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In the end, we completely agree with what A. Caracciolo underlined in the *Presentazione*, when saying that the work is "*paziente, rigoroso e attento*". Thus, Carlo Campana's catalogue represents undoubtedly a necessary tool that should be present in the personal library of any Venetologist.

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Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers, How Europe Went to War in 1914*, London, Allen Lane (Penguin), 2012, 697 p.

Almost one hundred years passed since the start of the First World War, and thousands of books and articles have been written on the topic. Yet in his *The Sleepwalkers*, Christopher Clark rightfully claims that "the subject is still fresh" (p. xxv). In order to find an explanation for this continuous interest both for the public and in academia, one has to give credit to the famous words of historian Fritz Stern, who characterized the Great War as "the first calamity of the twentieth century, the calamity from which all other calamities sprang". In his most recent book, Christopher Clark aims to reinterpret the July Crisis of 1914 "as a modern event, the most complex of modern times, perhaps of any time so far" (p. xxvii).

This new account of the origins of the First World War can be said to have four main coordinates. (1) The principal point in Clark's analysis is that "the outbreak of war was a tragedy, not a crime" (p. 561). The author does not aim to establish whose fault the war was. Instead, the idea is to "identify the decisions that brought war about and to understand the reasoning and emotions behind them" (p. xxviii), rather than talk about guilt. (2) The Balkans are placed in the centre of the analysis, because many historians have dismissed the developments in this area as a mere pretext for the Great War, which has left Serbia "one of the blind spots in the historiography of the July Crisis" (p. xxvi). Moreover, (3) Clark's story is one "saturated with agency", where more profound forces exist, but they are always in a dynamic interplay with short term changes. (4) Controversially, Clark claims that present developments in world history allow us to better understand the past; for instance, the European Union project permits us to look to Austria-Hungary "less contemptuously". All in all, Christopher Clark does a remarkably good job in convincing the reader of the legitimacy of this fresh perspective. There are, however, some small "blind spots" and methodological problems in his analysis that will be highlighted later on.

In terms of structure, the book has three parts. Part I ("Roads to Sarajevo") gives an account of the internal and foreign policies of Serbia (Chapter 1: "Serbian Ghosts") and Austria-Hungary (Chapter 2: "The Empire without Qualities") and their relations up to July 1914. Part II ("One Continent Divided") starts with a narrative account of the structural changes in alliances and foreign policy from 1887 to 1907 (Chapter 3: "The Polarization of Europe, 1887-1907"), but immediately switches to contingency, in an absolutely remarkable Chapter 4: "The Many Voices of European Foreign Policy", where the decentralized executives all around Europe are analysed in subchapters like "Who

Governed in Saint Petersburg?”, “Who Governed in Paris?”, “The Troubled Supremacy of Sir Edward Grey”). Part III (“Crisis”), starts with the assassination of Franz Ferdinand (Chapter 7: “Murder in Sarajevo” – note that this key event is placed only in the third part of the book), to describe the escalation of the conflict up to the end (Chapter 12: “Last Days”). Interestingly enough, the last two subchapters are named simply “Belgium” and “Boots”, respectively. The “Conclusion” emphasises one more time the complexity of the event and the importance of contingency, as well as the author’s refusal to play the nonsensical “blame game”. *The Sleepwalkers* is, without a shadow of a doubt, an academic work, with more than 100 pages of notes and a wide range of sources consulted, including, noteworthy, Serbian and Bulgarian archives and secondary texts. The number of personal letters, diaries and memoirs of the statesmen and private citizens seen by Christopher Clark is impressive, and this has allowed him to imagine – with the elegance of a historian knowing how to properly read sources containing self-serving accounts and deliberate lies by the authors – what was or had to be in their minds. In the end, the actors of this story had something in common: they were all “sleepwalkers, watchful, but unseeing, haunted by dreams, yet blind to the reality of the horror they were about to bring into the world” (p. 562). The style of the book is, in key places, metaphorical, but without damaging the clarity of the message, quite on the contrary. The reader is delighted to find more than one passage like these: “The outbreak of war in 1914 is not an Agatha Christie drama at the end of which we will discover the culprit standing over a corpse in the conservatory with a smoking pistol. There is no smoking gun in this story; or, rather, there is one in the hands of every major character” (p. 561), or the Austrians being compared to “hedgehogs scurrying across a highway with their eyes averted from the rushing traffic” (p. 429), for their narrow vision of the events.

Undisputable contributions to the historiography of the Great War are, first and foremost (1) Clark’s account of the political life in Serbia and (2) the breadth of his analysis on the range of internal and external constraints weighing on the shoulders of every stakeholder, as well as (3) the interplay of long-term, structural causes with contingency. Thus, the chapter on “Serbian Ghosts” makes a comprehensive analysis of Serbian political life starting from the grisly murder of king Alexander and Queen Draga in 1903, to July 1914. Brief references are made to Serbian history – for instance the idea in their collective mentality that it is imperative for the “Serbdom” to have a nation-state the size of the Tsardom of Stepan Dušan, which was lost at the battle of Kosovo in 1386. Also, all the peoples that inhabited in 1914 the territory of the old Tsardom were thought to be Serbs, even if some of them (like the Croats) did not know it yet. The Black Hand is presented since its foundation in 1911 and key figures like Dragutin Dimitrijević (known as Apis, “The Bull”), the brains behind the assassination of 1903, founding member of the Black Hand and chief of Serbian General Staff’s intelligence division in 1914, with a key role in the murder at Sarajevo, as well as Nikola Pašić, prime-minister from 1903, a man known for his “habits of caution, secrecy and obliqueness” (p. 19), are presented in some detail. In the end, Christopher Clark claims that “[t]he legacy of Serbian history [...] weighed heavily on Belgrade in the summer of 1914” (p. 62). The reader can picture how a man like prime-minister Pašić had to (re)act in a complicated landscape of a fragile political system, with civilian authorities having little control on “praetorian, conspirational networks born with the regicide of 1903”, an “irredentist milieu” (p. 63), full of fanatic nationalists that interpenetrated state structures (recall Apis’ position). It is very plausible that Pašić and the Serbian state had no means to control the terrorist

networks within and without its borders, and, moreover, Pašić was himself a secretive man, knowing when to duck and wait for the storm to pass, rather than try to control the uncontrollable. He was also a nationalist Serb, desiring the realisation of the nation-state, so why would he even try to stop the irredentist nationalist trans-borders networks? This review can by no means give a fair account of the richness of detail in Clark's analysis, which shows how violent, and at the same time enormously complicated, the situation in Serbia was.

This premise of the complexity of the crisis underlies every chapter. Clark makes no effort at simplifying things. This complexity, the author argues, is not given by structural, long term events, but by rapid changes of the international system. Here is where structural causes meet contingency. **On the one hand**, *The Sleepwalkers* does acknowledge the major changes in the years prior to 1914: Austria-Hungary was evacuated from the Italian Peninsula and from the German Confederation, being forced to look towards the Balkans. Russia was stopped by Japan in the Far East and by the Great Britain (by agreement) in Central Asia, being also compelled to project its power in the Balkans. The creation of a powerful German Reich in the middle of the continent determined the creation of the French-Russian alliance, and the overall unstable situation made Britain gradually abandon its isolation. However, **on the other hand**, there are smaller, temporary changes, like "the Turkish-Russian naval arms race in the Black Sea, or the reorientation of Russian policy away from Sofia to Belgrade", as well as power struggles and shifting balances in the executives, such as the British Foreign Minister Grey's fight with liberal radicals, or the fact that "deeply conservative Pyotr N. Durnovo, a forceful and determined man who was adamantly opposed to Balkan entanglements" (p. 557) refused the Tsar's proposal to take the post of Chairman of the Council of Ministers. This made the military commanders and Foreign Minister Sazonov acquire the upper hand in Russian politics, and tilt the balance towards war. In this already complicated picture, the reader can also fit details like the chief of Austrian General Staff, Conrad von Hotzendorf's passion for Gina, a married woman, and the fact that "[h]e even came to see war as a means of gaining possession of Gina. Only as a victorious war-hero, Conrad believed, would he be able to sweep aside the social obstacles and the scandal attaching to a marriage with a prominent divorcée" (p. 103). The causality works on so many levels that it is indeed difficult to assign blame to any of the participants. The central question regarding the metaphor of the sleepwalkers is asked in the "Conclusion". It is obvious that somehow, the policymakers knew they were heading towards disaster. "They knew it, but did they really feel it?" (p. 562). They feared Armageddon and their empires falling. But they also kept hoping it would be a local war, or that it will be short or something else positive will happen and the disaster would be avoided. The situation was too complex; they certainly did not "feel it". They sleepwalked into it.

A frequent critique against *The Sleepwalkers* is that it is more conciliatory with Austria-Hungary and Germany than with the others. Indeed, this is the impression the reader is left with at end of the book. The Central Powers are seen mostly in a defensive stance, having to respond (and responding clumsily) to threats and challenges posed by Serbia and the Entente. It was, Clark claims, Poincaré and the Tsar, along with their system of alliances that placed a "trigger" in the Balkans. It was France that assured Russia of its full support. Also, overall, the Entente Powers, Clark claims, were not willing to concede that the Dual Monarchy was vitally threatened by Serbia; for the Austrians, it was a matter of life and death. Their claim was more "legitimate" than

Russia's intentions to help the Slav "little brothers". The famous German war council of December 1912 is also interpreted in the most favourable light for the German Empire. If Clark goes back to 1386 to find the roots of Serbian nationalism, he does not make any effort to speak about Prussian militarism and the line of Prussian leaders (starting with the Great Elector) obsessed with the military. I think it is unfortunate that Clark fails to go deeper into the German and Austro-Hungarian share of mistakes, aggressive postures and miscalculations. It is certain that for a balanced account of the story, more should have been said about these. At the same time, if my reading is correct, Christopher Clark seems to say that the historiography is biased against Germany ("a diluted version of the Fischer thesis still dominates in studies of Germany's road to war", p. 560); more needed to be written about Serbia and Russia (and France for that matter), enough has already been made of Kaiser's mistakes.

If I only partially agree to the critique that the book is unjustifiably mild towards the Central Powers, what Clark makes of the connection between past and present is most of the times wrong. In "Introduction", the author mentions that he does not want to embrace "a vulgar presentism", in order to change the past according to "the needs of the present", but he certainly wants to show how changes in the present can offer us a clearer perspective on the future. The idea here is interesting; the execution is not. As mentioned before, Clark argues that today's European Union makes us look "more sympathetically" to Austria-Hungary. This should mean that the Dual Monarchy has been criticised in the past from a nationalist standpoint: it was simply thought it could not have worked, and that was it. Today, it is worth wondering: maybe, it could have worked. This way, the present can help us to better see the past; but the dangers are huge. Were the EU to fail, will that again modify our vision of Austria-Hungary? Does this kind of approach not allow the present to take the past hostage?

The book is full of questionable references to future – from the standpoint of 1914 – events and one of them is especially unjustified and misleading. Clark likens the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to the NATO Rambouillet Agreement, the former being "a great deal milder", while the NATO provisions were "a demand for the complete prostration of the Serbian state". Other than the debatable interpretation of the Rambouillet Agreement, it is clear that here Clark has overstepped the mark. First, he implies that after seeing how tough NATO was on Serbia in 1999, we should see the Austrian ultimatum of June 1914 more favourably ("The demands of the Austrian note pale by comparison", p. 457). There is no reasonable way in which such a claim can be supported. If tomorrow someone issued another ultimatum on Serbia, should the historians again reinterpret the Austrian act of 1914? Secondly, the comparison is methodologically wrong. This kind of documents reflects power relations. Demands formulated by the most powerful alliance in the world on an almost isolated Serbia in 1999 do not amount to those produced by an "Empire without Qualities" – Clark's own words – on a Serbia strongly backed by Russia and indirectly by France in 1914. In addition, the context is widely different: an assassination of royalties compared to ethnic cleansing.

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In conclusion, Christopher Clark has written a brilliant book about the origins of the First World War, rich in detail and remarkably clear in style, considering the

multitude of unfamiliar names of diplomats and obscure politicians present in the volume. *The Sleepwalkers* brings a fresh and necessary perspective on the situation in Serbia, as well as on the complexity of the July Crisis of 1914, a complexity that proves that the “blame game” played by many historians until now is nonsense. The book is a “must-read” on the Great War, and will likely remain so in the future, regardless of its slightly imbalanced treatment of the Central Powers and the sometimes wrong comparisons with future events.

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