian sentiments (pp. 82-83). Rocca seemed unable to find an explanation for what had happened to his

Gorizia and his Italy, let alone himself. He wondered if what had happened after World War I were not simply an absurdity or explicable simply in fatalistic terms.

Rocca's diary is fascinating because it was written by one of several prominent Fascist Jews. He was not forthcoming about his Fascist past in his diary, which probably owes to the nature of the genre rather than any attempt to dissemble. Implicitly, the diary suggests that he had conformed outwardly and used his Fascist connections during the 1920s and 1930s to advance his journalistic career. After the Racial Laws, his status changed even if his Fascist past allowed him to become a so-called discriminated Jew. As the war turned against the Axis, however, he found himself stripped first of his national and then his professional identity. Finally, he was forced to accept an exclusionary Jewish one that did not sit well with him (p. 187). One perceives in Rocca both an articulated sense of utter disillusionment as an Italian patriot of 1915 and an unarticulated sense of guilt nagging at him as he increasingly suffered the same persecutions facing Italian Jews who did not share his Fascist past. By mid-war Rocca appeared to be at the breaking point. If he had conformed on the outside to Fascism, he was now forced into an external silence, finding a way out only through his diary entries. The diary's interior voice celebrates Rocca's liberty of spirit that separated him from what he saw as the hypocritical and conformist middle class.

The diary was his way of being different, even superior to everyone else. Thus, the diary suggests a continuity between 1915 and the Second World War. An enduring elitism can be found in both the "younger Rocca," anticipating a new Italy and disdainful of those who did not agree with him, and the "older Rocca," disillusioned with the new Italy and equally disparaging of Fascists, antifascists, the middle classes, and the masses.

The idea of keeping a diary had not been Rocca's own. His friend, Stefan Zweig, an Austrian Jewish writer, had urged him to keep one in1929. Next to the two "Roccas," Zweig is the dominant figure in the diary. And, interestingly enough, both Zweig and Rocca would commit suicide. In several ways, Rocca's obituary for his friend seems as if it could have been written for himself. Both were motivated by despair. Zweig lost hope when his humanistic dream for humanity appeared a chimera, and there was no room for him to act any more.

The diary suggests that Rocca's despair set in as his Mazzinian faith in the nation appeared a chimera and as he saw no room for action after the war. Zweig's fruitless effort to be "au-dessus de la mêlée" in the Americas paralleled Rocca's efforts in Italy after liberation. Rocca's efforts were futile because he could not escape his reputation as a Fascist among antifascists and as an antifascist among former Fascists. In addition to the failure of the Italian nation to live up to Rocca's interventionist expectations, viewed from the perspective of the 1940s, Zweig's death was another source of disillusionment:

"E sognavo di ritrovarti, amico, non so dove, non so come, dopo la guerra vinta (vinta dalla ragione e dagli spiriti liberi contro la congiura del male) e d'intrattenermi senza fine con te sulle vicende nostre negli anni bui … Avremmo radunato 'le fronde sparte' e, così sognavo, ripreso, con bene altra saggezza e calma certezza, la strada" (p. 177).[5]

Although he never recognized it in his diary, Rocca's despair was caused, at least in part, by his rejection of antifascism. He viewed antifascists as comparable to his old opponents from 1915 and the postwar period who could offer nothing more than a sterile opposition. He disparaged the *fuoriusciti*, but failed then to see the contradiction in his high praise for their German counterpart, Thomas Mann. If Isnenghi is correct in defining Rocca's stance as consonant with today's "anti-antifascism" (p. 14), readers may find it instructive to consider Rocca's conception of liberty (a theme that runs throughout the diary) and democracy: "ch'era tanto meno pericolosa del totalitarianismo perchè distrubuiva, diluendola, la capacità di far del male a un numero notevole di individui" (p. 158). Democracy, then, is simply the politics of *pis aller*. Even more instructive in this regard is a prescient observation Rocca made in October 1942 that could be applied to his own "anti-antifascism" and, perhaps, even to the "anti-antifascism" of today:

"L'intelligenza è molto diffusa in Italia ed è per questo che nessuno crede al fascismo, all'Asse, alla vittoria o alla nuova Europa. Non ci crede nessuno, nemmeno gli alti gerarchi, nemmeno, credo, Mussolini. E questa è la farsa tragica: che tutta l'oligarchia dirigente e digerente fa come se credesse e parla come se criticasse non le proprie fascistiche malefatte ma le altrui. E peggio andrà la guerra e più codesto vezzo aumenterà. Tutti, a cominciare dalla testa, diranno all'eventuale voltarsi della carta che loro, loro sono stati sempre (e Tizio e Caio e Sempronio possono dirlo) dei convinti antifascisti. Si tenterà di cercar dei responsabili e si troverà che i fascisti non sono mai esistiti. La Marcia su Roma, il forcaiolo e inutile intervento in Spagna, la conquista dell'Impero di cartapesta, la maramaldesca e, malgrado ogni calcolo facilonesco, fatale dichiarazione di guerra saranno avvenute o si saranno fatte da sè. In Germania, forse, i responsabili tireranno tragicamente le conseguenze del

loro operato. In Italia (ridere, ridere, ridere) tutti, da chi ha subito a chi ha dichiarato la guerra, dichiareranno di non aver, fin dal principio, desiderato altro che la vittoria delle democrazie" (p. 209).

Unfortunately for Rocca, he can offer no third way to fascism and antifascism that is capable of transcending the interior world of the spirit he elaborated so eloquently in his diary. Viewed from this perspective, Thomas Mann's *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man* (Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen [1918]) might be a more appropriate point of comparison to *Diario degli anni bui* than *The Magic Mountain*, to which Isnenghi points (p. 7).

In addition to what the diary reveals about Rocca himself, it also offers a valuable portrait of life during the war. Rocca offers vignettes of Germans and Italians he encounters, reactions to the war and propaganda in public opinion, and a gripping description of the dangerous passage of the battlefront in Molise in 1943. The diary entries are best digested slowly and it would make an excellent primary source in a graduate class, (Students would need to read Italian very well.) Before beginning the diary, readers should be advised to read Raffaelli's excellent essay, which is placed, unfortunately, at the end of the book. It provides a brief biographical sketch and a comprehensive discussion of the two versions that are grafted together to form *Diario degli anni bui*.

If there is a flaw to this otherwise excellent edition, it is the lack of critical apparatus inside the text. Its value as a historical document could have been improved had Raffaelli's thorough knowledge of Rocca's subsequent deletions, additions, and revisions been included as footnotes. In addition, explanatory notes about the historical and literary figures mentioned in the text would make the text even more readable, especially for those unfamiliar with contemporary German and Austrian literary figures. Nonetheless, this edition of Rocca's diary is an important document, and Raffaelli is to be thanked for bringing to light the improved text.

Notes

[1]. Renate Lunzer, "Irredenti redenti. Il caso di Enrico Rocca," *Quaderni giuliani di storia* 34, no. 2 (2003): 173-204; Giancarlo Lancellotti and Sandra Zonch, *Addio, Italia cara … Vita opere e mistero di Enrico Rocca goriziano*, ed. Cristina Benuss (Trieste: Hammerle, 2004).

[2]. Sergio Raffaelli, *Le parole proibite. Purismo di Stato e regolamentazione della pubblicità in Italia (1812-1945)* (Bologna: IlMulino, 1983).

[3]. Enrico Rocca, *La distanza dai fatti*, ed. Alberto Spaino (Milan: Giordano, 1964).

[4]. Gordon Wright, *The Ordeal of Total War, 1939-1945* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

[5]. "Fronde sparse" refers to Canto IV in Dante's *Inferno*: "Poi che la carità del natio loco / mi strinse, raunai le fronde sparte, / e rende'le a colui, ch'era già fioco" [Love of our native city overcame me; / I gathered up the scattered boughs and gave / them back to him whose voice was spent already].

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