

**Languages of war: how Italian combat
officers wrote about the Great War,
1915-1918.**

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**Nella Porqueddu
Trinity College Dublin**

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'Writing Officers'

Letter collections

Leonardo Cambini

The edition consulted is that published in 1941. There were two other editions: the first published in 1918 (only 400 copies) by Cambini's friends (Pisa: Mariotti 1918). The second, with an identical title (Firenze: Bemporad 1920) featured an appendix. The third edition (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1941) consulted here is based on the second edition but has an additional letter (sent on 20 December to Alberto Cian).¹ From the letter sent on 26 August 1915 to Prof. Vittorio Cian it is clear that Cambini envisages a future publication, even though the tone with which he refers to it is ironic.²

The third edition saw the light in a clearly fascist atmosphere, as witnessed by the paratextual elements that declare that the collection is proposed as inspirational reading, defined 'bella e salutare/ beautiful and healthy' for Italian people. This edition transcends the boundaries of commemoration of previous publications and has to be viewed rather as a socio-cultural and political choice realized by a publisher, Le

¹ Vittorio Cian and Plinio Carli, 'Preface' Leonardo Cambini, *Epistolario di Guerra (1915-1918)*, Vittorio Cian and Plinio Carli eds., (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1941) pp. v-xxiii here p. vi.

² Leonardo Cambini, *Epistolario*, p. 16.

Monnier which, along with other publishing houses, was influenced by the criteria defined by the regime in the person of Giovanni Gentile.³

Cambini was born in Livorno in 1882 from a modest family, all of whose five children became combatants. This information was underlined in the introduction to the 1941 edition as it was deemed as the perfect example of a large family committed to the sacred national cause. Leonardo Cambini is represented as a teacher who joined the war as a volunteer, leaving behind his private life for the higher national cause.⁴ His brother, Raffaello, died on 30 June 1915, and in the summer of the same year he was accepted as a reserve second lieutenant and started training with the Battalion Livorno. Nominated director of the Scuola Normale in Nuoro, he managed to remain at war.⁵ This is interpreted by his friends, writing from a nationalist perspective and for a fascist audience, as an example of the pure spirit of sacrifice for the nation whereas, in this thesis, it is interpreted as an attempt to hide at war. There, due to the exceptional nature of events, he has less time to feel the desperation of the loss of his brother. War, as argued in the first chapter of this thesis, is also a way of mourning, and a way to even avenge his brother's death. On 14 May 1917, Cambini left the reserve unit (that he refers to with a popular disparaging nickname 'la Terribile'/'the Awful', promoted lieutenant, and was assigned to the 129th Perugia Brigade in the area of Carso. On 6 June 1917 he was wounded. Of interest is also the fact that what drove him from the safer reserve unit life to the Carso is more than the pure will to fight, the will to visit his brother's grave in Pieris. Sent to the new position at Asiago,

³Laura Antonietti, 'Editori durante il Fascismo' av. at <http://www.apice.unimi.it/mostre/decennale/percorso_editoria.html>.

⁴ Vittorio Cian and Plinio Carli, *Ibid.*, (pp. v-xxii) here p. x.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. xi.

Melette di Gallio, he was wounded again on 6 November 1917.⁶ Cambini died on 12 January 1918.

Even here the fascist rhetoric (all voted to the celebration of masculinity) describes his death as a positive event that spared him and his loved ones the grief of a destroyed youth in which vigour was turned into disability.⁷ The collection itself is presented as a clear sign of heroism, for the 'Italia nuova' meant as fascist Italy. The references to fascism are unsurprising given the commitment of Vittorio Cian to the regime.⁸

Cian and Carli's attempt to recompose the tone of a selection of letters by Cambini into something which could be accepted *in toto* by a fascist and catholic Italy, which signed the *Patti Lateranensi* (1929), would certainly deserve further attention. Relevant is their attempt to suggest that the reader plunge himself into the atmosphere of war which was significantly different from that experienced in 1941. This warning, which would be wise and appreciable, however, aims to downplay the sense of frustration. Moreover, it mitigates the anticlericalism emerging in some letters and recomposes it as pertaining to the nationalism of Mazzinian origins, in which anticlericalism could be seen as a legacy of the *Risorgimento*. The text also presents an explicit reference to Mussolini, called Duce, who is presented here as the only person who was able to resolve the contrast between the state and the church. While the paratextual elements misrepresent the letters by Cambini, they appear extremely interesting for the insights they offer on the communication, collective and demagogical re-reading and re-writing of history, narratives, and war experiences

⁶ Ibid. p. xiii.

⁷ Ibid. p. xiv.

⁸ Vittorio Cian was a Professor of Literature in Messina, Pisa, Pavia and Turin. He funded the Nationalist party in 1910, signed in 1925 the Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals, in 1928 he worked for the Ministry for Public Education and was nominated senator in 1929.

programmatically undertaken by the fascist regime. Even the memory of a loved one, as Cambini was for both Carli and Cian, requires some rethinking in order to become acceptable in the new Fascist era.

Angelo Campodonico⁹

Born in Genoa in 1895 he died in Castagnevizza on 25 April 1917 from a wound reported on the night of 24-25 April. He was lieutenant in the 137th Infantry Barletta Brigade. Campodonico studied in Genoa until the end of high school and then read law at Turin University. He enrolled on a course for candidate officers in 1914 because he wanted to undertake a military career. He was promoted to regular lieutenant in July 1915 and chose the infantry. He later instructed candidate officers in the 50th Infantry in Turin and in the 89th Infantry in Pavia. It left for war on 23 August 1915 where he was assigned to the Barletta Brigade. His letter collection begins with that sent on 26 August 1915 when he is still travelling to the front. His time at war is adorned by several medals and decorations assigned to him for undertaking dangerous actions.¹⁰

Attention needs to be directed to the publication of his letter collection, one which exemplifies what has been previously noted for other publications of fallen soldiers. In this case, the celebrating intent could be seen not solely as an attempt to silence or compensate the family's sense of guilt but is marked by clear self-aggrandizing tones. Campodonico's letters are several and represent an insightful set of messages to be explored. Nonetheless they are placed between a series of paratextual elements that precede and follow them. The first sixty-five pages are

⁹ Angelo Campodonico, *Lauri di Gloria Epistolario di Guerra di un eroe Lettere del tenente Angelo Campodonico*, Mario Panizzardi ed. (Genova: I.G.A.P., 1918).

¹⁰ See 'La Vita', *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

dedicated to presenting Campodonico and his family. Before Angelo Campodonico's voice is reproduced the reader is exposed to all sorts of narratives, images and preliminary information aiming at representing him as the son of a well-off interventionist Catholic family from Genoa. His wish to undertake a military career is recounted along with his successful university studies. The title given to the book is epitomizing of the operation undertaken: 'Lauri di Gloria Epistolario di un eroe'. It is edited by Mario Panizzardi, who never met the author in person and was probably selected for this publication by the family. Panizzardi was a prominent figure in Genova. (We understand from his preface that he has a background in law).¹¹ The preface is devoted to magnifying Campodonico's family through the celebration of Angelo's letters and courage. Two pages are dedicated to describing his successes and goodwill in life and fifteen to commemorating his death (through a detailed description of his death on the battlefield, a picture of his grave, a series of letters of condolence sent to the family and three additional pages entitles 'I funerali' in which the ritual is reported by also quoting several articles published in the local newspapers. Then there are another twenty-five pages written or assembled by Campodonico's sister, Annina. The actual letter collection follows these sections, which is itself followed by the appendix where a few additional letters or articles provide further news about the Barletta Brigade and the death of Father Arcangelo, who was close to Campodonico and his family. Underlining the bond with Father Arcangelo serves to place the family within the frame of catholic tradition and religion, merged with that of a military tradition.

¹¹ Mario Panizzardi, 'Prefazione' in Campodonico, *Ibid.*, pp.5-10, here p. 6.

Filippo Guerrieri

Filippo Guerrieri was born in 1891 in Monti, in the province of Massa Carrara in Lunigiana (between Liguria and Tuscany). He joined the Libyan campaign in 1912. The letters he sent home in 1912 resemble those that some young officers, who were new to war, sent home in 1915.¹² This is mentioned here in order to underline that his personal experience of war is slightly different from that of the other officers considered. In spite of his previous experience in Libya, however, Guerrieri notes the difference of WWI and shows less enthusiasm about it. Despite the skepticism towards the paratextual elements of the letter collection, a few details derived from them are relevant here in order to present the source. Guerrieri's collection was published in 1969 by his son Enrico. The work aimed to provide the letters with a date and a place even in those cases where Filippo did not specify them. This was made possible by the proximity of the generals Ludovico Castellani and Ernesto Riccardi who shared most episodes at war with Filippo and helped to reconstruct the missing details.

Of interest is the fact that, even if Guerrieri's collection was published in 1969, it is still possible to detect certain aspects of celebration and glorification that were observed in those publications released in the immediate postwar period. Among these is the tendency to highlight conduct universally recognized as heroic while downplaying, or completely omitting, others. An example worthy of mention is the ways in which people with different cultures and, even more so, with different religions are described by Guerrieri. This is an aspect that characterizes his letters, not

¹² Filippo Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla trincea* (Libia, Carso, Trentino, Macedonia), Enrico Guerrieri ed. (Genova: Manfrini, 1969). Consulted at ALSP, Genoa.

only when he finds himself in Libya but also when he sees Askari in Naples.¹³

Guerrieri's descriptions would today be considered politically incorrect and should be read in light of the time and circumstances in which they were written. It was certainly uncommon at that time to see people of a different race in Italy and this detail was noted in Guerrieri's diary. However, the problem is really the horizon reception.

Describing the campaign in Libya and Macedonia, he notes different traditions, at times described in negative tones. This is often due his own frustrations while at war and from a desire to feel at home. Observed without the due contextual information, however, they could be mistaken for racism, or for an early sign of that hideous colonial attitude that Italy had under fascism (an attitude that Guerrieri never shared). These descriptions should not be underlined excessively as Guerrieri is more open than what he writes, to the point that he instructs his parents about the ways to send Renato to Macedonia due to the fact that it was a less dangerous theatre of war.

Now the discussion will turn to the public figure of Guerrieri for Italy as a nation. Guerrieri who became, after the war, a renowned lawyer in Genoa never embraced fascism. He remained close to his Catholic roots and was an active member of the National Liberation Committee. He was an important member of the constituent assembly and a member of parliament until his death in 1967. These details are important when one reconsiders the war writings encountered, so often focused on the sense of justice and legal mindset, but also on the challenge that war represents for moral values (which should be framed in catholic terms). For the rural origins and the catholic background Guerrieri displays in his letters, similar traits to those presented by Giuseppe Zanivolti's collection. As is the case with Zanivolti,

¹³ Ibid., p. 27.

exactly because of his faith, war is for Guerrieri particularly challenging. The formal framework of catholic culture is maintained in terms of recurrences, perspectives, and beliefs, but utterly challenged from life at war as it imposes a rethinking of previously accepted values, thinking and conduct.

Franco Michelini Tocci

Son of a lawyer, Tocci was born in Cagli (Marche) on February 1899. He came from an upper-class, conservative and nationalist family. He left Rome to attend the military academy on 22 April 1917 and not even a year later, he was entering the war during the Rout of Caporetto as a second lieutenant.

Tocci was an active member of the Nationalist society in Cagli (the letter written on 1 July to Count Umberto Morra di Lavriano bears witness to his wish to become a member of the Nationalist society and take part in the conference in Rome).¹⁴

After the Rout, Tocci is ordered to group, lead and divide the dispersed soldiers from different armies. Then he stays with the infantry (that he defines 'undesirable') in Spilambergio but requests to be assigned to the Alpini corps. On 10 December, from Parona di Valpolicella, he writes that he has been assigned to the 9th company of the second marching brigade of the First Alpini Army.¹⁵ He expresses his satisfaction and enthusiasm for having to lead Alpini soldiers and for having the chance to meet two volunteers (brothers Marco and Piero Jahier) and the son of Lanino Barnaba, of the Idea Nazionale and the Nationalist society. He shares his time within the Alpini, i.e. the corps that from the beginning he wanted to join, with the two Jahier brothers. While

¹⁴ Franco Michelini Tocci, *Fede il Dovere La Patria Amore, Lettere ed Altri Scritti*, (Roma: P. Maglione e C. Strini, 1920) pp. 73.74.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107-109.

in the 7th Alpini Regiment, he frequently mentions Marco and Piero in his letters. His letter of 5 January recounts the bravado and sense of comradeship within the 7th Alpini Regiment. In two letters, dated 14 January¹⁶ and 20 January 1918, Tocci expresses his sorrow for the separation from Piero Jahier, who had left for the frontline.¹⁷ Even his friendship with Jahier needs to be explained to his father, as in this letter Tocci reassures his conservative father that Jahier is different from what he used to be when he wrote in *La Voce* and is now only a great officer moved by sense of duty and love for the fatherland.¹⁸ Jahier had been assigned to the Pasubio Battalion which was ordered to go to the frontline (Basso Posina sector) in January 1918. The period with the Alpini corps and the encounter with Piero and Marco Jahier influences Tocci's vision of war and of soldiers. After his negative impression due to the events of the Rout and to the scarce sense of belonging witnessed among certain disorderly infantry groups, the 7th Alpini provides him with something more similar to what he expected from war. His discussion of soldiers' sense of belonging to the regional and local context and the attention paid to the songs by Alpini are redolent of the influence of Piero Jahier.¹⁹ The meeting between Tocci and Jahier helps us to place both in a different perspective. On the one hand, Tocci finds in Jahier a mature figure to substitute/or accompany his fatherly figure. On the other hand, Tocci's reasoning about the infantry and Alpini corps, one might venture his reasoning on soldiers, before and after the encounter with Jahier, also helps to understand further Jahier's commitment. While Tocci's opinion on the infantry is reflects both political and socio-cultural snobbery, Jahier's love for the Alpini soldiers should be seen not as the

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 129-131.

¹⁸ More information on the first publications by Jahier in this appendix under the entry dedicated to him.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 128.

celebration of soldiers in general but rather as the celebration of the *Alpini* and of their mythical aura and cultural legacies. The diffidence towards the infantry is also seen in the song about the Buffa (a disparaging name for the infantry).

At the beginning of April, Tocci was assigned to the 68th Pieve di Cadore marching brigade battalion. He would die when a grenade landed at his feet in Malga Valderoa on 27 October 1918. Among the messages of condolence, there is also a letter from Piero Jahier. Worthy of attention are the dates of these messages of condolence: they arrive in April and May 1919 from Jahier and from the captain of Tocci's battalion, Ippolito Radaelli. Both of them mentioned the fact that they received a picture of Franco sent by his family. This is interpreted here as a sign that the family was collecting even delayed condolence messages (among which those sent by the Nationalist Count Umberto Morra di Lavriano of the *Idea di Nazione*). The intention was to include them in the publication of Franco's letters, so further commemorating his glorious death.

Enzo Valentini

Enzo Valentini was the son of an aristocratic family from the Umbria region. His father was the mayor of Perugia. Born in Perugia in 1896, he was only 19 when, in 1915, he volunteered for war with the Corpo Cacciatori delle Alpi (a volunteer corps already mobilized for the Libya campaign). This became part of the Alpi Brigade, with its headquarters in Perugia during peacetime. In July 1915, this group, which was now part of the 51st regiment of the Alpi Brigade, was sent to the frontline to support the 52nd regiment of the same brigade. On 18 July in Agordo on the Cordevole torrent,

Valentini starts feeling closer to war, but given his age and youthful interventionism, he is thrilled about it. In his letter home he cannot mention where he is but he provides the distance from Belluno (28 km) and the initial of the torrent's name.²⁰ The old border of Italy is used as a reference to indicate his position to his parents without naming the villages or positions explicitly. War is the occasion for young Enzo to escape from his sheltered life of wealth, to explore the world, get to know people from different backgrounds and become an adult while also serving a cause in which he and his family are all actively committed. His aristocratic family grants him the admiration and support of many superiors but also attracts the envy and diffidence of simple infantry soldiers, especially those who uphold democratic interventionist views critical of the monarchy, and of families like his. Valentini later refuses to take a course and become a candidate officer as he wants to be certain of staying in the 51th infantry solely for the reason that its headquarters are in Perugia. He hopes that this might result in a more chances to spend time at home.

Valentini's mobilization is strongly connected with his family, of his mother in particular, who is an active supporter of charity and hospital care for soldiers (as it was often the case among aristocratic families: see Countess Capponi in Florence). In his letter of 15 July 1915 which describes his leave from Perugia and his farewell to his mother. He compares her to the fatherland. In his mind's eye, she is the fatherland, the right cause, the ideals of love and affection that are worth fighting for. The love and affection for his mother are as evident as the distance from his father. His will is addressed to his mother ,to whom he leaves everything and asks her to give something of his to anyone who knew and loved him. His father is not listed among

²⁰ Enzo Valentini, *Lettere e Disegni XV Luglio-XXII Ottobre MCMXV*, E.Gallenga, ed.,(Perugia: Bartelli & C., 1930).Lettere, pp. 6-9 here p. 8.

the people worthy of having a souvenir of his. Valentini writes only a few letters to him privileging his mother as the main audience and sending regards to his father at the end of the letter, as one would with an acquaintance.

His letter collection was published in 1930. It is introduced by a text signed by the aristocrat Romeo Gallenga Stuart. He founded the boy scout movement in Perugia and, being a convinced interventionist, volunteered for war as a lieutenant. The publication includes Valentini's letters and reproduces the drawings mainly released to fix places in the memory and illustrate them for his mother. However, at times Valentini draws images with motifs as a self-mobilizing instrument while at war. The final section includes several short daily notes written in the trenches which fill the gaps left by his letters from 17-21 October. Also included is a letter written on 23 October by Captain Colagè of the 51th regiment to Lieutenant Torelli announcing Valentini's death as well as a letter of condolence sent by volunteer Lieutenant Mayo, from the 51th Infantry regiment, to Valentini's mother.

The letter of condolence sent by Lieutenant Mayo testifies to the diffidence towards volunteers and even more towards those volunteers of aristocratic origins, as was the case with Enzo Valentini. The company that Mayo refers to was defined the company of the *mantellaccio* (a disparaging variation for *mantello* adopted to designate a specific infantry company). The name refers to the 'compagnia del Mantellaccio' associated with the author Burchiello. Burchiello was from a more humble background and was known for his innovative use of language but also the mocking and critical attitude towards higher classes and important figures. The 51th infantry group where Valentini volunteers is called the 'compagnia del mantellaccio' both for the origins of its soldiers (most of them from Livorno in Tuscany and from

Romagna) and their background (many of them are workers) most of them active members of democratic parties.²¹

From Mayo's letter, it is possible to follow Valentini's movements. He arrives on the Marmolada on 20 July 1915 and, in October 1915, Mayo and Valentini are together at the frontline against the Sasso del Mezzodì in Veneto. Valentini loses his life in an attempt to repel the successful counter attack carried out by the enemy on the 22 October 1915, one that followed the success of the 51th Infantry regiment of the Alpi Brigade the day before. On 22 October, Valentini is among those squads trying to regain the trenches of Sasso del Mezzodì now occupied by the enemy.²²

Augusto Vivanti

Vivanti was born on 21 May 1893 to Giuseppina Aguzzi and Cesare Vivanti (a town clerk and committed to the cultural and administrative life of Pavia). After studying at Ugo Foscolo high school in Pavia, Augusto went on to read law at Pavia University. A convinced interventionist from 1913 onwards, he was chairman of the committee for the Italian University in Trieste and of the students' society. From 9 June 1915, Augusto Vivanti attended the course for reserve officer candidates in Modena and was assigned to the 158th Infantry regiment on the eastern front. He was to stay close to Cividale until August 1916 and, in Rapallo, he led the training of a unit. Promoted to lieutenant in November 1916, he was assigned to the 141th Infantry on the Carso

²¹ Lieutenant Mayo's letter of condolence in Valentini *Lettere*, pp. 161-169 here p. 162.

²² 'Brigata Alpi' in *Brigate di fanteria riassunti storici dei corpi e comandi nella guerra 1915-1918*, (Roma: Libreria dello Stato (1924-1929) 8 vol, pp. 69-86 here p. 70 av. at <<https://www.storiaememoriadibologna.it/files/grande-guerra/schede-brigata/alpi.pdf>>.

river. At the end of 1917 he was promoted to captain and assigned to the 241th where he took on a range of different tasks, most of them administrative.²³

A cross-observation of the information collected by Cristina Guani and of Vivanti's letter collection with the information pertaining to the action of the 158th Infantry regiment, enabled a more accurate understanding of Augusto's writing attitude.²⁴ His accounts remain close to the actual facts of war without mentioning them explicitly, as is the case with his letter dated 8 November 1915 when his regiment (as reported in the section on the Liguria Brigade, the 157th and 158th Infantry) is returning to the frontline after a few days of rest and recovery due to a cholera epidemic.²⁵ Augusto summarizes the retreat from the frontline for health reasons as follows:

Tre notti fa, infatti, lasciammo senza rimpianto quel luogo dove piovevano acqua e pallottole dove dovevamo stare accovacciati per non farci colpire e dopo una lunga camminata cambiammo fronte e ci riunimmo qui dove facemmo una cura ricostituente di riposo e di preparazione /Three nights ago we left without regret that place where we had to stay crouched down not to be hit and after a long march we changed front and grouped here for a good restorative care²⁶

²³ The information on Augusto Vivanti has been summarized from the thorough presentation provided by Cristina Guani in his section 'Augusto Vivanti da un Secolo all'altro' pp. 23-30 in Cristina Guani ed. by, 'Scrivimi più che puoi' L'Epistolario di Guerra di Augusto Vivanti in Guerra (1915-1919), p. 25.

²⁴ For the history of the 158th, see 'Brigata liguria (157^a 158^a Fanteria), 271-292 of *Brigate di fanteria: riassunti storici dei corpi e comandi nella guerra 1915-1918*, vol. 4 Ministero della guerra, Stato maggiore centrale, Ufficio storico (Roma, Libreria dello Stato, 1924-1929) av. at <<https://www.storiaememoriadibologna.it/files/grande-guerra/schede-brigata/liguria.pdf>>.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 272.

²⁶ Vivanti, Ibid, p. 166.

On 23 November 1916, newly arrived at the 141th Infantry regiment, he openly writes to his father that news has arrived that they might rest for three months.²⁷ In spite of the interventionism after a year of war, the news that the Catanzaro Brigade might rest for three months, after the huge losses suffered in early November, is greeted by Vivanti with clear relief. 'Illusioni forse ma qualche elemento di vero c'è di certo / Illusions maybe but there is certainly some truth in it'.²⁸

Giuseppe Zanivolti

Born in Maghero to Antonio Zanivolti and Fortunati Maria on 26 October 1895 (as recalled in the letters investigated in the last chapter) he received a strict Catholic education at the seminary he left to join up rather than become a priest. After the war, he studied law at Pavia University and became a lawyer. His faith before, throughout and after war would certainly be worth analyzing more in depth. His letters present him as observing the rituals attached to Catholic religion but he appears less worried about the other norms imposed while in the seminary. From the oral recounts of his descendants, it emerges that Zanivolti escaped with the help of a nurse he met in Pardubitz. He was hospitalized in the town after being tortured for trying to break free from a prison camp. According to the accounts reported by the Zucca family, the torture consisted in placing honey onto his eyes and letting him be stung by insects. The disease resulting from this practice is played down in his letters

²⁷ Vivanti, *Ibid.*, p. 231.

²⁸ For further information, see 'Brigata Catanzaro 141^a 142^a Fanteria' in *Brigate di fanteria: riassunti storici dei corpi e comandi nella guerra 1915-1918*, Ministero della guerra, Stato maggiore centrale, Ufficio storico (Roma, Libreria dello Stato, 1924-1929) av. at <https://www.storiaememoriadibologna.it/files/grande-guerra/schede-brigata/catanzaro.pdf>

home: 'Ho un po' di mal d'occhi'/'I have a little eye pain'. He travelled throughout a few countries until he returned to Italy and was sent to Asinara.

Giuseppe Zanivolti presents his commitment to war through his military record, one that lists all his promotions, wounds, etc. He entered war in 1915 as an infantry soldier, first in the 36th and then in the 119th Infantry. He attended the candidate officer course and was promoted to second lieutenant (1 November 1915) and lieutenant (31 August 1916). He was assigned to the 90th Infantry when he became second lieutenant and was assigned to the 18th machine guns from 6 December 1916 onwards. He was wounded twice in war: once on Monte Vodil on 30 September 1915 and again on 17 September 1917 on Monte Veliki Carso. He was hospitalized, respectively, in Alessandria and in Forlì. Captured on 12 November 1917, he was taken to a prison camp in Reichenberg Bohemia on 17 November 1917. He escaped on 24 August 1918 while hospitalized in Pardubitz. He then wandered around until he arrived in Jasi (Romania) in September and in Salonicco (Greece) in December. He was repatriated on 14 February 1919. Zanivolti does not mention in his military record the spell in jail on Asinara Island before being allowed back to continental Italy.

Notebooks

Pasquale Attilio Gagliani

The author of this thesis has relied on the copy of the manuscript 'Anni 1915-1916-1917 Campagna Austro-Italiana Impressioni e Ricordi'/'Year 1915-1916-1917 Austro-Italian Campaign Impressions and Memories' available at Archivio Diaristico Nazionale in Pieve Santo Stefano (Italy).

Since 2014, excerpts of Gagliani's diary have been digitized and published on the website and curated by Pier Vittorio Buffa and Nicola Maranesi, 'La Grande guerra, i diari raccontano' available at

<http://espresso.repubblica.it/grandeguerra/index.php?page=autore&id=118>

In 2015, the diary by Colonel Pasquale Attilio Gagliani was published by youcanprint with the title 'La mia prima guerra mondiale diario di un artigliere dal Carso all'altipiano di Asiago'. It was edited by Leonardo Magini. Some important dates are missing from the published edition (i.e. 29 June 1916), and some other dates prove to be incorrect when compared with the manuscript, which has been therefore privileged for this analysis.

Gagliani was born in 1867 and died in 1923 while attempting to defuse a bomb in Udine. In spite of his higher rank, Gagliani's diary has been considered here as an insightful source because it adds a further perspective on the experience of war in an artillery sector. Gagliani was a military professional: he was a major at the outbreak of war. On 8 February 1915, he was required to move from the Sardinian island of La Maddalena where he directed an artillery unit, to Sassari, Sardinia, where he was placed in charge of field-artillery units. Gagliani reflects upon the theme of separation from his family and records the importance of exchanging letters with his wife, Bianca, who he left at home to care for four children. In June, Gagliani complains about the delays in the postal service, arguing that it takes eight to ten days to receive a letter. He records that the mobilization order arrives on 23 May 1915, and on 2 June he describes the trip to Livorno via Genova, Milano Brescia and Lonato as 'triumphal' due to the interventionist spirit encountered at the stations. Gagliani records the welcome reserved for him and to Sardinian soldiers by the singer, Carmen Melis, who is of

Sardinian origins. She hands him flowers and gave Sardinian soldiers cigars. This witnesses further the regional sense of belonging characterizing Italy in 1915. Considering his role as a judge in military courts, Gagliani's diary is also quite informative as far as the theme of justice is concerned, providing a first-hand account of the ambivalent emotions felt by a high-ranked officer while applying military justice. Even the complex set of feelings animating him throughout the conflict, especially in moments of military crisis or when his troops are not granted the proper shifts, are worthy of attention and reflected in a peculiar way in his writing. His previous knowledge on war makes him an attentive observer of the conflict, of its unprecedented nature and of the Italian army's poor-adaptation to it. In spite of this, he is never openly critical towards the government, the army or the nation. It is possible to detect in his diary many doubts and even some criticism directed at the ways in which war is conducted and men are treated. Even as a colonel, Gagliani is not distant from lower-ranked officers and soldiers. This is not argued on the basis of the image of himself he projects in his writing but rather grounded in the analysis of his description of soldiers and of the struggles they experience at war.

Sebastiano Spina

The primary source for Lieutenant Sebastiano Spina was consulted in its manuscript version at the Archivio della Guerra (War Archive) in Rovereto/Trentino. The few pieces of information on his biography have been taken from the published version of his notebook. The family did not know Spina wrote a notebook while at war and he did not like to speak about his experience of war. The publication of his notebook follows the criteria of commemoration but is completely removed from an attentive

reproduction of the source. The parts in the manuscripts that were erased by Spina are inserted with no editorial mention of Spina's cancellations. Dates do not always coincide. The original title given by Spina to his notebook was 'Ricordi di Guerra/Memories of war' on the first page of the notebook where one reads 'dello studente/student name' he wrote 'ten. Sebastiano Spina'. The title given to the publication is 'Le vicende di un siciliano alla Grande Guerra/The adventures of a Sicilian during the Great War'.

The manuscript was written in two notebooks presenting exercises and grammar to learn another language. The language is French, even though Spina was studying English in Venice and became an English teacher when he settled in Sicily after the war. He was keen on poetry and also published a booklet of poems, some translations from English and an English grammar volume.²⁹ He was probably studying both languages.

Lieutenant Sebastiano Spina was born in Acireale, Sicily. He worked as a customs officer in Venice and in 1915 he enters war as a volunteer reserve second lieutenant. He would be promoted captain at the end of the war. The connection with the region of origin (Sicily) is recorded in his notebook, particularly at the first stages of his war (entry of 11 August 1916). Of further interest for the theme of trans-regional encounters at war is the entry of 12 August 1916 in which he describes a conversation with a volunteer who escaped from Trieste dressed as a woman, armed with false documents. In recalling the episode, he repeats his words uttered in dialect and in Italian but still with strong dialectal influences and inflections. On 15 September 1916, Spina also recounts some humorous stories of one soldier's lack of expertise

²⁹ Giacomo Spina, 'Prefazione' in Giacomo Spina ed., *Le Vicende di un siciliano alla Grande Guerra*, (Trieste: LCM, 1999) p. 3.

who, ignorant of the meaning of some words from military jargon, misunderstands a few orders. He mistakes the term 'capra/goat', which in Italian military jargon designates a tripod used to place the cannons on their base. On 15 September 1916, he notes that 'Tra gli artiglieri e i fanti non corre buon sangue, specie quando si incontrano nelle retrovie/ No love is lost between artillery and infantry men, especially when they meet in the rear.

It would be too time-consuming to state all the differences between the published edition and the manuscript but a few are reported here to explain why a choice has been made to rely, as was previously the case with Gagliani's notebook, on the manuscript. A few examples: p. 62 the following is missing: 'Le notizie che abbiamo sono vaghe e incerte'

p. 62 from Spina's description of the moon the following part is missing : 'che ne oscurano la fronte serena'

Other discrepancies are to be found elsewhere in the text: p. 86 in the published text the adjective 'solitaria' used to describe the beach near Venice is not recorded. p. 87 'una folla ansiosa e accorata' is also missing

Antonio Vitelli

The notebook consulted at the Museo e Archivio della Guerra in Rovereto, written by Lieutenant Antonio Vitelli under the title 'Doss Remit (col 17 gruppo montagna) appunti di guerra'/ Doss Remit with the 17th mountain group War Notes', covers a span of time between 6 November 1917 and 9 January 1918. Unfortunately, due to the lack of biographical information on Antonio Vitelli, it was difficult, even for the museum, to find further information on his war other than those included in his

notebook and analyzed in this thesis. In spite of the lack of biographical information, Vitelli's notebook could not be excluded from this research due to the insights it provides on a series of topics which are crucial for this study. To name but a few, the nature of the war experience in an advanced position and the sense of belonging to the newly born military family of *Alpini*. His writing also sheds further light on the sense of frustration, and a resentfulness for the lack of expertise and empathy of his superiors. This is endured solely in the name of an ideal and of the sense of community experienced with his group and leads to the creative reinterpretation of nonsensical, possibly fatal, orders imparted from a distance.

Furthermore, the value of Vitelli's notebook also lies in his writing as it gives shape to all these topics and aspects of his experience of war. The ways in which Vitelli portrays his thoughts and emotions, along with parts of dialogues that were held in the canteen, and the literary references he makes to his readings, epitomizes the category of writings considered in this thesis. Vitelli shares with Jahier the fatherly affection for his soldiers and a great sense of understanding of their human, cultural, regional and generational specificity. Vitelli shares with Gagliani the pride for the efficiency of artillery fire conducted under his lead, and with Lussu the diffidence, mocking attitude and eventually protest towards higher-ranked Piedmontese officers. Similar to Monelli he feels caught being between the devil and the deep sea.

Akin to Franco Michellini Tocci's letters home, Vitelli recounts his love of wine, the cheerfulness and bravado. However, Vitelli experiences these pleasures with a different attitude as he is not from class '99, to which he expresses a patronizing pity. He considers them to be immature, thus difficult to fit into a group, and he describes the jokes made at the expense of a newly arrived '99 recruit. From a political point of

view, the frequent mentions of Garibaldi, as both a source of inspiration and self-mobilization and as a legendary figure who can protect the group and is venerated as a sacred character, suggests that his interventionism has matured within a democratic or socialist milieu. The absence of references to religion, substituted by the cult of Garibaldi, further suggests that his background was not infused with religious faith.³⁰

Even after having aimed at the villa occupied by the enemy and having received an artillery counter-attack the troops made fun of unsuccessful enemy shots. Garibaldi is mentioned again as a protector of the troops. Vitelli senses from the choral attack coming from different positions that the enemy occupying the villa probably includes someone important. In spite of the terrible consequences of his attack on the villa, he does not lose his ironic point of view and comments the unsuccessful enemy's fire with a phrase borrowed from Shakespeare's play, 'Much ado about nothing!' The Shakespearean reference reinforces the idea, as previously suggested in the chapter on literary anchors, that he has read and probably studied literature (and is fluent in English). The following entry is introduced by the say 'chi la fa l'aspetti' and describes the revenge of the Austro-Hungarian troops.

From what is recorded in the notebooks, it could be suggested that a certain level of imprudence characterizes Vitelli. Moreover, Vitelli's artillery bravado and self-celebration of artillery expertise results in his battalion suffering a heavy and long-lasting counter-attack conducted by the enemy. Although Vitelli was certainly a skilled artillery commander, he seems to be unaware of the consequences of his actions on his and on other groups positioned nearby. The precision of his artillery attack makes

³⁰ On the Garibaldi myth, see Lucy Riall, 'The Myth of Garibaldi' in Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi Invention of a hero*, (New Haven and (London: Yale University Press, 2007) pp. 388-392.

him particularly fond of himself and his quality is recognized within the army, so much so that the major of the 17th group puts him forward for a medal he notes, 'Racchiusi l'avvenimento nelle poche linee di un fonogramma'. The success is celebrated even in the presence of Colonel Ragni in the canteen and becomes a further occasion to drink a lot.

The celebration of Christmas is based on wine. The day after, the men, including Vitelli, are hungover and some have been warned by Colonel Ragni for their conduct. Vitelli held his troops (and possibly himself) incapable of any action on that day.

'Officers Writers' or 'writers in uniform'

Carlo Emilio Gadda

As with many other officers, the conflict represented for Gadda 'the tragic break' that suspended his university studies. He completed his Bachelors degree in 1912 and he started studying engineering at the Politecnico in Milan where he finally graduated in 1920. He was 22 years of age when he left for war and 26 when he came back from the prison camp to realized his beloved brother, Enrico, had died.³¹

At the time of war, Gadda was not yet the author he became after, even though some traits of his writing attitude are already there *in nuce* (e.g. the attention to technical terms, the projection of different narrative selves, and the proximity to

³¹ Andrea Silvestri, 'Gadda Studente Politecnico e ingegnere' in Andrea Silvestri ed. *Per Gadda il Politecnico di Milano*, Atti del convegno e Catalogo della mostra, Milano 12 Novembre 1993 (Milano: Pesce d'Oro, 1994) pp. 41-55 here p. 41.

reality).³² War was, for him as it was for others, an incredible occasion to come to terms with a new language (military jargon associated with war and the scientific language of techniques, the literary use of which he would praise in an essay published on Solaria in 1929). Andrea Silvestri mentions the clear sign of Gadda's passion for maths in Gadda's 'Giornale di Guerra e di Prigionia'. However, Gadda was forced to choose this academic path due to the economic problems and the ambitions of his family.³³

Language is a protagonist in Gadda's war writings, both in the notebooks and in the memoir of Caporetto written retrospectively from the prison camp. Language is explored, challenged, and forced into new structures throughout his notebooks. These thus represent a vital set of texts with which to observe other war writings, to evaluate their responses, in search of differences and similarities that might disclose something new on the impact of war on language and writing, and to disclose new paths to observe the role forms and contents of writing throughout the conflict.

The presence of Gadda is motivated also by the obsessive attention to the detail of the war experience (in both its physical and emotional manifestations) and to the never-ending quest for words, images, and details to describe it.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to present a thorough analysis of the author's complex developments and work, which have received an entire series of studies. Gadda himself reflected upon the heuristic role of language and upon his own writing activity and use of language at a later stage of his life when he was a mature writer. Segre lists certain features of Gadda's use of language that were also detected in the analysis conducted on his war writings in the present thesis. Moved by both the

³² On the projection of different selves through writing, see M Guglielminetti Gadda/Gaddus: diari, giornali e note autobiografiche di guerra in *Versantes*, 25 (1994) pp. 81-96.

³³ Silvestri, *Ibid.*, p. 44.

desire and the need to be precise, Gadda opts for a complex hybridization between different registers and jargons belonging to different spheres (literary milieux, spoken language, and technical and specific jargons); terms deriving from different stages of the Italian language (diachronic contamination); and elements borrowed from different linguistic and dialectal contexts within Italy.³⁴ Gadda's appreciation of the language of different technical and scientific contexts is due to their proximity to the specific circumstances they refer to. Moreover, because of their varied provenance, they create a reaction to the standardized ordinary use of language or to its literary counterpart, which serves as a heuristic technique.³⁵

This thesis did not apply the subsequent evolution of Gadda's thinking and reasoning to an earlier stage of his writing. The impact of war on language and on writing attitude investigated in the selected sources could thus provide further insights to investigate the impact of war on Gadda's evolving confrontation with language, narrative and self-projection.

Gadda seems to be aware of the different identities behind writings as he refers to himself in different ways in his diary. He gives himself a Latin nickname, Gaddus, and the nickname, Duca di Sant'Aquila, derived from the family lexicon of his childhood.³⁶ This is significant for this research because it underlines the experience of war as an initiation to adulthood, towards which many officers had an ambivalent attitude. The two nicknames indicate both the projected idealized identity and the projected identity of Gadda as a child, thus creating an interesting parallel between

³⁴ Cesare Segre, 'Linguaggio scientifico e invenzione letteraria' in Gadda in Silvestri ed., *Ibid.*, pp. 83-96, here p. 88.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³⁶ More insights on this in Gian Carlo Roscioni, *Il Duca di Sant'Aquila. Infanzia e giovinezza di G.*, (Milano: Mondadori, 1997) and Marziano Guglielminetti, 'Gadda/Gaddus: il "Giornale di guerra e di prigionia"', in *Dalla parte dell'io. Modi e forme della scrittura autobiografica nel Novecento*, (Naples: ESI, 2002) pp. 251-265.

the adults' war and children's games. They also signal the co-existence of a wish to cover oneself in glory and a desire to go back in time to the protective shield of childhood. In the case of Gadda, however, these nicknames might also be seen through the lens of irony, as setting the child Gadda, named Duca di Sant'Aquila, in comparison with the Gaddus seems to suggest an anti-heroic stance on the experience to come.

Piero Jahier³⁷

While presenting Piero Jahier it is vital to consider different aspects of his life which appear to be deeply connected. The first aspect is that concerning Jahier's biography: the religious legacies derived from the Waldensian family-context and the traumatic transformation provoked by his father's suicide. Secondly, the intellectual commitment and literary activity developed within the circle of the *La Voce* review before and during wartime.³⁸ However, it is interesting to consider all the reviews/journals that published his poems between 1912 and 1917: *La Voce* (14 poems), *La Riviera Ligure* (21 poems) and *Lacerba* (6 poems).³⁹ Thirdly, Jahier's experience of war both away from the line (at the beginning of the conflict when he instructs recruits for the Alpini) and on the line (when the Pasubio Battalion that he was requested to lead was ordered to the first line at the Basso Posina sector. This occurred in January 1918, as reported by Michelini Tocci in his letters).⁴⁰

³⁷ Piero Jahier, *Con me e con gli alpini* (Roma: La Voce, 1920).

³⁸ Further insights on *La Voce* in Stefano Magni, 'La Voce «bianca» e la Grande Guerra Immagini del conflitto e dei soldati', *Italies*, 19 | 2015, pp. 37-55.

³⁹ Aurelio Benevento, 'Un documento dell'avanguardia vociana: Le poesie di Piero Jahier', in Aurelio Benevento *Saggi su Giovanni Boine e Piero Jahier*, (Napoli: Loffredo, 1986) pp. 127-143 here p. 127

⁴⁰ see Michelini's Tocci record in this appendix.

For a thorough analysis of *Con me e con gli Alpini* and for a rich set of references and perspectives on Jahier at war, see Silvio Ramat "'Qui siamo uniforme..." Rileggendo Con me e con gli alpini'.⁴¹ The merit of Ramat is that of considering *Con me e con gli alpini* in the light of what preceded it, and, more specifically, the poem *Con me* appeared in *La Voce* in early 1915.

Ramat identifies Jahier's educative vocation (detected by many literary critics) in his biography. When his father committed suicide in 1897 Jahier, who was the oldest of thirteen children, felt the responsibility to take his father's role within the family. One should bear in mind this aspect of Jahier's background when discussing his presumed 'paternalism', in order to grasp the complexity and the personal need characterizing it.⁴² Ramat criticizes those who attacked Jahier for this trait as Isnenghi and Antonio Testa and argues that Jahier's traumatic loss is filled by the new military family at war (which is something similar to what has been detected in Leonardo Cambini's letter collection).⁴³ There is a strong continuity between the personal and the collective which become two sides of the same coin. In this light, it is necessary to frame his genuine adherence to the human co-existence in war. Ramat sees Jahier's attitude as fatherly rather than paternalistic attitude and I am inclined to support this view. Ramat ventures the hypothesis that the misinterpretation of *Con me e con gli alpini* is based (as it is often the case in Italy) on political grounds. The educative intent of Jahier is not solely directed to his recruits but also to himself, as he understands how much he can learn from the experience, from the deep encounter and the sharing

⁴¹ Silvio Ramat, "'Qui siamo uniforme..." Rileggendo Con me e con gli Alpini' in Mariacristina Ardizzone ed. *Scrittori in divisa* (Brescia: Grafo, 2000) pp. 13-22.

⁴² Interpretations of Jahier's attitude as paternalistic are put forward by Mario Isnenghi, 'L'uso esistenziale della guerra nel populista Piero Jahier in *Il mito della Guerra. Da Marinetti a Malaparte*, (Bari: Laterza, 1969) pp. 176-180 and Antonio Testa, *Jahier*, (Milano: Mursia 1970)

⁴³ Ramat, *Ibid.*, p. 14.

of such an important moment in history with these Italian fathers.⁴⁴ In 1916, the 32 year-old Jahier is ordered to instruct the recruits that he described in *Con me e con gli alpini* under the entry entitled 'recruits'. These are class 1984.

Emilio Lussu

Emilio Lussu was born in Amungia, Sardinia, in 1890. He graduated in Cagliari in 1915 and was a convinced democratic interventionist. He was a reserve lieutenant in the Sassari Brigade (regiments 151 and 152) active on the Asiago plateau. He was awarded several medals promoted captain. As a Sardinian he always maintained a strong bond with his region of origin.⁴⁵ In 1919 he founded the Partito Sardo d'Azione to which he remained linked even when he was politically active with Giustizia e Libertà and with the Socialist Party.⁴⁶ The novel *Un anno sull'Altipiano* was written in 1936-1937 and responded to his need to rethink the war experience (both individual and collective) in a different way, distant from that imposed by fascist rhetoric (see the fascist presentation of Cambini's letter collection in the 1941 Le Monnier edition). Lussu's attitude towards war is worthy of attention, as he remained convinced that intervention and war were the right choice but he came to think that what was wrong about war was the way in which it was conducted. He was particularly critical of career-driven attitudes, lack of empathy towards soldier, and high command's frequent lack of combat expertise. Even though his novel is not based, as is the case with Gadda, on a rigorous linear notebook, even Lussu's retrospective work is founded

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 16.

⁴⁵ Paolo Pulina 'Emilio Lussu, Uomo Politico, Oratore, Scrittore' in *Atti del Convegno su Emilio Lussu Rivoli 18 Maggio 2014*, (Torino: Soter editrice 2014) pp. 16-29 here p. 23.

⁴⁶ Paolo Soddu, 'L'eredità politica e culturale di Emilio Lussu' in *Atti del Convegno su Emilio Lussu Rivoli 18 Maggio 2014*, (Torino: Soter editrice 2014) pp. 30-45.

on notes and memories of his own experience of war. The novel also carries an important message as it bears witness to his spiritual proximity to the experience, the problems and difficulties of soldiers with which he shared life under fire in the trenches, and the skepticism and diffidence towards high command and superiors resulting from the injustice suffered within the army while exposed to violence and enemy fire.

Paolo Monelli (Fiorano Modenese 1891-Roma 1984)

Born in 1891 in Fiorano Modenese and the son of a colonel and director of the military hospital in Bologna, Monelli applied to the military academy. After his application was rejected, he chose to study law and duly graduated. He collaborated with the *Resto del Carlino* for which he wrote about mountain sports and activities. He already had connections with the Italian Alpini Club in Bologna and his request to be assigned as a volunteer to the Alpini was fulfilled.⁴⁷ Italy's participation in the war in 1915 thus represented his chance to become a soldier. He enthusiastically volunteered for war, deciding not to take up the opportunity to remain close to his family of origin, a 'privilege' granted to him after the death of his brother.⁴⁸ He was assigned to the 'Val Cismon' battalion of the 7th Alpini Regiment, received several medals and was promoted to lieutenant. He was later assigned to the 301 unit of the 'Monte Marmolada' ski battalion and was promoted to captain in October 1917. In November he was on Monte Tonderacar where he led an assault of 15 November 1917 that was

⁴⁷ Giorgio Zanetti, *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, editore Treccani, (Roma: Treccani, 2011) vol. 75.

⁴⁸ See also the entry Paolo Monelli in Treccani online edition av. at [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/paolo-monelli_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/>](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/paolo-monelli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/>)

rewarded with a medal, but he was then captured with his men in Castelgomberto after running out of munitions.

His war writing *Le scarpe al sole*, which is based on his war notebooks and possibly partly redrafted subsequently, was first published by Cappelli Bologna in 1921 and then by Treves in 1928.⁴⁹ His work reflects upon the bonds created while at war, the sense of proximity to the men of his group and the commitment to the military cause.⁵⁰

Giani Stuparich

Born in Trieste on 4 April 1891, he was the son of Marco Stuparich, originally from Istria, and Gisella Gentili, from a Jewish family of Trieste. He studied in Prague and was an active member within the circle of the Florentine review, *La Voce*, along with his younger brother, Carlo, and a friend from Trieste, Scipio Slataper.⁵¹ Stuparich managed to obtain false documents and escaped from Trieste in order to fight for Italy rather than the Austro-Hungarian empire and he entered war as a volunteer (first as a

⁴⁹ For further information on the content and writing attitude, see Ada Neiger 'Gaie e tristi avventure di alpini, muli e vino nel racconto di Paolo Monelli' in Mariacristina Ardizzone, *Scrittori in divisa Memoria epica e valori umani*, (Brescia: Grafo, 2000) pp. 99-105, here p. 99.

⁵¹ Angelo Ara, 'Giani Stuparich: Uno scrittore triestino fra Austria, Italia e Slavia (1913-1922)' in 'Beiträge des Studientages L'Austria e l'Italia nel corso dei secoli Giornata di studio in occasione dell'ottantesimo compleanno del Prof. Adam Wandruska' Roma 10 November 1994' in Hermann Fillitz and Otto Kresten eds., *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* vol. 37, (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1995) pp. 377-394.

⁵¹ Angelo Ara, 'Giani Stuparich: Uno scrittore triestino fra Austria, Italia e Slavia (1913-1922)' in 'Beiträge des Studientages L'Austria e l'Italia nel corso dei secoli Giornata di studio in occasione dell'ottantesimo compleanno del Prof. Adam Wandruska' Roma 10 November 1994' in Hermann Fillitz and Otto Kresten eds., *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* vol. 37, (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1995) pp. 377-394.

simple soldier than as a second lieutenant) with his brother, Carlo, in the 1st Infantry Sardinia Grenadiers regiment.⁵²

Stuparich, in his youthful enthusiasm, wished to fulfil the Mazzinian dream.⁵³ His adherence to war is marked by a spirit that overcomes nationalism as he is convinced that the right path is the one leading to a European federation.⁵⁴ He imagined a European fight for nationalities that could respect the specific traits of each culture.⁵⁵ Stuparich imagined Trieste, his beloved home city, as the centre for this project. Before war his idea was that of a cultural and political commitment inspired by a form of international pacifism able to safeguard and respect all nationalities. However, at the outbreaks of war, Stuparich embraced interventionism which appeared to him as an inevitable choice to fight Austro-German imperialism.⁵⁶

His notebook *Guerra del '15*, probably remanaged after the war and published, is interesting from the point of view of language explored in this thesis but also provides some further insights into the history of the 1st Grenadier regiment. Comparing Stuparich's notebook with the official history provided by the army on the movements and losses of the regiment, appears of the utmost interest also from a military perspective as the accounts complete each other. Worth noting is the contrast between the complexity of movements from Palmanova to Pieris that Stuparich records in his notebook and the short historical summary of it provided by the army. Here there is no mention of the strategic mistakes or military short-sightedness behind the losses suffered by the 1st regiment (282 fallen, including which ten

⁵² Further information on av. at <<https://www.storiaememoriadibologna.it/files/grande-guerra/schede-brigata/granatieri.pdf>>.

⁵³ Cesare De Michelis 'Amor Fraternal Cesare, in Giani Stuparich ed. Cesare De Michelis ed. *Colloqui con mio fratello* Cesare De Michelis, (Venezia: Marsilio 1985) (Treves 1925) pp. 149-183.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 161.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 154.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 156-157.

officers) which are solely attributed to the nature of the terrain and to the efficient barbed-wire fences defending the Austro-Hungarian positions. On his entry of 9 June from Monfalcone, Stuparich records the destruction of the first platoon of his regiment and expresses his relief and horror at the thought that they would also have died if they were not assigned to the 'squadra soprannumero'. During the first battle of Isonzo, carried out in Monfalcone by the 1st Grenadiers in order to gain quota 121 and 85, on 30 June 1915, Stuparich and his comrades are sent to the assault. According to the official summary, the attempt failed 'in spite of the courage of many brave men it is impossible to go further because of the great quality of enemy positions and of their incessant fire. The official summary fails to record what is noted by Stuparich who recounts that, on 30 June, every second man was given pliers and ordered to cut the wires without the help of gelignite.⁵⁷

Farmer soldier Giuseppe Manetti

Known as 'Beppe', Manetti was born 1884 in Tuscany and was a farmer living close to Florence. He was orphaned at the age of twenty and had to take care of his younger brother and sisters while also working in the fields. Manetti had a basic education but one achieved with great effort by taking classes with the teacher from his village. He wanted to have an education as he considered it as being very important (p. 12). He formed his own family in April 1915, a month before Italy entered the war. He had the chance to stay at home for another year and his war began in July 1916, a few days before the birth of his first daughter.⁵⁸ In February 1917 his hopes of remaining in Cervignano were dashed as he was assigned to Modena and then to the Carso river

⁵⁷ Giani Stuparich, *Guerra del '15*, Giuseppe Sadrini, ed., (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2015; Treves 1931) p. 95.

⁵⁸ Cristina Chiechini, 'Introduzione' in Giuseppe Manetti, *Maledetta Guerra*, Cristina Chierchini ed., (Firenze: Pagnini, 2007) pp. here p. 11-15.

area. His diary ends in July 1918 as there is no more space in his notebook. He managed to return alive from war and died in 1974.

Oral sources: Zucca family

The Zucca family is formed of Valerio Zucca, Alberto Zucca, and Maria Teresa Camera, all living in Pavia. Valerio's grandmother, Teresa Zanivolti, was the oldest of the Zanivolti sisters. Valerio recounts that Zanivolti gave to his weapons model St Etienne , lost when he was caught prisoner, the names of his two sisters: Maria and Teresa.

The Zucca still lives in Pavia and still owns some of Peppino's souvenirs of war (among which the case shell reproduced in the section on images) and his letter collection. Among Peppino's mementos safeguarded by the family is his military box, and a series of six profile portrayals by Lieutenant Sobrero, a friend Zanivolti made while at war. The portrays are realized from carved tissue paper and they represent Sobrero himself, Zanivolti (recognizable for his high-bridged nose), the queen and the king.

The letters were left by Peppino's sisters, Teresa and Maria (the latter nicknamed Gegia or Mariot) to Teresa's daughter Angelina. She was Valerio's aunt, known as 'zietta/little aunt'. Valerio Zucca gave Peppino's letters to his daughter, Giuliana, who is now around ninety years-old, but, since she has no descendants, she decided to leave them to Zucca family. Giuliana was glad someone was going to study Peppino's letters.

Language and its legacies

Alfredo Panzini

A short introduction to Alfredo Panzini and a few selected entries connected to the language of war taken from his *Dizionario Moderno delle Parole che non si trovano negli altri dizionari* (Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1935).

The influence of fascism on this work becomes clear while browsing through the entries of the 1935 edition of his *Dizionario Moderno*. The fact that the entry 'deserter' and 'prisoner' of war are missing is not accidental, but rather connected with the postwar legacy and fascist tendency to remove or downplay the aspects of scarce heroism and nationalism of WWI and portray it solely in terms of courage, sacrifice, and combat, etc. The dictionary pays for being conceived and published under fascism. In spite of the inevitable echoes of the Fascist era, Panzini provides a clever, attentive, sensitive, meticulous observation of language and of its connection with history and his dictionary proves, therefore, of the utmost interest for this work. The references to war have been underlined in the list of entries reported.

p. 154 complementi voce della Guerra: nuclei di truppa che vengono a completare gli organici di un reparto che ha subito perdite (1918)

p. 91 buffa: epiteto dato alla fanteria dal vestito un po' goffo rispetto alle altre armi

La fanteria è buffa

bassa di statura

ma quando va all'assalto,

nessun le fa paura/

Infantryman

is a funny short lad

but in combat

he does not fear the bad

p. 641 Sette Comuni (Altipiano dei): I comuni sono Asiago, Roana, Rotzo, Lusiana, Foza, Gallio, Enego... sono d'origine tedesca e in qualche località conservano delle voci con suono tedesco. Provincia di Vicenza tra la Val Sugana e la Val d'Astico. Devastati nella guerra.

p. 40 aspirante ufficiale: termine dei primi tempi della guerra, primo gradino della scala gerarchica dell'ufficialità. Poi si disse aspirante sottotenente. Per i molti morti fra i giovani ufficiali, si disse, *aspirante cadavere*. (1918)

aspirante è quella cosa

che la guerra ha messo in ballo

Poco sopra al maresciallo

Poco sotto all'ufficial

p. 43 attendente: il soldato che fa i servigi personali all'ufficiale: ordinanza

p. 704 Terza Italia: cioè Italia dei nostri tempi

Prima Italia con Roma antica, capo del mondo, seconda Italia, sede della maestà della chiesa di Roma; terza Italia, la moderna unita in nazione, abolito il potere politico dei

romani pontefici. Terza Italia è espressione frequente nelle opere del Mazzini, e probabilmente è sua: certo sua è la concezione di una nuova Italia, idealmente vagheggiata come nuova luce del mondo.

p. 710 Tirolo: questo nome di regione tedesca a noi finitima è per voluto errore dai tedeschi dato talvolta al Trentino. Südtirol significa difatti Trentino nell lingua ufficiale italiani noi siam, non tirolesi! scrive Clementino Vannetti (1759-1804) nativo di Rovereto

p. 116 Carro di Tespi: cioè il teatro di prosa (da Tespi, primo drammaturgo greco, contemporaneo di Solone e di Pisistrato.) Famoso nella storia del teatro, è il carro - a guisa di rudimentale teatro- sul quale Tespi trasportò la tragedia per i borghi dell'Attica. Teatro ambulante su autocarri da impiantare in percorrenze turistiche, rimesso in onore dal fascismo (1929).⁵⁹

p. 725 trincea: antica parola (dal ted. trennen= separare) ma cui la Guerra (detta di posizione) ha dato senso di cosa paurosa e terribile. L'uscita dalla trincea per l'assalto: "Ecco l'istante! Scoccano le quattro del pomeriggio. Il tiro delle artiglierie si è allungato. Ha fatto lui il primo balzo. La fanteria avanza con una avanguardia di granate e di shrapnels. Non si vede niente, non is sa niente. Solo da tutte le parti i telefoni annunziano: "sono usciti!..." "sono usciti!" "sono usciti!" Sono laggiù nella nebbia, nella polvere, nell'indefinito, nell'ombra, in quel panorama di irrealtà che urla, che rugge (Barzini 1918).

⁵⁹ Probably in order to keep a tradition that was common in war and as a further means of propaganda.

p. 328 Hurrah: è propriamente il grido di guerra dei cosacchi, dallo slavo gu-raj= al paradiso, detto secondo la fede che, morendo per la patria o per lo Czar si apra il paradiso. In Tedesco Hurra, in ingl. hurrah, in francesca hourra. La nostra parola bella e gentile: evviva!

p. 698 teleferica: agg. fatto sostantivo: via teleferica ..ferrovia aerea su valli o fiumi. Alle rotaie è sostituita una fune metallica, su cui scorre un o più pulegge, reggenti il carrello per il trasporto di uomini o materiale. Voce della Guerra (1918)

p. 153 compagnia della morte: antica denominazione del tempo della battaglia di Legnano, rinnovata nella Guerra, per indicare *quella schiera che si espone al massimo pericolo per far saltare i reticolati*

p. 663 spallata: termine della Guerra, quasi colpo di spalla: *sforzo violento e breve* contro un punto del fronte o linea del nemico

p. 109 entry canzoni della guerra:

Vittorio Emanuele

ci hai fatto un gran dispetto

hai chiamato il 99

che piscia ancora in letto

p. 35 Armata: tutte le forze militari di un paese. Così l'uso. Tale parola ricorda da vicino l'uso del fr. armée: nella buona lingua, armata indica più specialmente il naviglio di guerra. Ma chi ad esempio traducesse la *grande armée* di Napoleone per il *grande*

esercito non perderebbe forse d'efficacia? A certi suoni si accompagnano certe idee. A ciò aggiungo che nel senso di *esercito* ha esempi antichi e lo registra la *Crusca*

p. 33 arditi: voce della Guerra. il nome di Arditi fu ufficialmente dato ai soldati scelti, nome che poi i soldati stessi dieder ai cosiddetti reparti d'assalto. Dalle mostrine presero il nome di fiamme rosse (bersaglieri) fiamme nere (fanteria) fiamme verdi (alpini) fiamme gialle (finanza) Sul braccio il segno della breve spada romana. Pugnale giubba aperta e cravatta: D'Annunzio si fregiò del costume di semplice Ardito (1918). Creatore di questi "cavalieri della morte" fu il Colonnello Giuseppe Alberto Bassi (luglio 1917).

p. 236 Espressione geografica: fu detto dell'Italia: *Italien ein geographischer Begriff* frase del principe di Metternich (circolare del 6 agosto 1847), del cui valore non è qui il caso di ragionare. Nel periodo del Risorgimento fu ritenuta come ingiuria In una lettera al conte di Prokesh-Osten, 19. nov 1819 il Metternich scriveva... il mio detto che il concetto nazionale "Italia" è geografico.. si è acquistato il diritto di cittadinanza

p. 592 Reticolato: voce della Guerra. Barriera di fili di ferro spinato, a multiplo intreccio, per impedire l'avanzare del nemico.

p. 296 gelatina esplosiva: nitroglicerina fissata in una pasta gelatinosa (dinamite)

p. 621 Savoia!: grido di guerra italiano: sopravvivenza del grido feudale dei vassalli ai conti, duchi re di Savoia. Nell'esercito è tradizione cavalleresca dire Savoia! allo sguainar della spada. Se no si paga da bere.

p. 202 disfattista: voce della Guerra: Chiunque per varie ragioni e gradi prevede e desidera la disfatta dell'Italia e dell'Intesa. Anticamente, *disfacitore*. v. *Nemico alle spalle* (1918) voce sopravvissuta alla guerra.

p. 284 fronte interno: espressione della guerra: la difesa in Italia contro i nemici d'Italia (1918) Poi in senso esteso *fronte diplomatico*, *fronte economico*.

p. 197 Dies Irae: il giorno dell'ira cioè il giorno della vendetta, della resa dei conti, del *reddere rationem*, e propriamente, e nel primo senso, al Signore Iddio.

Dies Irae, dies illa

solvat saeculum in favilla

teste David cum Sybilla

p. 218 Effettivo (ufficiale) = dell'esercito permanente: non di complemento, o territoriale, o della riserva.

Risorgimento through nicknames: from Giusti and Cima to Augusto Vivanti

Giuseppe Giusti in his poem 'Dies Irae' written in 1835 after the sudden death of the Austrian emperor, known as Franz II, assigned to the emperor the disparaging name 'Cecco'

Dies Irae

è morto Cecco

gli è venuto il tiro secco

ci levò l'incomodo/

Day of reckoning!

Cecco is gone

a heart blast

he left us alone

at last!⁶⁰

⁶⁰ The full text of Giuseppe Giusti Dies Irae is available at: Consulted at <<http://condividendoidee.overblog.it/2014/11/il-dies-irae-giuseppe-giusti.html>>.

Camillo Cima second volume of 'Storia de Milan dal prencipi fina al dì d'incoeu cuntada su a la bona dal Meneghin alla Cecca' vol 2/'History of Milan from the beginning until nowadays told by the short tails from Meneghin to the Cecca' vol 2. published in Milan in 1895.⁶¹

He dedicates a chapter to the decreasing control marking the Austrian domination by Franz Joseph from 1857 onwards when he delegated to his brother, Massimiliano, control of the area defined 'Lombardo Veneto'. The section that refers to the 'concessioni dell'Austria dal 57' / Austrian concessions from '57 onwards' is given by Camillo Cima the following title: 'Ceco Beppo el mola' / Ceco Beppo loosens his grip'

Commenting retrospectively (in 1895) the reactions of Milanese people to the news of the less strict control inaugurated in 1857, Cima wrote in dialect

'A nun Milanês tucc sti notizzi ne faven l'effett de la scossa elettrica! Se fava bocca fina ai urecc! / To us Milanese this news had an electrifying effect. We smiled from ear to ear!

Meaning that the news found them incredibly happy.

⁶¹ Cima, p. 87. 'Meneghin' and his wife 'Cecca' are two figures from the Milanese theatrical tradition.

War songs

On the diffidence towards the volunteers and more in general towards interventionist students ⁶²

Addio Padre e Madre Addio/ Farewell Father and farewell Mother

(esec. Elia Folloni, Paolo Folloni, Matteo Castellani, Beniamino Pecorari)

...

Sian Maledetti quei giovani studenti

che han studiato e la guerra voluto

hanno gettato l'Italia nel lutto

per cento anni dolor sentirà/

Damned those young students

who studied and yet the war wanted

they threw Italy into sorrow

a grief that'll last until an endless tomorrow

Stornelli sui corpi dell'esercito/ folksong on military corps

(esec. Giovanni Gelmini, Francesco Grandi, Pierino Rossi) ⁶³

On the diffidence between different military corps it is interesting to quote the following infantry song in which all other corps are attacked

Fantaccino è quella cosa

che in Italia è scalcinato

Ma alla guerra s'è mandato

ci si batte molto ben

Bim bum ban al rombo del cannon

⁶² Rolando Anni and Carlo Perucchetti, *Gorizia Canti di Soldati Musica, storia, tradizione e memoria della Grande Guerra*, (castelnuovo Sotto: Centro Studi Musica e Grande Guerra, 2017), p. 139.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 142.

Fantaccino è quella cosa
che si batte ognor sul piano
Ma che pur nelle montagne
Sempre batte l'inimic

[After a couple of stanzas dedicated to the merits and courage of infantry soldiers the rest of the song is devoted to underline the vices of other corps]

Bersagliere è quella cosa
che in Italia fa figura
ma alla guerra non la dura
E all'assalto se ne scapp

Artiglieria è quella cosa
che spara sul nemico
Ma talvolta sull'amico

Tira colpi a tutto andar

Cavalleria è quella cosa

Che va sempre sui cavalli

Ma però ha sempre i calli

Se al fuoco deve andar

L'aviatore è quella cosa

che nel ciel va ad esplorare

Se il nemico appare

Se ne scappa indietro svelt/

Infantry soldier is that thing

that in Italy is useless

but while in war

proves fearless

Bim bum bom that's the roaring of *cannon*

infantry is that thing
that fights all the time on the plateau
but even on the tops
and the enemy always stops
bersagliere is that thing
that in Italy looks good,
but in war does not last
to the assault prefers the hood

Artillery is that thing
that aims at the enemy's end
but at times even on friends
fires endlessly bang bang

Cavalry is that thing
that rides a horse
but got terrible feet-corns
when there is fire is sent back

aviator is that thing
that dares to explore the sky
but when the enemy appears
he flies away very shy

Going back to war: The leave of Piero (a poem by Candido Meardi)

Candido Meardi was born in Voghera in 1947. His poems were published in several literary journals and in Candido Meardi, 'Il Destino di un eterno mare' (Varzi: Guardamagna, 2015). His poems have received several awards. This poem is still unpublished and the poet gave me the permission to include it in this thesis. It was inspired by the oral accounts heard by Candido's mother who, in turn, heard it from the mother of a soldier from Fontanasse (Alessandria province) who did not want to go back to the front after his leave in the home village. During a brief interview, Candido's recollection of his mother's details and dialectal features shed more light on my understanding of this topic. The poem retains the richness of the oral account. Moreover this poem is a due tribute to soldiers' perspective on war given that this thesis focused mainly on officers.

La Licenza di Piero

Mesi e mesi di trincea e assalti
all' arma bianca
vita e morte di fango e sangue
di coraggio comandato
e finalmente la licenza per il fante contadino.
La gioia allegra e triste della madre
l' ingenuo orgoglio del padre e dei fratelli.
Gran festa al suo apparire a piedi
zaino biondo di sorrisi

sulla curva della lunga dei livelli...

Che poi, fu una festa di lavoro, mietitura
e battitura di covoni gialli alla cascina.

Ma fu festa anche di gioie semplici
come per la tavola imbandita
e il ritrovato cibo della madre
il letto di spannocchie con sentore di bucato,
il saluto di pochi amici all'osteria
le bocce e le bottiglie giocate con maestria
e poi in chiesa in abito di festa.

Con il sacro riposo nelle sere
in quel buio curvato azzurro di pianura
sotto le tranquille così clare stelle,
stelle senza confini e senza patria,
così diverse da quelle di trincea
lontane fredde e attonite agli assalti.

Quel buon riposo delle sere familiari
con le sedie impagliate nell'aia di cemento
con le parole calme piene di domande
lui senza risposte a quelle sulla guerra
disse solo che desiderava dieci giorni
lontano dai colpi di mortaio, filo spinato
dai ragazzi dilaniati nei lamenti;
che aveva capito la guerra, avendo visto,

e ora lo sapeva, che era senza scopo

e senza una ragione.

Ma venne il tempo di tornare al fronte

con la tradotta treno di Voghera,

l'avrebbe portato lo zio Antonio di Retorto

(lui già sapeva da tempo dello schifo

della guerra) con il cavallo baio

ed il biroccio nero della gran Signora

dama marchesa sempre stanca:

"che vadano a combattere sti ragazzi nostri

che molto bello è morire per la Patria".

Una strada bianca lunga di polvere

nel verde dei pioppi cipressini

portava alla cascina di Retorto

e Piero si incamminò cantando

l'eterna canzone del povero Soldato.

Di colpo lo colpì quel fumo bianco

sul tetto della casa della bella Emerenziana

che sparso s'avvitava al vento di collina.

Così si riavvitò al suo cuore

il ricordo del camino della casa

tante volte sognato e sospirato alla trincea,

le castagne arrosto, le patate sepolte nella cenere: prima della guerra

ci si poteva sentir ricchi e felici

anche con poco...

E il soldato ritorno`con passi brevi

a bussare alla porta socchiusa della madre

e si sentiva quasi straniero, ormai.

Abbracci silenziosi , parole di conforto.

E ancora ripartì com' era il suo dovere

com' era premonito il suo destino.

E ancora e ancora si fermo`

lungo il suo cammino; accanto quel boschetto

verde e rosa di rose canine

dove s' era trovato da bambino

con la nonna a raccogliere funghi e more.

Ma poi partì per sempre.

Partì. E quella bianca strada

mai più fu ripercorsa

dai suoi passi di ragazzo...

Mai più lo zaino fu slacciato nei ritorni.

Cadde ucciso tra quei crepacci e quelle cime.

Papavero rosso di prima estate

assieme a quei seicentomila papaveri

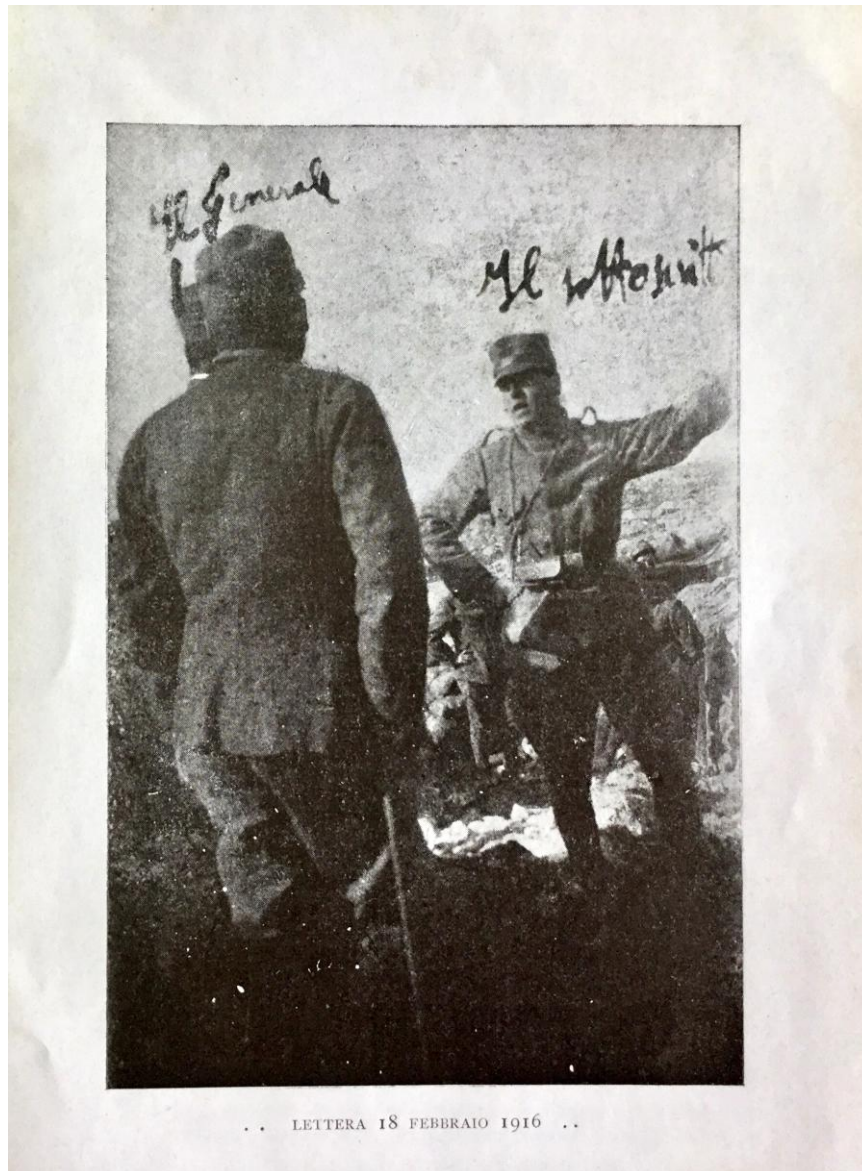
in nome del Grande Inganno, per sempre

dispersi e calpestati.

Images of war

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Military identity and self-projection in WWI



Angelo Campodonico stages his picture to appear as the war master. Rather than being the protagonist of the picture, the general is staged as part of Campodonico's audience.

(Picture reproduced from Campodonico's published letter collection).



Campodonico's bravado just before his death on the battlefield. (Picture reproduced from Campodonico's published letter collection.)



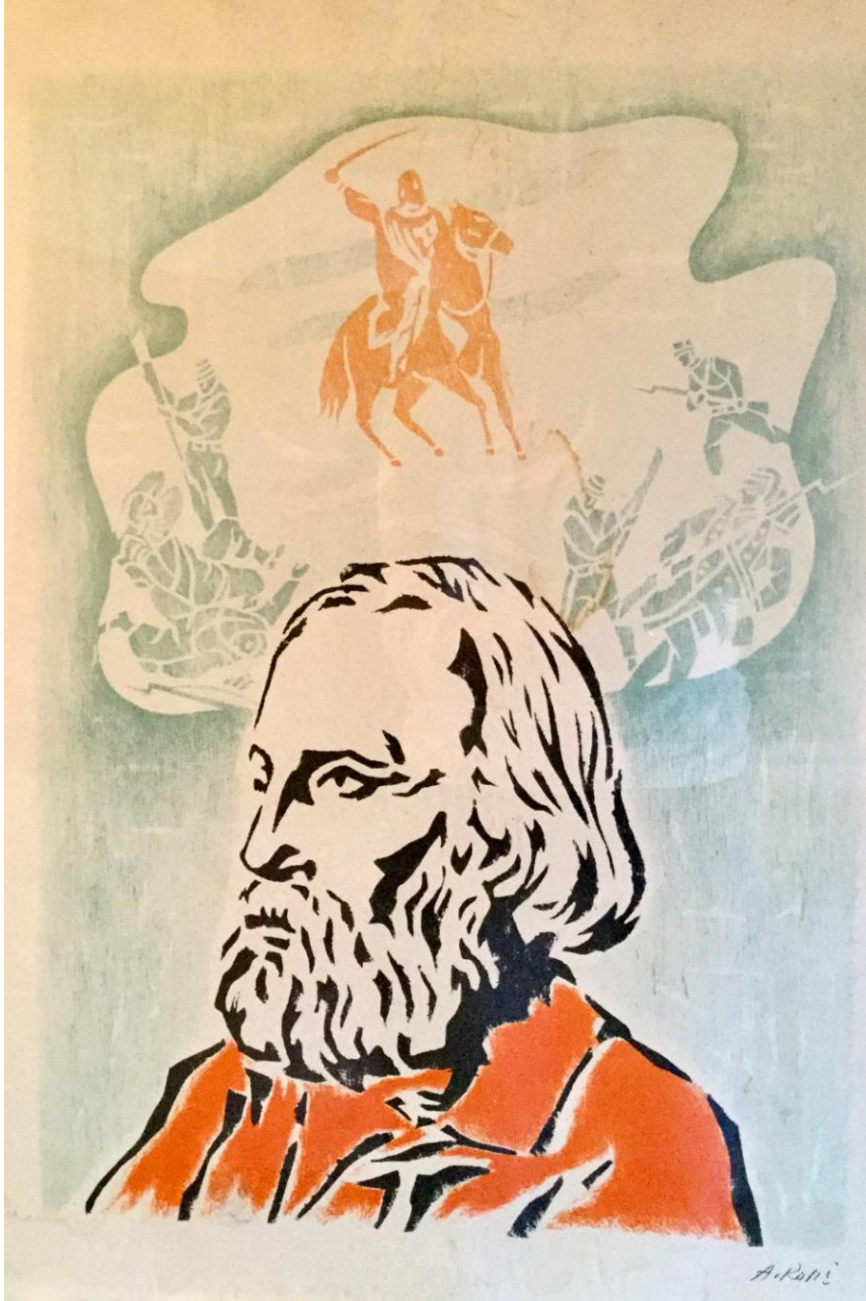
Sobrero, carved black tissue paper profiles. The Queen and the King, Sobrero and Zanivolti.

(Zucca family collection).



From left: Lieutenant Zanivolti, another colleague and Lieutenant Sobrero. This picture stands on the cover of a postcard thus elevating these three officers to a war postcard subject.

(Zucca family collection)



Warrior's identity in retrospect. A work of art included to describe Gadda's recollection of Caporetto as the last battle. A portrayal of Garibaldi by Attilio Rossi (title and date not available).

Reinventing war



This and the following image represent a shell case collected by Zanivolti and crafted with artistic majesty by comrades from the 18th machine gunners. It became a war memorial to fallen comrade, Luigi. On each side stand flowers one would place on a grave. This was sent to the family of the fallen. The family subsequently gave it back as an inheritance and memento of the war to Zanivolti. The Zucca family kindly provided a few photographs of it.



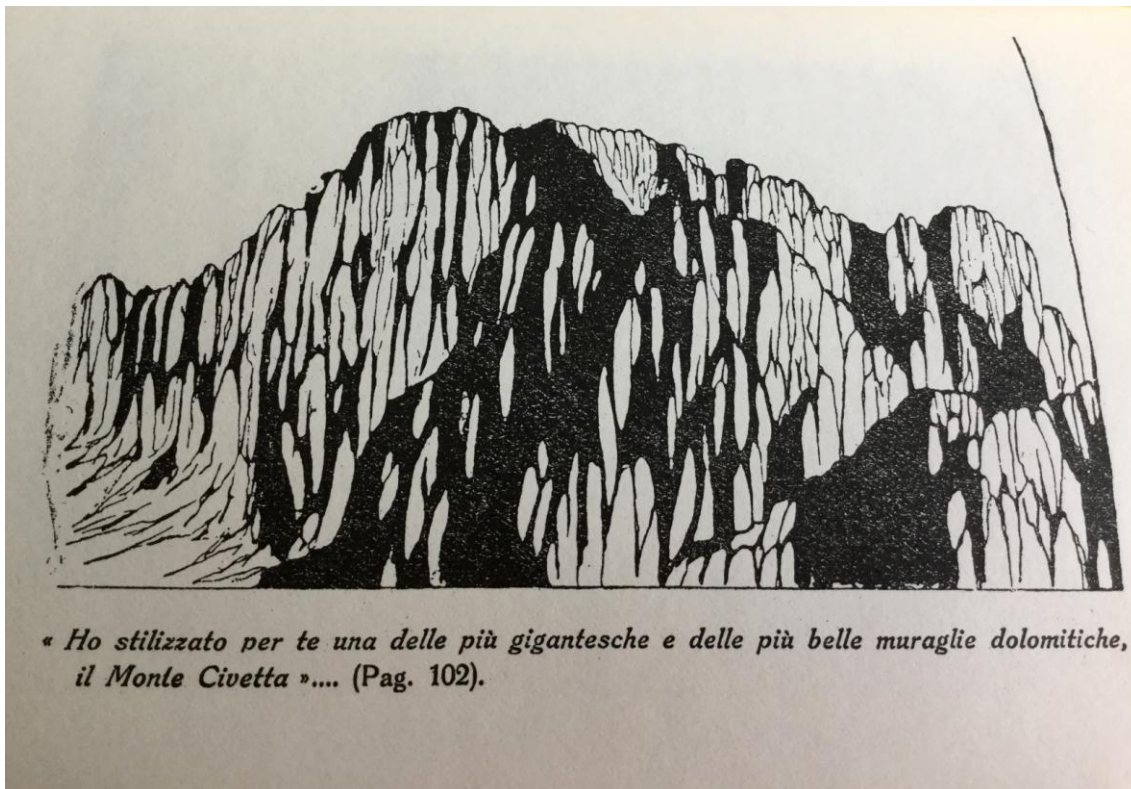
The same casing seen from another angle.

Drawings



Enzo Valentini's drawing of a bird of prey (in all probability a buzzard)⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Enzo Valentini, *Lettere e Disegni xv Luglio-xxii Ottobre 1915*, (Perugia, V. Bartelli & C. 1930) p. 59.



Enzo Valentini Il Monte Civetta. 'I have sketched for you one of the most gigantic and amazing rocky walls of the Dolomites: Monte Civetta' ⁶⁵

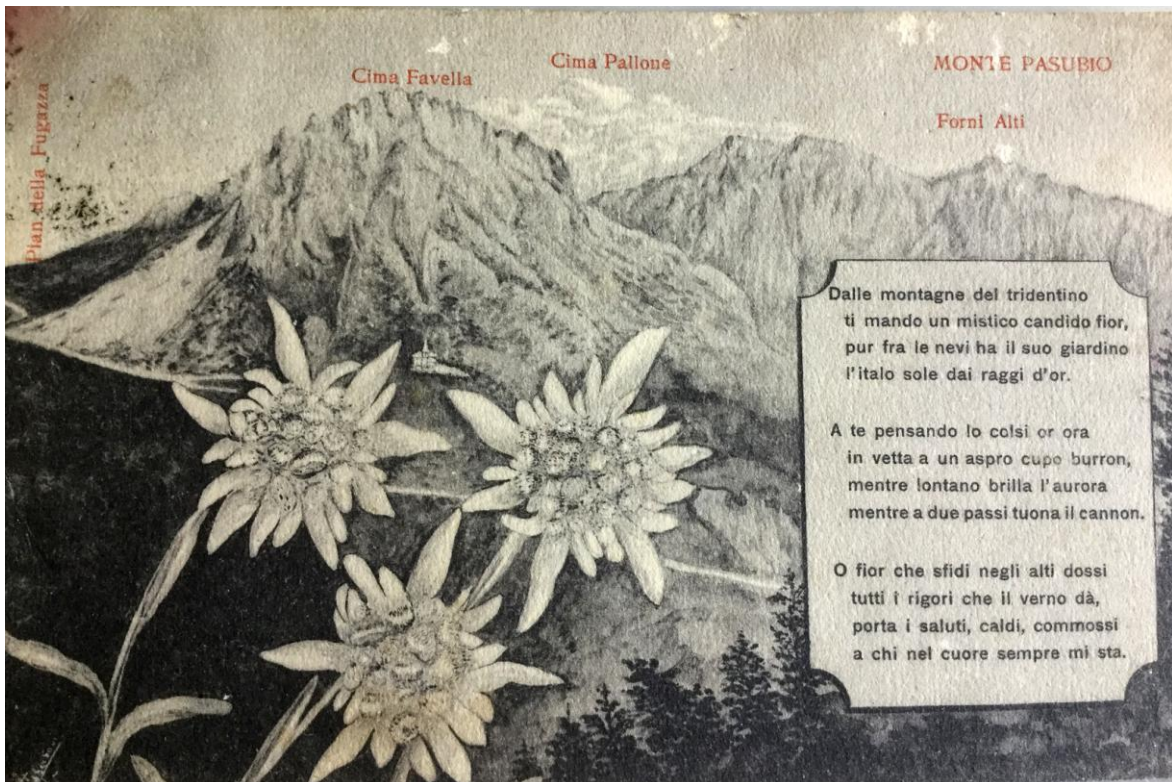
⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 96. The sentence is taken from the letter written on 20 September 1915.

Family communication in war



Zanivolti's postcard to his father sent on 8 March 1916 representing J. B. Greuze, *La Maledizione paterna*. Renewed attention was directed to this work of art because of a movie produced by Savoia film that was released in January 1916 with the same title.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Information av. at <<https://www.ilcinemamuto.it/indici/FILM.pdf>>.



Zanivolti's postcard to his sister, Maria, on 28 March 1917.



Postcard sent by Zanivolti to his family from Valle dei Signori. The Pasubio and the other mountains lurk as a threatening presence (as it is described in previous letters) in the background. The image is adopted to support his decision to delay the arrival on Pasubio and spend another night in the village.

Class '99

La chiamata alle armi della classe 1899

Roma, 1. — Il Giornale Militare Ufficiale pubblica una circolare del Ministero della Guerra con cui si determina che col giorno 11 giugno 1917 si inizia la chiamata alle armi delle reclute di I., II. e III. categoria della classe 1899 arruolate dai consigli di leva.

Con queste reclute si dovranno presentare nuovamente ai distretti anche quelle nate nel primo quadrimestre del 1899 già arruolate dalle commissioni di arruolamento presso i distretti militari e che, per effetto delle disposizioni contenute nell'articolo 5 del D. L. 1 febbraio 1917, sono state incorporate nei battaglioni di M. T. Tutti coloro che saranno arruolati dai consigli di leva posteriormente alla data fissata per la presente chiamata dovranno presentarsi ai distretti isolatamente di giorno in giorno e quindi i consigli di leva provvederanno per l'immediato loro invio alle armi appena avvenuto l'arruolamento avanti ai consigli stessi.

Provincia Pavese, 2 June 1917

(from Panzini) Entry 'canzoni della guerra'/war songs

Vittorio Emanuele

ci hai fatto un gran dispetto

hai chiamato il 99

che piscia ancora in letto/

Vittorio Emanuele

the trick you played is very sad!

you called class '99

that still wets the bed

Remobilization and demonization of the enemy in 1917

Supplemento al giornale LA PROVINCIA PAVESE - N. 111

Udite e rispondete...!

*Udite e rispondete,
O voi, che della guerra,
Che inasprisce la terra,
Rendet conto dove
Al trionfo, che sta
Supremo, corno giudice
Dei dritti della storia
E della umanità.*

Chi primo, tradimenti
E offese meditando
Al dritto delle genti,
A lungo affilò il brando

Nell'ombra, e dei trattati
Di pace lacerò
Le pagine, e ai giurati
Patti di fe mancò?

E le terre e le case
Altrui, liete di pace
E di lavoro, invase
Come ladron rapace.

E, belva fra gli umani,
Spense vecchi cadenti
Ed amputò le mani
A bambini innocenti.

E donne invan piangenti
E tremanti violò?
E insigni monumenti
D'arte e fede atterrò.

Ovunque seminando
La distruzione e il lutto
Fra un popolo ammirando,
Che ad ogni orrore, a tutto

Ardi antepor l'onore
Di sua nobil nazione,
E stette, e sta con cuore
Invitto, testimone

Al mondo dello scempio
Che voi ne avete fatto,
Vandali nuovi, esempio
Del più orrendo misfatto?

Chi primo sicuro
Pacifici natanti,
E nei mari affondò
Vascelli trasportanti

Feriti ed ammalati
E spinse fra gli orrori
Di marosi spietati
Poveri pescatori?

E su città indifese
Si librò, lanciò bombe,
Recando nuove offese,
Scavando nuove tombe,

O feroci assassini,
Ovunque erano inermi,

(Ovunque eran bambini
E donne senza schermi?)

E chi l'antiche gesta,
Dei barbari emulando,
Compi nov'opra infesta
E nuove stragi, quando

I gas asfissianti
Lancio nelle battaglie
E i liquidi brucianti?
E pose inique taglie

A chi serbava amore
Alla patria diletta,
E innanzi all'oppressore
Tenea la fronte eretta?

E chi razzio le schiere
Di giovani donzelle,
Delitto, a cui le fiere
Stesse surien rubelle,

Sì, che a tal paragone
Gli antichi masnadieri
Erano anime buone
E fior di cavalieri?

Onta a questa gentia
Di lurchi saccomanni,
Maestri d'ogni ria
Insidia e turpi inganni,

Onta in eterno e morte:
E voi, ombre parlanti,
Su, gridatelo forte:
Mesti spirti vaganti.

Su, venite dai mari:
Venite da ogni terra
Voi, che pei vostri lari
Moriste in questa guerra.

E voi, di figli orbate,
Madri, su in folte schiere,
E voi contaminate
Spose in gramaglie nere,

In immensa coorte,
Su venite, marciate,
E morte, morte, morte
Ai nuovi Unni gridate.

E dite al Vaticano:
Con tai masnade ladre
Ed assassine, è vano
Pace sperare, o Padre!

Bertoldo

A profitto delle Opere di Assistenza Civile

PAVA - TR. POPOLARE

La Provincia Pavese, 22 September 1917.

This poem by Bertoldo recalls many images derived from the narratives on German atrocities including the violence against women and children and the destruction of monuments. The conduct of Germans in war and the use of lethal chemical weapons is considered as a continuity of the German violence in Belgium. The last five stanzas call for the victims to return and witness the atrocities of the enemy and to explain to the Vatican why peace with this enemy would be impossible.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ No information available about the author of this poem.

AUSTRIACI D' ITALIA

pioni aveva il Cor-
rioni sono, di scri-
sua protesta contro
si che, col pretesto
mentanea di alcuni
ecessità, mirano a
nza del Paese in
cui, sul terreno a-
rinato del Corso i
gnifici per ardimen-
nballona per la si-
avvenire dei nostri
zza d'Italia.
scrittore del giorn-
mentare l'imprevi-
ta delle Autorità;
plorare l'opera in-
noli caporioni pro-
di malcontento
venduti certamente
ni, altri cospiranti
sicuri di
nella convulsione
qualche cocco, di
e minima parte il
ritorno all'antico;
plorare con ama-
enza logica e senza
imaste nelle retro-
sono resa ancora
del dovere di tut-
lmo della vita; sol-
mentre scuopano
a di lire nel lusso
icere senza limite.
meraviglia, di do-
egore? — di indi-
cora, in uno degli
Provincia Pavese
mente severo, sul-
quale si sono dati
ragosto; comitice
illi, scarrozzati in
nti, sbornie, e tut-
ai decreti vecchi e
almieri, ai disagi;
to gli occhi di co-
per tutti gloriosi,
di fidanzate che
ampi di battaglia,
fra le eruzioni spa-
sioni il marito, lo
erte, che affolla i
fischia della guer-
ve senza una pre-
ritegno, ma che al-
alla minima ri-
tentanea, ad una
el pranzo, sempre
iesta, urla; male-

all'amore, che ha triplicato i propri
bundagni, che si occupa liberamente
dei propri affari, dei propri interessi
e che, in molti e molti e troppi casi,
sta in città,
al sicuro, al proprio posto di lavoro.
E questa è la brava gente che si la-
menta. Brava gente che dovrebbe ver-
gognarsi. Sacrifici e privazioni cui è
costretta a sottostare saranno sempre
inferiori, immensamente inferiori a
quelli che, ogni giorno, sono imposti
e serenamente, eplonterosamente ac-
cettati dai nostri soldati che da mesi,
da anni, vivono sotto il fuoco del ne-
mico, coi muscoli tesi nel lavoro spi-
branle dell'escavo di una trincea o del-
la costruzione di una strada sotto il
firo del cannone, dei trasporti perico-
losi di munizioni per sentieri alpini
quasi impraticabili, coll'occhio fisso
sul nemico che studia, sorreglia i mo-
vimenti e della più piccola disatten-
zione approfitta per un attacco di sor-
presa.
La battaglia vittoriosa raggiunge u-
na grandezza e una vastità orrende e
magnifiche: il più vermiglio, il più
puro sangue d'Italia cementa le terre
irredente alla madre Patria. E una
piccola folla di pigmei, rachitici nel
cervello quando non lo sono anche nel
corpo, proprio in queste giornate di
attesa e di raccoglimento, protesta:
protesta perchè deve ricorrere a qual-
che espediente, deve rinunciare ad un
piatto. Evidentemente si tratta di un
pretesto. La piccola folla dei vigliacchi
e dei traditori ubbidisce agli ordini
dei capoecia e fa del suo meglio per
dimostrare agli imperi centrali che
non hanno scuopato i loro qualtrini.
Bbbene, questi traditori, devono es-
sere puniti.
Una punizione che è tanto per il sol-
dato italiano. Ma il soldato e uomo di
fede e di coraggio, mentre costoro so-
no dei miserabili apaches della strada
e della politica.
siano inviati al fronte, in prima
linea, in faccia al nemico. Qui, a so-
ffrire quello che soffrono i galantuomi-
ni, a vivere nelle caverne e nelle tane,
a piegare la schiena alla falica, a tutte
le fatiche. Quindici giorni di trincea
basterebbero per far rinsavire questa
brava gente.
Ha ragione lo scrittore del Corrie-
re: qui le proteste dei signori esone-
rati, che molte volte sono anche dei
perfettissimi imboscati, fanno ridere.

dagni insperati che dava loro il lavoro
non hanno saputo mettere a profitto
della resistenza nazionale. Hanno la-
cardo. Ma terminata la breve giorna-
ta, hanno goduto spensieratamente e
sacciatamente mentre gli altri soffri-
vano e morivano nel nome d'Italia,
hanno dato ascolto agli agitatori inte-
ressati, si sono dimenticati del loro
dovere, hanno cooperato col nemico
nel diminuire la resistenza del Paese,
nel colpirlo alle spalle, a colpi di
mazza ferrata.
Il soldato ride perchè è buono, è
generoso. Ma domani potrebbe chie-
re conto.
Il Governo, le autorità, tutto i citta-
dini di buon senso devono preoccupar-
si del doloroso stato di
cose e tagliare il male alla radice.
Vengano quasi gli eroici
che si divertono, slanchi ormai di
tutti gli altri spassi, a far baccino e
surranno degnamente ricevuti. Trove-
ranno comodo posto alle feritoie delle
trincee, sulla pancia delle cannoni,
sulle rocce dell'alpe nuda e selvaggia;
faranno della ginnastica nella costru-
zione di strade e di teleferiche, sotto
il sole, coll'elmo in testa; veglieran-
no molte notti di seguito, proveranno
le belle emozioni dell'attacco e del
contrattacco; insomma avranno campo
di farsi onore.
CENSURA
Il Governo sa quel che deve fare.
Una cosa semplice e gaia. Istituire dei
tratt... di piacere per il fronte e in-
carrozzarvi tutti coloro che dimostra-
no di avere i nervi scossi, di trovarsi
a disagio in città, tutti coloro che non
riconoscono la Patria e maledicono la
santa guerra di redenzione. Tutti colo-
ra che maledicono alla guerra sfrut-
tando nel modo più indegno la guer-
ra, i portentosi eroi che,
sperano di salvare oggi e
nell'avvenire la pancia per i fichi.
Dalla Fronte, 20 agosto 1917.
Zio Francesco.
La nostra guerra
I Comunicati di Cadorna
Bollettino del 2 Settembre:
Sulla fronte Giulia nella giornata di
ieri lotta poco intensa. Contrattacchi
nemici vennero respinti sull'orlo me-
ridionale dell'altopiano di Bainsizza,
sulle pendici nord di Monte S. Gabrie-
le e a nord-ovest di Tivoli (est di Go-

The article appeared in La Provincia Pavese on 5 September 1917 under the title 'The
Austrians of Italy'.

From Alfredo Panzini:

Nemico alle spalle: espressione della guerra, al nostro fronte, "per significare il senso d'abbandono in cui il soldato si sentiva" (1917); v. *fronte interno* **Enemy at our back:** term of war, of our front 'witnessing the sense of abandonment in which the soldier found himself'; ⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Panzini, *Dizionario Moderno*, p. 460. Emphasis mine.

ATROCITÀ DEGLI AUSTRIACI NEL 1848 a Milano e nei dintorni

I soldati fecero cose atroci.

CARLO CATTANEO.

Il fremito d'orrore suscitato in Parlamento e in tutta l'Italia dalla narrazione dell'on. Barzilai sulla tortura inflitta alla vecchia madre del martire Nazario Sauro perchè riconoscesse il figliuolo nel tragico incontro precorritore della morte sul patibolo, e l'infamia di quella madre e della sorella trascinate dinanzi alla forca di Pola, non devono essere considerati come un *episodio*, ma quale non ultimo atto delle atrocità austriache in terra italiana (*).

Si può essere più forti della morte: *disprezzando la morte*. Sauro fece così!

Le *grandi* pagine della storia hanno attraverso i secoli rivelato la ferocia austriaca di *Stato*; altre pagine *ignorate o poco note* devono nell'ora presente essere ravvivate alla memoria del popolo italiano, perchè il ricordo delle atrocità austriache sofferte dalla generazione passata animi quella combattente a trovare novelle energie nella lotta punitrice contro il secolare nemico d'Italia. Non è questa propaganda d'o-

(*) Le quali sono ancor poca cosa, confrontate con quello commesso dai tedeschi nel Belgio. Giorgio Lqrand dice che, al paragone, Radetzki e Haynan possono considerarsi come modelli di bontà e di gentilezza.

U. G. I. I.

The Interventionist Teachers League introduction to the booklet by Nino Bazzetta da Vemenia on Austrian atrocities. It includes a clear reference to the remobilizing intent of the publication: 'non devono essere considerate un episodio ma quale non ultimo

atto delle atrocità austriache in terra italiana'/'they must not be considered isolated incidents but rather as part of a series of atrocities committed on Italian territory' ⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Nino Bazzetta da Vemenia, *Atrocità degli Austriaci nel 1848 a Milano e nei dintorni*, (Pavia: Tipografia Popolare, 1917). Consulted at the Bonetta library in Pavia.

The Flood



People checking the level of the Ticino, others go by boat in Via Milazzo which is flooded with water (picture provided by Fototeca Musei Civici Pavia).

An article entitled 'L'inondazione' appeared in the *La Provincia Pavese* on 2 June 1917 during the flood confirms the data and pieces of information provided by Cesare Vivanti in his letters to his son Augusto. The article, in fact, underlines the crucial role of the civil engineer in supporting the families of Borgo at a time when many young men were at the front and could not provide help.⁷⁰ The sensationalist term 'inondazione' is not common, the 'flood' in Pavia is generally defined 'la piena' simply referring to the high level of the water. The choice of this title thus appears of further interest as it shows the mobilization of language. The theme of the flood, and of the damage and discomfort it caused to the inhabitants of Borgo Ticino, is covered for the rest of 1917 in *La Provincia Pavese*. This is not only due to the fact that it is a local newspaper and, as such, deals with local problems. In fact, the attention to the difficulties experienced by the people of Borgo, along with those related to the new norms on the consumption of food and beverages, have to be seen in the light of the new wave of remobilization. These problems are presented as a common challenge, that, similar to the war effort, have to be endured and overcome heroically. The need to support the inhabitants of Borgo is implicitly compared to that of soldiers. This reinforces the idea of maintaining the support for war, the proximity to combatants at the front and the national interventionist belief in eventual victory. Peace is presented as an impossible option that would significantly worsen the well-being of Italians and frustrate all the sacrifices endured both at the front and on the home front.

⁷⁰ The article could not be inserted due to the bad quality of the image. The sensationalist term 'inondazione' is not used for the 'flood' in Pavia, which is generally defined 'piena'. The choice of this title thus appears of further interest.

Translated Quotes⁷¹

Chapter 1 War as a family lexicon

Conversation with me (this is how I like to call the set of your letters that you do not often send me)... Your writings bring me immense pleasure because in them I hear your voice and this demonstrates that for you it is necessary to write letters rather than postcards, given that you are not in the immediate proximity of danger I do not need to get a clear understanding of your condition.⁷² (p. 61)

Mum is not here with that repeated 'Pipin-Pipin' which wakes me up; what I have here is an alarm clock that I have positioned somewhere, which screeches in my ears for a few seconds in a vulgar way .⁷³ (p. 62)

Upon a concrete block, one side of which was still flat and smooth, a table was improvised, from backpacks, from haversacks emerged a sheet of paper, a fountain pen, and everyone writes, and writing is restful, because as we remember you, as we tell you of our lives the weariness seems to fade into the distance, it seems that every word written takes one of our many pains away with it and when the letter is finished we feel what is a truly blissful sense of wellbeing, we breathe more freely, I would almost say we start to live anew...In these moments we cut ourselves off from all that surrounds us and which is never nice, we are no longer under a stone, hidden in a rock, we are no longer in danger, no, no, we are at your sides in our calm homes that know only peace and we talk of many things, of fine weather and good wine.⁷⁴ (p. 63)

⁷¹ All attempts of translation are mine. Otherwise a reference to the translation used is provided.

⁷² Campodonico, *Lauri*, p. 108.

⁷³ Zanivolti, unpublished collection, 8 January 1916.

⁷⁴ Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla trincea* p. 139.

When your letters arrive it is an explosion of joy everywhere, stretching hands into the dark, given that the letters arrive in advanced military positions; they arrive divided according to the different companies, and they remain there with us all night long, kept securely to the chest of the first who received them. Then, when dawn enables us to read, each of us gets out of his hideout, and grabs the dear and known envelope, carrying the beloved address.⁷⁵ (p. 64)

You know, we pick them out in a second, we glimpse our own letters even from a distance, even in the imposing heap, who does not recognize his own family's envelopes and his parents' handwriting even from far away? Everyone does. Your envelopes are longer and larger than all the others and this is helpful to me because I spot them more quickly than the others, I pull them out in a rush and then escape behind the stone which is my castle.⁷⁶ (p. 64)

I am under a rock in puddles nonetheless I'm happy as today I got your letters. They make me feel so good.⁷⁷ (p. 65)

We were in the line, I was at the top with the flag. The captain, on his horse started shouting our names in a metallic voice, assigning a company to each of us. It was a somehow sad ceremony, because everyone saw embodied in that captain, his own tough and adamant fate, and everyone feared the unwritten law. (p. 67)

For instance, how the short list of those who died for the fatherland disappears among the mundane things in the *Corriere della Sera*! And how it is followed immediately by the programmes of theatres and movie theatres...⁷⁸ (p. 69)

and you Austria, come closer if you're brave enough/ if the Ridiculous let you pass,/ the brave Alpini will teach you enough'.⁷⁹ (p. 70)

⁷⁵ Ibid.p. 140.

⁷⁶ Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla Trincea*, 29 June 1916, from Forte Aralta p. 140.

⁷⁷ Vivanti, *Scrivimi*, p. 161.

⁷⁸ Zanivolti, Unpublished collection, 29 June 1917.

⁷⁹ My translation: attempt to translate the rhythm and not simply the literal meaning of the song. Tocci, *Fede Dovere*, p. 122 .

The Ridiculous is the infantry corps that wears on its collar military insignia of all colours, hats of all sorts, whereas all the Alpini wear only the green flames and the hat with the eagle plume⁸⁰ (p. 70)

I spent the nice day of the Pentecost on the train, on one of those trains on which one reads 'horse 8, men 40'. In peacetime they are used to carry animals. I spent that night sleeping under a small bunk with my head on a loaf of a bread ... Suddenly 'bag down' was shouted.⁸¹ (p. 72)

My Dears, what the hell did you write on the envelope? "Allegraggio signor GZ etc.... Alessandria preme"... No, look, write something like this "Second Lieutenant G. Zanivolti Hospital Arrigo Alessandria" leave the 'preme' to pen pushers, do you understand me? One should be short and simple, especially when writing to a member of the military.⁸² (p. 75)

Dialect, one should learn dialect, sole idiom of their thoughts. To be quick in learning this dialect of theirs, actually that Venetian language, so sensitive and melodious. Me, who would like to know all the dialects of Italy, rather than the Tuscan dialect of the persons of letters.⁸³ (p. 77)

Now you look for each other among countrymen, but in a short while you will look for those who have spent the same night, who have shared the same solitude, the same passion⁸⁴ (p. 77)

You see the old ones who do not admit anyone to the company? Who embrace each other like brothers who have met again after a long time? They made jokes about life in military positions: they were fetid hideouts in the lost rock, where when one undresses, the jacket should be stepped on, otherwise it will walk away on its own; but after a while they have named them all with deep affection, stone after stone, like

⁸⁰ On the mythical representation of the *Alpini* Marco Mondini, *Alpini. Parole e Immagini di un mito guerriero*. (Roma: Laterza, 2008).

⁸¹ Zanivolti's unpublished letter collection, Udine 24 May 1915.

⁸² Ibid. 15 November 1915.

⁸³ Jahier, *Con me e con gli Alpini*, (Roma: La Voce, 1920) p. 59.

⁸⁴ Ibid. pp.97-98.

villages: the two dice, the cliffs, the mysterious stone; and they keep talking about them, and they were crying because they had to abandon them. These had become the home of their skill⁸⁵ (p. 78)

And they exchange language, other than trenches. It is moving to listen to *Agordini* making an effort with the Piedmont dialect, and the *Segusini* distorting the Venetian dialect as if returning this military affection. Shouting 'pais' rather than 'cio ti' to the *casere*, as to the *bergerie* of the Val Chisone. Well done Italy that is unifying forever in sacrifice.⁸⁶ (p. 79)

and then we will always speak well of you as the night we left you made the effort to shake hands with us as if we were always part of the same company as brothers in arms therefore I thank you for everything. The old soldier of your company.⁸⁷ (p. 79)

With my current company everything is going very well: I have some good and nice officers as colleagues. Our canteen is one of the most joyful of the battalion. When at lunch Mario Jahier (brother of Piero) and the medical officer get engaged in a discussion, Lieutenant Perin stands up with a solemn attitude and puts on the head of the guilty a huge grey-green top hat, a masterpiece by Goria and the company tailor. If Piero Jahier and Aldo Perin start an endless talk on Russia, Ukraine, the Pope or the function of *mulettiere*, Goria, as director of the canteen, asks to bring to the table of the mentioned lieutenants a huge button, on which one can read 'I am given to the one who attaches me' and 'qui me non vult, cilindrum vult', a no less incredible masterpiece realised by your son.⁸⁸ (p. 81)

In the evening then what unimaginable chaos. We are youngsters again: and we make noise as never before, not even in my student life, i.e. when I made plenty of noise. Yesterday, for instance, we were in Capo Sile. Beppino Pananti got the command ... There we drank like Lanzechenecchi, and we flirted with a woman, a teacher, a poet,

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 58.

⁸⁷ Monelli, *Le Scarpe al Sole*, p. 17. (Milano: Mursia, 2016).

⁸⁸ Tocci, *Fede, Dovere*, p. 161.

and a pregnant woman who was dining with us. I joked so much, jokes without any common sense that I can easily improvise, especially if I drink half a glass more than planned (in Capo Sile I might even have drunk twenty glasses...) The conclusion is that on Wednesday we are invited to lunch at her place: another drinking session, more chaos, more improvisation⁸⁹ (p. 83)

There is a sergeant who is specialised in making *cénci* and we have named him the cook of our *ribòtte*, in the same way as I was voted official orator. No matter what happens, we piss speeches: a couple of them, which I was asked to give, were for the birth of the king! And I gave another one yesterday evening without being asked⁹⁰ (p. 83)

We simulated a *comitium* in favour of Marquise Dumset, who was a candidate in Capua against Bonanno of the Roman people, and who is now with us in the battalion. From the beginning endless applause and acclamations; then right in the middle of the third part, Cempini shouts in my face 'Paid!!!' and then we start throwing apple peels, napkins, corks ... I was leading this in my role as main orator of the *comitium*: you can imagine that chaos! Twenty people screaming and me shouting even louder! But the following morning we got half a telling-off from the colonel 'because we risk alarming the village with our screams'

Yesterday my soldiers prepared a nice grave for him, with a cross made of red stones on white stones and a small epitaph with the engraving 'To their Luigino Corti. The soldiers of the 18° company Machine Guns'⁹¹ (p. 85)

I am ok I am loved and respected as a father by my soldiers. My section is nothing but a family.⁹² (p. 85)

⁸⁹ Leonardo Cambini, *Epistolario di Guerra*, p. 48.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

⁹¹ Zanivolti, unpublished collection, (Villa dal Brun, 22 June 1917).

⁹² Ibid., September 1916. Written on a postcard at 5 pm from the war zone.

Zanivolti 22 June 1917. His name is Luigi: a good fellow, simple, strong, handsome. He belonged to the '96 cohort. On the 20th he said his last goodbye and went to celebrate his saints-day in heaven. He never met his dad, and his mum died a few years ago and now he only had⁹³ the love of his sisters. (p. 86)

and now that he is gone, I think with deep regret, that his sacrifice for our fatherland would have been much more useful if only the grenade did not hit him so early. Believe me my dear Rosati: it is not true that I was hiding my concern. I was calm and serene: it seemed to me that nothing bad could happen to my boy. Maybe a wound, I thought of that, but I considered it an occasion to keep him at home for a while.⁹⁴ (p. 87)

He had a hurtful baptism: his little Raffaello, the brother-son, who had already participated as second lieutenant in the campaign of Libya, fell on the field, near Sagrado on 30 June 1915. This loss hit Leonardo, in one of his dearest bonds and represented the strongest stimulus to that spiritual drive he gave to his life on earth.⁹⁵ (p. 87)

I did not want to write to you, I did not want to write to anyone. I am moved by your kind sympathy, which found a way to celebrate and honour the memory of my child, and the way to do something good.⁹⁶ (p. 88)

And my first days as a novice officer, I was always with him, thinking of him, imagining how he would have laughed if he could see me marching the wrong way or keeping my legs open while giving the military salute: and that same morning, I enjoyed the last part of my action thinking in my head of what to write in a letter to tell him about

⁹³ The gap between 'now' and 'had' is faithfully maintained in the translation along with all the time discrepancies of this passage.

⁹⁴ Leonardo Cambini, *Epistolario*, Letter to Prof. Carlo Rosati, 20 July 1915, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Worth noting is that this is a preface written in 1941 is inspired by the Fascist rhetoric on war and military sacrifice: the attitude toward war attributed to Cambini should therefore be examined with a critical eye. (see appendix).

⁹⁶ Cambini, *Epistolario*, letter to his friend Prof. Carlo Rosati, 20 July 1915 p. 3.

how I let my company get lost in the small lemon woods, and I returned happy and serene looking for the sentence to make him laugh and improve his mood... And then, all at once, a horse comes in my direction, at high speed, my brother runs in my direction and then... Then here we are tomorrow I will march, have breakfast, take a nap: at the meeting we will crack jokes with the major and with my colleagues⁹⁷ (p. 89)

And upon the two letters returned to us, the hand of the post officer was not satisfied with 'died' but wrote 'died a hero' and, on the other one, 'dead, glory and honour'. What thankfulness I felt, dear professor, for that recognition by an unknown person, for this infinite kindness which is able to find a word of supreme comfort for those who will see these undelivered messages returned.⁹⁸ (p. 92)

I am here lost in the heart of war: in the brain. Frightened not because of the frightening look of the city, quiet and silent, or the one of my soldiers, happy and clean, but for this silent continuation, for this life which slips through the streets, as if trying to escape profane looks. And we feel little, little, little in front of the big thing that our war is. We keep going, superb and trustful: second lieutenant of the terrible, it seemed to me that everything should open up to let me pass. Now I am lost, confused, frightened: and everything appears small, as if disappearing in front of this huge look of war: everything, everything, even my huge pain. "A second lieutenant died": this is what all the grief of my soul means here. And we still have to give, we still have to suffer.⁹⁹ (p. 92)

Because now we are separate. Not that we do not love each other. We enjoy finding each other similar in involvement and intentions; we exchange little favours full of affection with sombre words; our soldiers speak well about us to each other: but there is some self-restraint between us on important issues; our confidence goes somewhere else. This is war and while destiny unites you in the same effort of love,

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 4 .

⁹⁸ Ibid. Livorno, 23 August 1915 p. 13.

⁹⁹ Cambini, *Epistolario*, letterto Prof. Alberto Niccolai, Udine 30 August 1915, pp. 16-17.

and love is as vital as bread, you are separate.¹⁰⁰ (p. 93)

Step back brother-father, because it is time to do so, time to watch only: to watch this strong youngster who is a full head taller than any Alpino. So much stronger than his brother-father. With less imagination and less violence. But a lot more of true goodness.¹⁰¹ (p. 94)

¹⁰⁰ Jahier, *Con me e con gli Alpini*, p. 43-44.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p. 48.

Chapter 2: Literary Anchors

We are in open country and the only beautiful thing is the 'divine green silence of the plain'.¹⁰² (p. 102)

Moreover, a simple signal flare can determine my action, and if an observation post signals me toward two peaceful shepherds herding their sheep, like a Don Quixote of sorts I must ready my lance.¹⁰³ (p. 106)

So saying, and commending himself with all his heart to his lady Dulcinea, imploring her to support him in such a peril, **with lance in rest** and covered by his buckler, he charged at Rocinante's fullest gallop and fell upon the first mill that stood in front of him;¹⁰⁴ (p. 107)

Austro-Hungarian policemen, forest rangers, and soldiers generally preferred to dress up as farmers. With rural work clothes and tools they went out early in the morning to the fields close to our trenches. They worked hard all day long with a scythe and, while reaping the harvest, kept an eye on our positions.¹⁰⁵ (p. 107)

Ariosto was similar to our war correspondents and described one hundred battles without having seen one... The big battles are for him pleasant excursions into the verdant countryside and even death seems to him a nice continuation of life. Some of his captains die but keep fighting without realizing they are dead.¹⁰⁶ (p. 109)

Baudelaire is the opposite. The Sun of the High Plateau was made to shed light on his

¹⁰² Augusto Vivanti, "*Scrivimi più che puoi*" L'epistolario familiare di Augusto Vivanti in guerra (1915-1919), ed. by Cristina Guani, (Milano: Edizioni Unicopli, 2011). p. 313.

¹⁰³ Antonio Vitelli, unpublished notebook, Vitelli, Antonio (Museo della Guerra Rovereto) *Doss Remit. (col 17o gruppo montagna) Appunti di guerra" 1917, Novembre 6 -1918 Gennaio 9.*

¹⁰⁴ translation from Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote de la Mancha* Atidem Aroha, ed., (ebook version, Alejandros Libros, 2013).

¹⁰⁵ *Corriere della Sera* 17 June 1915.

¹⁰⁶ Lussu, *Un Anno*, p. 114.

gloomy life. As a student from Bologna he could have wandered naked in the mountains drinking sun and cognac. He could have fought the war alongside the lieutenant-colonel at the Stoccardo observation point. Like him, like thousands of mates of mine, he had to drink in order to numb himself and forget. Life was to him what war is to us. But what sparks of human joy spring out of his pessimism!¹⁰⁷(p. 109)

It is on the mountains of Asiago that I learnt to understand two of the most characteristic souls of the western culture. I knew them already, but only superficially, as one could know them, reading them, at a table, in a city, in normal times. (p. 110)

Maybe only in war does Horace's *carpe diem* become a clear truth.¹⁰⁸ (p. 111)

Up here, in the solitude of the mountains, the sound of a mandolin, the short story read in a magazine, or the departure of a comrade make you cry (silently, of course!). Who would be able to live a life of resentfulness and hatred?¹⁰⁹ (p. 111)

tool for the elevation and civil progression of the population and thus realizing the ideological and political demands of the Risorgimento.¹¹⁰ (p. 112)

the mental attitude one would acquire there in years which were crucial for the building of one's character, formed within a community that should follow common rules, and in which obedience, respect for property, and sacrifice, were built along with all those values also spread by the literature of the time: *The Heart of a Boy*, *Pinocchio* and other works, from which one would draw the lesson that only obedient children deserve the love of the blue-haired fairy. (p. 113)

The ideal man that emerges from his pages is that of a man who lives fully, who does

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 114-115.

¹⁰⁸ Tocci, *Fede il Dover* p. 121.

¹⁰⁹ Vivanti, *Scrivimi* p.324

¹¹⁰ Ernesto Bosna, *Stato e Scuola*, (Bari: Cacucci, 2000), pp. 198-199.

not shirk any kind of duty - spiritual, moral, practical - that life imposes on him, who bravely faces all kinds of responsibility, even the riskiest. No matter what, he never thinks of himself alone, he knows his action and thoughts are a tiny part of a universal order. (p. 115)

The reader descends into the dark heart of the earth, gets back up in the open air on a high mountain, all alone on the infinite ocean, and physically penetrates the dense yet intangible light of paradise. (p. 116)

I seek my fate in the pocket Dante that I always carry with me in my jacket pocket, in the hope that it may at least serve to stop a bullet. Fifth on the left: "your essence will remain with you".¹¹¹ (p. 116)

beyond the crag all at once, a rock of Dante's bedlam, the 8th circle of hell made real.¹¹² (p. 117)

Vivanti 15 March 1916. the exchange of gunfire increases and degenerates into real combat, the artillery thunders then the searchlights scan the battlefield, hundreds of signal rockets rise and the entire valley resembles the hell scenes of *Mefistofele*. (p. 120)

It is very hot but it doesn't matter, yesterday evening I was at the cinematograph... in the open air. It is meant to amuse soldiers and the cinematograph is set on a truck it goes around and it stops for two shows. It is the thespian cart.¹¹³ (p. 120)

Leaving Padua was a deep sorrow. Doubly so as we were abandoning city life with all its comfort and as we were leaving the known for the unknown. In fact with our

¹¹¹ Paolo Monelli, *Le scarpe al Sole*, p. 127.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 115.

¹¹³ Vivanti, *Scrivimi*, p. 342.

departure from Padua we became men of war. And it was a trip, especially beyond Mestre... A little hurtful because we were abandoning our native soil and the things most dear to us came to mind. The most intimate memories and aspects resurfaced. During the trip I wrote you a letter in pencil that I then sent via express then, finding my mates asleep, I also curled up in a corner in a wagon. But for us all that sleep was a little like Lucia's.¹¹⁴ (p. 122)

[Vitelli Farewell to Doss Remit]. I stay a little longer to load the last bits of kit onto the mules. Before leaving I look out once more to see the enemy's positions enveloped in the dark. A crackling of machine gun fire, some flares are still rising and falling again in gold and silver rain. Silver reflector strips that criss-cross other in amazing duels, invisible and deadly snipers up to their usual attacks. The twilight air whitens in the fog and sleet... I may not see these places again that might have become my grave. I will go far away, somewhere else. But where? What awaits me?... Yhe loud 'Look out!' and 'Forward!' You didn't leave anything behind, did you? Everything loaded? Yes, Lieutenant! Let's go then, with God! The last mules moved, a hard, icy snow was falling in the twilight atmosphere as a stormy shiver. Let's go: on foot, in the snow and in the mud, me and the few men left, we moved down the twisting paths on the cliff. Farewell Doss Remit! Goodbye Maly and Tures! Goodbye Altitude 514! Goodbye Roncola! We leave bent into the blast of the snowstorm. We go in the middle of winter leaving safe shelters without knowing where we will be tomorrow but certain that we will have to work hard again, to win out over nature once more and against adversity. Full of a burning desire we cannot fulfill, namely that of knowing the treacherous fate, full of longing for the leave that we are well aware won't be granted to us. (p. 123)

I wanted to ask you if you could lend me some books to read, books, books of any kind. You can't imagine the thirst for printed paper that affects us sometimes when we

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p. 146.

are all dry... Could you, in your weekly letter, ask you sister to provide some books or to find them for me through someone in S. Donà?¹¹⁵ (p. 130)

[Idem] If it were possible, I would send a soldier to collect them, and my days would be spent pleasantly. I have carried out some searches in attics and granaries to see if I too could be lucky as you were when you found the works by Conti: but so far I have explored in vain! (p. 131)

I have here in front of me in a parcel a couple of books I have just bought, the Aiglon and Cyrano by Rostand which amuse me a lot.¹¹⁶ (p. 132)

I have also read 'La Lettura' and 'Il Secolo XX' in which I found the well-written article by Caffa entitled 'Rear areas and field hospitals'. As far as books are concerned, if you haven't lent the volumes of the Salani collection to someone, could you send them to me via parcel post?¹¹⁷ (p. 132)

Warzone 18 March 1918. I am not lacking anything here. You could nonetheless send me a parcel of books. In order not to bother you, I indicate the books that I found mentioned in the *Corriere della Sera* of the 17th. The *Passion of Italy*, by Sem Benelli - *Novelle d'ambo i sessi* by A Panzini, *L'altare del passato* by Guido Gozzano. If these books cannot be found I totally defer to you.¹¹⁸ (p. 133)

¹¹⁵ Cambini, *Epistolario* p.34.

¹¹⁶ Vivanti, *Scrivimi*, p. 205.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 207.

¹¹⁸ Tocci, *Fede il dovere*, p. 155.

In the few hours I have free from duty I would like to read, study, write; but I have no books apart from the guide of the Val Camonica and a military handbook in three volumes. If I am granted leave to go to Milan, I will bring back a lot of stuff, especially my poets¹¹⁹ (p. 133)

Today is a rather serene day: the nice weather that is back and the reading of a detective novel from the 'Monthly Novel' have calmed my mood a little.¹²⁰ (p. 134)

I found at Villa Rossi, situated in the woods, midway between Gallio and Asiago, some abandoned books. It was night and the squad raid did not leave me much time. In my hurry I picked *Orlando Furioso* by Ariosto, a book about birds and a French edition of the *Flowers of Evil* by Baudelaire. The book about birds was missing the first few pages and I never knew its author. I took those books to the plateau. Once saved by me and once by my orderly, I always safeguarded them. It was probably the army's only mobile literary library. My orderly had a particular passion for birds, and this illustrated book became his pastime. He was a hunter. He was hardly able to read, but he was mainly interested in the pictures. Whenever I read, he read too and we exchanged our impressions.¹²¹ (p. 135)

It was a sunny day, all was quiet on the frontline. Only, carried by the wind, the noise of a rifle shot came to us. My orderly, his rifle across his knees like a skewer, was curled up with his book on birds. I sat next to him immersed in the escape of Angelica and Orlando. A voice broke our silence.¹²² (p. 136)

¹¹⁹ Gadda, *Giornale di Guerra e di prigionia* (Milano: Garzanti, 2002), p. 37.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 39.

¹²¹ Lussu, *Un anno.*, p. 113.

¹²² Ibid., p. 115.

he made jokes about the sharpshooters, and about my book. He wanted to know its author. He confessed he never read Ariosto. I gave my book to the orderly, took my walking stick and got back to him. Just to say something related to our previous exchange I said: 'Orlando is divine.' He answered 'He would deserve to become Prime Minister'. 'Prime Minister is maybe too much. But he wouldn't conduct the army worse than Cadorna,' I replied. 'No his Excellency has no military experience, but he is certainly the best orator and the greatest political man our Parliament has ever had.' 'His Excellency?' The question became difficult. In the short explanation that followed I realized that while I was talking of Orlando 'Furioso' by Ariosto, my colleague meant the Honourable Orlando, member of parliament and Minister of Justice of the Boselli Ministry.¹²³ (p. 137)

At the sight of my commander I have a surge of disdain: but his ridiculous figure and the comic terror painted on his face reminds me of Don Abbondio escaping in the face of the Lanzichenecchi advance. Then my rage fades away and leaves space for a sense of commiseration and indulgence.¹²⁴ (p. 138)

¹²³ Lussu, *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116.

¹²⁴ Sebastiano Spina, unpublished notebook.

Chapter 3 Family Communication

Ah, dear Pepino, I don't blame you for being like this based on what you read and hear there in Milan, but the reality of things is quite different. I also, in my youthful fervour, when everything seemed like poetry, glory and honour, felt blood pulsing in my veins at the first news about the war in Libya. I almost envied those brave souls who fought for their fatherland in such dry soil, I dreamt of glory and triumph. And even at the outbreak of the present war, which dragged millions of men onto the field, who did not feel a noble tremor for the endangered fatherland and did not dream with pleasure of his honourable place on the battlefield? But when one stepped over the border and bid farewell to the fatherland with all its memories and ties of affection, when one heard the dull and terrifying rumble of the cannon with appalling carnage all around, when one saw the first blood flow and heard the moan of the dying, ah, Peppino, how many men's enthusiasm paled, how much poetry and how many dreams vanished like clouds in the blue evening sky.¹²⁵ (p. 146)

Dear Dad, The news that the newspapers bring us in these days is astonishing. I do not believe though in the good faith of these people. Until I am on the banks of the Piave, talking peace seems out of place to me.¹²⁶ (p. 150)

beautiful times those, even though only in appearance in that they were the herald of many storms.¹²⁷ (p. 152)

The admission letter for officer training was due in many cases not to a fervent patriotism or to coherent interventionist ideas but rather to the will to maintain a social position and middle-class lifestyle.¹²⁸ (p. 153)

¹²⁵ Zanivolti's letter to his cousin Peppino, June 1915.

¹²⁶ Tocci, *Fede Dovere*, p. 196

□

¹²⁷ Vivanti, *Scrivimi*, p. 150.

On this day, which is probably the saddest of the many I have lived through, I implore you to hold in your mind and in your heart the sense of desolation that you leave us in and to draw from this thought and feeling a constant norm of caution and foresight. Don't ignore my aspirations and how much I have worked to fulfill them: if you have the chance to satisfy them, do not miss out on doing that, with all your strength, out of love for me, even if they do not suit you. But I implore you, do not place obstacles in the way of anything that I might ask of you, I am always thinking of your own good, but along with that also for your duty and your honour. Make sure anyhow, that these three elements form the essence of each opinion of mine. Our thought might become guidance, comfort, and always hope: the love for fatherland should never be separate from that for the family, especially when in this case, it relies on one single life. Faith, good and our love support all of your actions and inspire the fateful triad that enlightens your conduct. (p. 155)

You ask me what I think of war? Nothing and too much. The Russians seem like an elephant running away from a fly. I always have officers in my bureau, most of them lawyers, the other day there were two of them, out of three.¹²⁹ (p. 156)

Today the *Gazzetta del Popolo* carries a long and beautiful article about the military academy. I bought it and I will bring it to you. It says, among other things, you are making a noble and obscure sacrifice. 'Noble and obscure sacrifice in that today the cadets from Modena academy fight a terrible battle' also because of 'the conscious renunciation to youth, to carefree university life, to be here in this gloomy study temple, this canteen, this squalid barracks where one learns to become a soldier.'¹³⁰ (p. 157)

¹²⁸ Piero del Negro, 'L'esercito Italiano, I volontari e i Giovani nella Grande Guerra', in Rasera e Zadra, eds., *Volontari Italiani*, (pp. 5-37) here p 21.

¹²⁹ Vivanti, *Scrivimi*, p. 127.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p. 130.

I have always received 'La Provincia' which often is contended between my second and third reading by the several Pavesi and by the many students from Pavia in my company.¹³¹ (p. 158)

In order to draw a conclusion from of these rumours, it is necessary that I say what Romano Guerra says in the *Giornale d'Italia*: 'Time will tell us where the truth lies.'¹³² (p. 159)

Dear Dad I read with great pleasure the article by Benedetto Croce and the letter by the colleague from Pesaro. Unfortunately, the news that the press sends us is far from good. The only newspaper that I could get was the yesterday's with the article by Right Honouable Morgari.¹³³ (p. 159)

That God bless him, our poor child, that God bless Italy: and that we will win soon: dear, dear child. Did they cross his arms? Did they close his eyes?'¹³⁴ (p. 161)

And Truci wants me to pray! As for me, I never do that but, whenever one acts in the name of an ideal and out of duty, whenever one observes the supernatural, isn't this an evolution of the soul... towards He who is the beginning and the end?¹³⁵ (p. 162)

You will tell your wife, I pray to you, that tonight I will also recite an Hail Mary with her intention: and believe me that they will have a great party in Heaven as they always have, they say, when a sinner converts. But I ain't converting, you know? And the Hail Mary for you will be the first I have recited since I came to war.¹³⁶ (p. 162)

My dear, was I born yesterday or today? The 15th or the 16th? The day of the Virgin Mary or that of Saint Rocco? I really don't remember and with this doubt I have

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 133.

¹³² Tocci, *Fede il Dovere*. p. 73

¹³³ Michellini Tocci, *Fede il Dovere*, p. 112.

¹³⁴ Cambini, *Epistolario*, p. 85.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 74-75.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 100-101.

celebrated twice with great solemnity, I ate a lemon more and did a march less.¹³⁷ (p. 165)

Even here, as in Monti and elsewhere, I have come across the custom of offering the nicest and biggest bunch of flowers to the Virgin Mary.¹³⁸ (p. 166)

But they are wonderful people! Today I encountered two of their cemeteries, with the crosses aligned in the green like so many grieving sisters, on each of them a name. They have an even greater cult of the dead, a sense of infinite pity for those sacrificed and abandoned, deceived. On those crosses I prayed. Are we not the same as they?¹³⁹ (p. 166)

To the archpriest I wrote a short 8 page letter. I want to think that he got it. I met Don Giovanni in the past and I am still meeting him. He is 100 metres further up away from me. Every day we spend a few hours pleasantly talking about the past and future of our Magherno. Finally I reached my goal. I served for his mass on the dusty hillside of Mount Corrada. This evening, under the mild sun of Austria, during the liturgical sacrifice I took communion in an enchanted and poetic atmosphere, with the quietly whispered prayer of a nature that was watching upon us wet with dew. Believe me that in the fervour of that moment I remembered all your beloved names and all those who thought of me... Tomorrow is Sunday I want to lead many fellow soldiers to experience the joy of hearing the mass surrounded by grass and flowers. Last night I witnessed a terrible long-lasting and accelerated combat fire. From afar one could hear the great echo of 'Savoia'... I did not fire a single shot though. The power of the enemy's lights that were projecting light onto our trenches was shocking. Saint Rocco even watched over me that night.¹⁴⁰ (p. 167)

¹³⁷ Guerrieri, *Lettere*, pp. 81-82.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹³⁹ Guerrieri, *Lettere*, p. 174.

¹⁴⁰ Zanivolti, unpublished collection.

Will you wait for me at home at Christmas? To sing 'dormi' and 'Tu scendi dalle stelle'?
Oh how I would like to come. But be calm, don't cry.¹⁴¹ (p. 168)

P.S: But you aren't satisfied, are you? You wanted me to say something for you only.
Well I'll tell you something for me. I need your prayers, not to save this existence of mine, but rather to save my innocence that is as nice as it is in danger.¹⁴² (p. 169)

Pray for me, you, unaware of how brutal the world is, unaware of the corruption ruling over men. Recommend me to the Madonna. Ask her that I might live among brutality without getting dirty, dealing with the corrupted without contracting their disease, because I want to come back as I left, and want to remain your Pepino cleric.¹⁴³ (p. 169)

The chaplain of the hospital learnt from Canevari that I am a cleric and asked him: will Second Lieutenant Zanivolti go back to the seminary? Canevari, who knows me very well, answered him as he deserved to be answered and then told me about it. But I am not satisfied. Tomorrow I will call him here and ask him to explain what it is he has to say, and the reasons that induce him to doubt me... probably my missing the mass and the blessing on Sunday here at the hospital is one of the causes.¹⁴⁴ (p. 170)

whereas I preferred to wake up early in the morning, go to the cathedral and confess and take the communion there, and listen to the sacred mass ... and enter the hospital pretending I had been savouring a drink of spirits or sipping a good cup of tea at 'Cafè Roma'.¹⁴⁵ (p. 171)

I read between the lines an unjustified anxiety, a work of interpretation of everything I write that hurts me. I repeat: I write the truth, whether good or bad...¹⁴⁶ (p. 172)

¹⁴¹ Ibid..

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Vivanti *Scrivimi*. pp. 166-167.

In fact I referred to the *Domenica del Corriere* as an example, without meaning to provide you with a picture, as I would have said that, I quoted the Saturday newspaper, it was clear that it was the Saturday before the day I was writing and that the newspaper *par excellence* was the *Corriere* that every evening you bought and you will buy it. There you find a map of the places where I was and where I no longer am. It matters to me that what I write is not intercepted, and that you know about me with all due respect to Mezzabarba.¹⁴⁷ (p. 172)

Doubts, sorrows, needless troubles are due to an affection that is so big that it sometimes becomes a little intransigent. And given that we are talking about this, getting back to the train of thought of the discussion we had during my leave, I have to tell you that these little intimate episodes reinforce in me the belief that in our country and more specifically in our family there isn't a precise idea yet of what war is and of how strange, variable is the life we conduct here, too simplistically framed through enthusiasm and encouragement. It is necessary to understand combatants in their oddities, in their weaknesses, distractions, their wishes should be respected a little, or else, they should be guessed as one does with those with kids who are recovering from a long disease.¹⁴⁸ (p. 173)

[Idem] If in three years of being away, during which, even having been through different stages, I was always able to silence certain aspects of life, certain weaknesses, certain thoughts and fleeting pains, doubts and hopes, boldness and fears, masking all of this with a conventional sentence in a letter or with a half smile in a one-on-one talk, today I wrote what I sincerely thought, which means that what happened hurts me deeply, but also that I never have questioned my affection for you. (p. 174)

Dear Augusto, distressed as your father for the delay in receiving a letter from you, I beg you, as much as I know how and can, not to prolong our agony. What did I do, in the end, to make you so angry with me? The more I search my soul, the less I find a

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. The building of the city council in Pavia is called Palazzo Mezzabarba and this probably a way to express frustration at the fact of having to send constant updates that are then shared with many people in Pavia. The reference to Mezzabarba is used as a metonymy to indicate the city of Pavia.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp.323-324.

plausible reason for which you could hold a grudge, unless you misunderstood my arrival at the station before you left. Believe me my dear Augusto, I was moved by the wish to greet you again, given that the night before I reproached you for being late, I could not let you leave like that, without having seen you again...¹⁴⁹ (p. 175)

It seems to me though that you should be kinder to me, you should have written to me immediately given the mood I was in, and that you certainly sensed. You did yourself a disservice in not making amends with a letter, lifting me from my soul the storm that stirred within. Consider that we are unfortunately very far from each other and that, at any time I could fall ill and be on my deathbed. Would you let me die without having my maternal blessing? Yours, so lonely mum¹⁵⁰ (p. 176)

Dear Augusto, this letter that mum wanted to write you this morning, after the post did not bring anything new from you, no longer has a reason to exist, in that this afternoon I got six postcards from you - from the 26/27 and 28 - one for mum and one for me. They demonstrate that you wrote, as usual, to her as well, and that the delay is simply down to the postal service rather than to your anger, of which I never doubted, not even for a moment.¹⁵¹ (p. 177)

Dear Augusto, yesterday evening after lunch, going home under a violent shower, after having drafted a letter for you, I found your dear postcard of the 9th and your letter of the 10th for mum, that I entirely approve of. After this, I think it is time to end this quarrel that mum provoked the day before your departure, over a minor matter of being late for lunch, while thousands and thousands more important concerns make us all anxious. But mum was unable to connect to the special circumstances of time and of the setting and still thinks of you as a high school pupil half an hour late after a walk with his mates. The effect of anachronism! But I repeat, let's close this incident and let's stop talking about it, as it's not worth it. Your letter sheds light by

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. pp. 322-323.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. pp. 322-323.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 323.

contrast on the psychological conditions that, as I told you, I empathise with and entirely appreciate, wholeheartedly.¹⁵² (p. 178)

Yesterday one of my soldiers who always speaks, and who in the most terrible moments speaks with his eyes and gestures, as restless as mercury, also received a nice, big parcel. Pleased as Punch, glad to see his name on that white parcel bag with sealing wax written with his Mum's big letters, he opened it and guess what he found inside? Pure wool, pillow and mattress wool, in balls, already used, secondhand. It was his family who, after newspapers, people, and associations talking about the famous 'wool for the soldiers,' believed that it meant this kind of wool and immediately sent him a kilogram of it. Much laughter ensued.¹⁵³ (p. 179)

Dear Mum, Every day, like when I was at home, you pester me with those blessed woollen garments. I am sorry that I cannot wear them, for they are nice and well made, but believe me that I don't really need them. Spring already manifests itself and the sun warms us, so that we come back from the drill rather sweaty. Mum, do you also dream about these clothes? Come on, forget them, if I had them now they would be my damnation.¹⁵⁴ (p. 182)

Dear Mum, you so desperately wanted a vase for the living room that I decided to send you one: a shrapnel case sent over to us by the Austrians among many other things; it is worth observing as high calibre shells that due to their huge explosions rarely stay like that. I believe it is a 152 or something similar.¹⁵⁵ (p. 183)

I heard about Mirino's escape with displeasure.¹⁵⁶ If my ear continued to hear Latin verses rather than cannon roaring, my Waterman might even have written something in Catullus' style.¹⁵⁷ (p. 184)

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 325.

¹⁵³ Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla Trincea*, p. 97.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 117.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 138.

¹⁵⁶ Tocci, *Fede il Dovere* Mirino is the little bird that used to live with Tocci's family.

¹⁵⁷ Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla trincea*, p. 140-141 .

Dear Natalia, to avoid arousing any sibling jealousy here's a postcard for you as well. I won't speak of anything here but fleas hidden with admirable skill in our filthy underwear which we haven't changed for ages. If we pause even for a moment they are suddenly out in search of... food and drink, and so they bite us. Bloody pests!¹⁵⁸ (p. 184)

Have you ever experienced this sensation, which is the only one given us to enjoy? I wish it upon to all the warmongers on the earth. The cleanest kiss!¹⁵⁹ (p. 185)

¹⁵⁸ Guerrieri, p. 145.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 147.

Chapter 4 Military hierarchy and the sense of justice

The captain explains with a pale face the difficulty and almost impossibility to place his pieces in the frontline under this bombardment. The voice of the general screeches: there are always at least seven minutes between one attack and another. Make your men work for five minutes at a time.¹⁶⁰ (p. 190)

They are happy to give orders! Then they should come here and try it for themselves! It is impossible to place the pieces under this fire. They made me kill two men of mine! I suspended the work. They can shoot me, it is fine. My heart cannot take seeing my men dying in vain like that!¹⁶¹ (p. 191)

The Austrians are waiting for us at the gaps in the fence and they will fire from close range on all those who try to approach the wires, with or without pliers.¹⁶² (p. 192)

Captain Zavattari was a complimentary officer. In civilian life he was the head of a division at the Ministry of Public Education. He was the oldest captain of the regiment. The order to shoot a soldier was for him an unconceivable absurdity. With careful wording he found a way to say that to the general who replied with no hesitation 'have him shot immediately'.¹⁶³ (p. 193)

'But how can I give the order to shoot a soldier without a trial and when he hasn't committed a crime?' The general did not have the same legal mindset. Those arguments annoyed him.¹⁶⁴ (p. 193)

¹⁶⁰ Stuparich, *Guerra del '15*, p. 62.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Lussu, *Un Anno*, p. 87.

¹⁶³ Ibid. pp. 58-59.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 58-59.

The captain again reached the front of his company that was standing still waiting for instructions. He ordered a squad to shoot their rifles at a tree then ordered that the stretcher-bearers lay the corpse of the already dead scout onto a stretcher.¹⁶⁵ (p. 194)

Let us salute the martyrs of our fatherland! In war, discipline is painful but necessary! Honour to our dead.¹⁶⁶ (p. 194)

At any moment the general could have fallen into a precipice. Many soldiers who were nearby saw that, no one made a move. I saw them all clearly: some of them smiling and winking. At any time the mule could have unseated the general. From the lines of our machinegun section a soldier ran to the general and got there in time to grab hold of him... The soldier stood and looked around satisfied. He had saved the general. When his fellow comrades reached him I witnessed a savage aggression. With fury they got on top of him, with a flurry of punches. The soldier was thrown to the ground. His comrades on top of him.¹⁶⁷ (p. 194)

Imbecile! today you have dishonoured your unit!... What should you have done? You should have done what the others did. Nothing. You should have done absolutely nothing! And that was already too much. I do not want such a jackass in my section. I will kick you out... You wanted to do something didn't you? Then you should have cut the reins with your bayonet to make the general fall... Yes imbecile, you should have left him to die. And if he did not die, given that you wanted to do something at all costs, you should have helped him die. Now go back to your unit and if your comrades kill you, you will have what you deserve!¹⁶⁸ (p. 196)

And you in peace in Italy still speak of morals and of respect, of lofty feelings, all ridiculous things that make us laugh, laugh, laugh... Poor laws and poor penal codes, how far away from us you are and how useless, murder is no longer a crime but a

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 59-60.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 60.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 64-65.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. p.

frenzied urge; theft is a right just as owning property is, killing is a duty just like living.¹⁶⁹ (p. 197)

An adjudged bayonet strike at night, from behind, an enemy lookout surprised in sleep and silence, a lookout who is a person like us with the same feelings and the same thoughts, who has a father and maybe is a father too, becomes a fine gesture, a noble act that renders the man who carries it out deserving of recognition and covers him in glory.¹⁷⁰ (p. 200)

Instead I am stuck giving the same orders to men who are more tired than me, men who, as usual, don't do what they are requested or who do it badly. I have to repeat the same reproaches, utter the same blackmail to fathers. These soldiers are worth nothing as soldiers, and as such they deserve to be treated like children, but they are fathers of children and probably good fathers too.¹⁷¹ (p. 200)

He remembers himself as a student in poor financial conditions, forced to shine his own shoes, eat poorly, work as a teacher to earn some money, and that he visited his girlfriend in disorderly dress; however, at that time he felt inwardly "proud" and he felt like a "giant" compared to the current second lieutenant "smartly dressed but who hides under his uniform the truth along with no noble feeling".¹⁷² (p. 201)

Do you really want to hear this? They elected me to be the director of the canteen. That is saying something! Military life perfects man, it easily reduces him to any sort of profession, from that of lawyer to that of cook, from that of strategic cleaner to that of camp latrine builder.¹⁷³ (p. 201)

Something that you are going to be pleased about. Yesterday I went to court for the evaluation I told you about. Given that the lawyer for the other trials was absent, the

¹⁶⁹ Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla Trincea*. p. 94.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 94.

¹⁷¹ Forcella and Monticone, *Plotone*, p. 275.

¹⁷² Forcella and Monticone, Ibid. p. 275.

¹⁷³ Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla Trincea*, p. 112.

president commandeered me so I had to defend in seven trials. I started with an acquittal and ended with two life sentences. I don't know what kind of impression I made there on the stand. It was probably more than poor. But at least I got an idea of the place (I had never been into an ordinary court) and made some new contacts.¹⁷⁴ (p. 202)

We have to build the fence but we have little wire, no nails to fix it, no hatchet to cut the stakes (a proud infantry man makes the stakes with his bayonet, fixes the wire with its own splinters): we have to dig the trenches but the rock is hard and the pickax' doesn't even scratch it. We need jelly to explode the mines: they don't give us any because it should be brought by a platoon of miners that we never see. We have to make the railings higher with beams, but you cannot cut beams with a bayonet, and in the entire company we only have one saw.¹⁷⁵ (p. 203)

Campiello 20 September 1916 Dear Dad, sad no, angry yes and a lot, but it is not necessary to protest or seek justice in higher ranks, my superiors and my colleagues from the regiment have provided me with it. When I renounced the rank of captain, the colonel forced me to apply again in order to become a regular captain. I applied again and read the references accompanying my application, from that written by the commander of the battalion, to that of the division and they represent a clear recognition of my merit. They are quite specific and could make anybody envious, giving magnificent praise of my derring-do and of my skills. Believe me Dad that this pleased me and largely rewarded me after the failed recognition of Monfalcone. I did not expect such big compensation.¹⁷⁶ (p. 208)

I don't know when I will be able to come home on leave, but I look forward to it, and hope it will be soon. Dad goes too fast, or else he flies when he hopes for a promotion to effective captain. The actual outcome will be smaller, much smaller than this fatherly dream.¹⁷⁷ (p. 209)

¹⁷⁴ Vivanti, *Scrivimi*, p. 294.

¹⁷⁵ Forcella and Monticone, *Plotone*, p. 60.

¹⁷⁶ Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla Trincea*. p. 176.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 182-183.

Damned war, damn who envisaged it, the first who shouted it out. I am tired of this military slavery, of this poor and humiliating obedience, nauseated by the abuses committed under the hypocritical cover of discipline. I had a different idea of military life before war, I thought I would find unruffled people here, whereas you find the filth, the scum of society, the elite of stupidity, the refusal of civil society, people who have no conscience and who cannot have broad views.¹⁷⁸(p. 212)

My dears... I have heard from Fernanda that even in Spezia the aeroplanes have let themselves be heard and that they flew over Monti, this is a prophecy by Dad which has come true. I am sure that the effect of the sight of them was not too positive, as no one likes bombs, even less those who enjoy the sound sleep of Spezia. But I am happy about it, so that, even the famous street - and café - 'yellers' finally get a very clear idea of what it means to suffer war. And Mum? I bet she has made the decision to go to the shelter in *Porcilia*, she does not want to know anything about heroism and she is right... as this does not count for anything.¹⁷⁹ (p. 213)

30 August I am judge in a special court against two captains of the 124th Infantry charged with refusal of obedience for something that happened in the night between 29 and 30 June against the Monticelli Rossi trench while their companies entered the enemy's trench.¹⁸⁰ (p. 217)

[Idem] The trial goes on and then we get together in the council chamber: long debate from which emerges a sentence which everyone finds to be fair or correct: the captain... is condemned to 20 years' imprisonment and I... to 5 years. Two existences are destroyed! (p. 218)

After two years of war during which many soldiers died, families ruined, positions lost and a lot of money wasted, in a few hours we lost something worse. For nothing, for irrelevant crimes that should be punished with a few years' reclusion, or some further

¹⁷⁸ Forcella and Monticone, *Plotone*, p. 236.

¹⁷⁹ Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla Trincea*, p. 151.

¹⁸⁰ Pasquale Gagliani, MS diary.

time in the trenches, men are executed. These cases happen every day. They discuss shooting as if they have to decide whether or not to kill a chicken.¹⁸¹ (p. 220)

The most hideous tasks are up to the assistant major; persuading the two that the hopes they anxiously carried with them all along the way are in vain (the *carabinieri*, poor devils, didn't find the heart to deprive them of this illusion); calling the priest and the doctor; aligning the firing squad, and meanwhile locking up in barracks the two doomed ones, so different from those we throw out of the trench on battle days. As soon as they found themselves with their battalion those two shouted, cried, evoked their distant family, implored forgiveness and pity. We will go on patrol every night lieutenant¹⁸² (p. 221)

The firing squad is aligned, dismayed, dazed, watching the assistant major who wants to adopt a bitter tone of voice, explains the importance of aiming precisely in order to shorten the agony of those who are ineluctably doomed. The assistant major has already explained: I wave and you shoot. The soldiers watch the officer and don't shoot. A new wave. The soldiers don't shoot. The lieutenant claps his hands nervously. They shoot. And there is the body hit by the shots, it bends sliding along the tree trunk, half a head removed.¹⁸³ (p. 221)

Justice has been served. Questions, doubts surface in our reluctant minds and we reject them with terror because they contaminate too high principles: those that we accept out of blind faith for fear of perceiving our duty as soldiers harder. Fatherland, necessary discipline - an article in the penal code, words that we did not even know the meaning of, that were only a sound to us, death by shooting, now they are clearly understandable before our weakened minds. But those lords in Enego, no, they do not flesh out the words of their sentences. High-calibre commanders, commanders of headquarters, reserve colonels, officers of the *carabinieri*: that's the court.¹⁸⁴ (p. 222)

¹⁸¹ Forcella and Monticone, *Plotone*, p. 255.

¹⁸² Monelli, *Le Scarpe al Sole*, p. 144.

¹⁸³ Ibid. pp. 144-145.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 145.

I will begin by asking my father what are the categorical questions he wants me to answer and which he keeps reminding me about. Although I want to make him happy it is impossible for me if he does not send me a list of those questions so that I can answer point by point. I spend my time wonderfully, I divide my time between arms and laws, in which I have become really experienced. I won't ask you if are in good health as you have to be. I receive your parcels as usual.¹⁸⁵ (p. 224)

But at this point I can almost hear you shouting the deadly accusation together: so why don't you write? Or why do you only write to Ferrara or Bassano? So, let me defend myself even from afar: everything I said is valid in general terms. You don't do anything usually, but sometimes a set of rapid orders arrives, the kind that makes you lose your head, and wear out your legs.¹⁸⁶ (p. 225)

Have I sufficiently excused myself? I hope so, and from your court gathered round the table every evening, so ready to accuse, I ask to be acquitted. Not due to lack of evidence, but to the non-existence of the crime.¹⁸⁷ (p. 226)

In this respect what you instruct me, namely to fight until the end, is fine, but understand, uncle, that Italian soldiers have done too much so far as there is no nation that treats its soldiers as badly as Italy. More than that, you have to understand that this retreat does not come from the soldier. The cause lies in the bigger dogs. Now, imagine what love the soldier might have while experiencing that this is not a war of liberation, all we see is a great slaughter...¹⁸⁸ (p. 229)

Then they were tempted by the new shoes provided by the fatherland. The fatherland, which is so powerful, has certainly prepared better shoes than their cobbler. But those who trusted in their fatherland were wrong, those who trusted their cobbler did well.¹⁸⁹ (p. 230)

¹⁸⁵ Campodonico, *Lauri di Gloria*, p. 115.

¹⁸⁶ Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla Trincea*, p. 120.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 121.

¹⁸⁸ Forcella and Monticone, *Plotone*. p. 259.

¹⁸⁹ Jahier, Ibid. p. 33-34

The shoes that the fatherland gave us are really bad. Oh if they only got wet with water. But they bite with their tanning acid. Oh if only they only got wet when it rains! ... Oh if they only ruined our feet! But they ruin socks as well with their ... Do you know that a soldier's sock only lasts one march? The American shoes feed on socks.¹⁹⁰ (p. 230)

I look at the shoes provided by our powerful fatherland with sadness: mine and theirs, here on this lawn of Italy where I would like to explain why the Italian shoe is better. Then I say: guys, let's bear it as this is our fatherland. Let's imagine being a little mistreated by our mother. Let's remedy it with a little fat. Or with the tanning. Our fatherland is a little young. When one is young it seems faster not to follow the set route.¹⁹¹ (p. 231)

An object of laughter and amusement to us officers is the new uniform which, with its unusually generous width, demonstrates how little we matter to the government that provided them. It is a very comfortable soldiers uniform, so to say, which should suit everyone, fat and thin, short and tall, so that the big body of my battalion commander in a jacket which would hardly suit a thin commander, and all with his disproportionate head. Dressed in such a way, even if we avoid the Austrian bullets, we nonetheless appear ridiculous away from the trenches. So, completely transfigured, we look like shy newcomers and we are worried that we lose some of our external authority to maintain our soldiers' trust in us.¹⁹² (p. 233)

Oh how I excuse their grumbles, their little discipline! They carry the true weight of war, the moral, the financial, the physical weight and they are treated worst. What a crime committed by those whom out of fraud or negligence have fitted their feet so inadequately; if I had had a shoemaker in front of me yesterday I would have provoked him into a fight and stabbed him to death. I wish they would die of consumption, or that they see their own sons slaughtered with an axe. I can't do anything: I am an officer, I am bound by an unbreakable oath of induction to

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 34.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p. 36.

¹⁹² Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla Trincea*, p. 77.

discipline, moreover the censorship would seize any protest of mine. If Semenza visited me, I would have given him a parcel of anonymous articles (anonymity is not an act of cowardice in this case) for some democratic magazines: as this state of things should not be tolerated any further.¹⁹³ (p. 234)

Who knows about those pregnant cows, those watery fat ministers, senators, directors, and generals: who knows how well they think they worked for the faith of the country with their speeches, visits to the frontline, interviews etc. But they should watch, see, and think how the 5th Alpine is shoed. But Salandra, that stupid stutterer of a king, those dukes and deputies who go 'to see' the trenches, why don't they ask us, ask me how my men are shoed.¹⁹⁴ (p. 235)

¹⁹³ Gadda, *Giornale*, p. 35.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 35.

Chapter 5 Landscapes of war

This is the Isonzo/ and here I recognized myself/ more clearly/ as a pliant fibre/ of the universe¹⁹⁵ (p. 245)

Dolina Bari, 9 May 1917. The Carso doesn't want to become beautiful at all. It couldn't care less about spring and fine weather and remains arid, barren, stony, rugged... We have known it for a while and it still gives us the shivers, imagine the newcomers gradually arriving up here! We are even picking up some of the characteristics of this terrain, becoming coarse and rough. And what's happening in Monti?¹⁹⁶ The vacationers must be arriving in droves at the moment. For God's sake do not shut yourself up at home, go out, have fun. There is no point in locking yourself away just because I am at war.¹⁹⁷ (p. 248)

Gaiga, 4 November 1916. A peculiarity of this front are the fogs which almost always surround us, and it's lucky that they do. They benefit us while on patrol, carrying rations, and doing all the movements that trench life requires. The enemy, also surrounded by fog, doesn't notice anything either, he lives and let live.¹⁹⁸ (p. 249)

Today it rains disgustingly: fucking rain, bloody wet, motherfucking muddy filth.¹⁹⁹ (p. 250)

My shelter rests on two sides on the mossy rock, from which water trickles into the room, on the other two sides it is made of sacks stretched onto the wooden sticks that are the temple columns. The ceiling, all holes and leaks, is made partly from sheet steel and partly from tarp and tent: the floor is ridged with muddy streams of water. Its make up dictates its look. It is placed outside the camp among broken shoes, pieces

¹⁹⁵ Giuseppe Ungaretti, *Poesie e Prose Liriche 1915-1920*, ed. by Cristiana Maggi Romano and Maria Antonietta Terzoli, (Milano: Mondadori, 1999) p. 27.

¹⁹⁶ Monti is Guerrieri's home village in Massa Carrara Province.

¹⁹⁷ Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla Trincea* p. 219.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 187.

¹⁹⁹ Gadda, *Giornale* p. 169.

of shit and rags left behind by former infantry camps that were once on these slopes.²⁰⁰ (p. 250)

Trenches in the zone of altitude 309 - 8 April 1917. It's drizzling and the line of the trenches is getting lost, hidden in the thick fog. It seems as if they too are animated by a desire for peace today, poor trenches who know all the unrighteous fury of cannon fire and all the barrages. In the shelters, no higher than a metre, no wider than two, with ceilings mixed with boards, rags and mud, soldiers smoke pipes and write home with a wild and primitive air, which makes them very silent. They have worn-out coats and unkempt faces. Water comes dripping down and slowly soaks them to the bone. Tomorrow the sun will come up and they will leave those nooks to dry and warm themselves. It's been like this for the past two years, the monotonous life of war!²⁰¹ (p. 251)

3rd July 1916. You'll say it is strange that we find ourselves dirty on these mountains, and in this relative cold, at least at night, but nonetheless this is how it is. And it is mostly due to the nomadic life we lead, constantly moving from rock to rock, from peak to peak, with nothing to worry us but the bayonet or the rifle. We are reduced to men of the woods, tattered, bruised, with long, days-old beards. Our hair no longer knows what the touch of a comb is, and we go with the wind soaked in water from head to foot and often trembling with cold.²⁰² (p. 253)

This is the second autumn that I have spent in the war zone. The countryside hasn't seen golden fields, doesn't offer us the gifts of sweet golden grapes, war and its destruction, its massacres, has shocked the vineyard, eradicated the trees that heated us through the long chill winter. The land has become sterile under the march of infantrymen and horses, the campsites fires and the explosion of grenades.²⁰³ (p. 254)

Trenches from Cima Arde in Capitello shelter, 17 August 1916. This is the best front in Trentino, where the losses are minimal and the fighting is endurable, where

²⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 169.

²⁰¹ Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla Trincea*, p. 213.

²⁰² Guerrieri, p. 145.

²⁰³ Engineer Lieutenant Sebastiano Spina, manuscript notebook..

everything is at least bearable. We dominate the Val D'Assa from excellent positions on the edge of the valley which falls away in rocky and precipitous cliffs that cause vertigo and send shivers through your bones. Equally secure on the farther side, controlling other gorges, the Austrians are vigilant. We watch each other, but we cannot harm each other, the horrible valley separates us and turns us into watchdogs...²⁰⁴ (p. 255)

Slopes of Mt. Cimone, 30 June 1916. The war on these steep mountain peaks, a war waged at incredible heights, has a character all its own. One of its main characteristics is the physical struggle it requires because of the never-ending climb up impassable roads where even mules give up halfway and turn back. And when you reach the top, sweaty, tired, with trembling legs and eyes which close from long-forgotten sleep, then the terrible phase of battle begins. You reach the top, but there are still menacing impertinent rocks to take, squared hard stones, boulders that the enemy will launch at you from up there using levers and mines, which come down with a deafening noise, tearing down everything in their way, men and trees. It is a defence which doesn't cost the Austrians much but which causes us a lot of damage and a lot of rage. Add to the rocks the riflemen and gunners who concentrate their fire on the mountain gorge and you will get a rough idea of what we are obliged to suffer and overcome.²⁰⁵ (p. 257)

[Zanivolti] Forlì, 22 September 1916. My Dears, I arrived in this city this morning. I don't actually know whether it is beautiful or ugly. Looking out of the window of my room I see sweet little hills, where a smiling sun plays upon the golden vine leaves. I haven't seen the city yet. For six days I have been confined to the hospital in quarantine; after that I can go out. If I could go to another hospital I'd pick Naples or Rome: I really want to see a little of this blessed Italy for which we make the greatest sacrifices. (p. 258)

²⁰⁴ Guerrieri, Ibid. pp- 168-169.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 143.

[Zanivolti] Udine, 18 July 1916. My dears, I don't know how to describe my trip. It seems to me that I have told you how in Novara I missed the train transporting my soldiers. Then I took the 11 am train to Milan. I was there for an hour, I had breakfast and left at 13.00 to catch train 7647. In Peschiera I passed by Lake Garda. I stayed by the window to contemplate the sweet light blue of that Veneto lake hiding at the feet of Mount Baldo. The point of Sirmione that I dreamt about reading Catullus, extended like a gondola, was smiling in the sun. In Vicenza a series of anti-aircraft rounds were fired at an Austrian aeroplane, warning me that a new life was about to begin, or else, to be more precise, the same life of a year before. I arrived in Venice at 9 pm. The lagoon, whose surface was slightly moved by the evening zephyr, was falling asleep in the last rays of the sun. Venice seemed to be smiling at me, cheerful in that crowd of people on their balconies, in the alleys, in the light breeze of the Canal Grande. The steamboat was gliding on water light as a dream. Sitting on a bench I was breathing deeply, smiling at all that cheerfulness, I breathe in all the pure air coming from the flowers in the Gothic windows. And I saw Saint Mark's square and the Rialto bridge and I felt like I was dreaming. I left Venice at 1. I arrived in Udine at 6, where I still am, bored while waiting for a train that it seems will never arrive. I feel like I am dying to sleep. Pepino (p. 259)

I am always travelling to the front because, as is common at the moment, the trains do not arrive on time. We stopped for half a day in Venice - there are about 40 of us - and we visited the city: very beautiful. Did you get my postcard with the picture of me in Saint Mark's Square? We went around the lagoon by gondola.²⁰⁶ (p. 263)

[Zanivolti] Vicenza, 7.12.16. My Dears, I have just arrived in Vicenza. It's raining and pitch black. I would have liked to have continued on to Schio, but I am tired and overcome with sleepiness: I will take the train at 8.20 tomorrow morning. The journey so far has felt more like a pleasant jaunt than a departure: I saw Lake Garda again with its beautiful point of Sirmione, but it was dull with lots of fog: it did not have the charm of last July. In the distance, like an apparition, the white mountains of Trentino

²⁰⁶ Campodonico, *Lauri di Gloria*, p. 63.

took shape. I watched them a little pensively at first, then I smiled, as if over there someone was waiting for me to let me spend an enchanted sojourn between the confusion of the storm and the caves of the fairies. I feel an indescribable pleasure in spending Christmas among the snow and the glaciers, high up in the pure, thin air, with the dream of youthful memories, the visions of legend and the echoes of bells lost in the lyrical magic of the night in the white valleys. I will write to you when I get there, if the cold does not prevent me from doing so. I left the case at Uncle Angelo's place. I was sorry not to have had the chance to see Mario and say goodbye to him. It will be for next year. I wish you well and embrace you. I'll have a stroll around the deserted streets of Vicenza. Let's hope that no aeroplanes will bother me tonight. Kisses, Pepino. (p. 265)

Undertaking a dangerous trip full of risks in order to reach my position late at night was not a good idea. Then I thought that a good bed in a warm cosy room would not do any harm and I went back to Valle dei Signori. It's a beautiful village, almost picturesque, very quiet, still populated and with many hotels. Mine is called 'Hotel of the Sun'. (p. 266)

[Zanivolti 24 June 1917 from Villa del Brun] My heart opened up. The smile of nature concealed for a moment in me a world of distressing roses, of memories full of tedium and fatigue. (p. 268)

[Zanivolti] It seemed like returning to another life. Oh how different from ordinary life is life in war! There are simple dark firs, some lost flowers and a few birds telling us that nature exists, but even they are different, of a species I'd say rather transformed. The chaffinch always sings that phrase of his, a rhythm, like a monotonous tune sung over cradles and now repeated over graves... (p. 268)

[Idem] But the view one enjoys from the plateau is vaster, almost infinite as it gradually fades into a light blue fog of the sea on the left and into a stretch of something infinite ahead and to the right. The Tagliamento, the Brenta, the Astico twist in white stripes between the dark green of the *macchia*, the yellowish of the fields and the blonde of the mature crops. (p. 269)

[Zanivolti 26 May 1917] That view hurt me. Who knows how many families dream about the home they were forced to abandon in sad times, full of anguish. They have buried a few things, copper along with some cherished objects, which they could not carry with them: but those beloved memories, which keep so many secrets, and a history of long traditions of people with many memories of affection, were unburied, ruined. 'The other day' a soldier told me 'the owner came to see the house with two girls. They cried'. My heart was also moved, out of that sense of sweetness that binds us to everything that saw us at our birth and growing up, that reminds us the beautiful world of our first years. (p. 270)

Salsomaggiore, 11 August 1917. Salsomaggiore is pretty but I thought it would be nicer given its image in advertisements. In any case there are ways to pass the time and amuse ourselves: music, coffee, strolls. It is all an extravagance and an incredible splendour. There is even a theatre, it is open and packed every night. When you are tired you go there, and wait till it's time to sleep... No natural beauty in the place, the village is just like any other, the only difference being that the houses are incredibly elegant, modern and with gardens and flowers. The hotels are many and luxurious. Imagine you're seeing a village from the Riviera but with no sea, no pine trees. Some might even dislike it.²⁰⁷ (p. 272)

Salsomaggiore, 13 August 1917. Salsomaggiore is a very strange village, an evening at the *café* is enough to see it all. People of every country and every colour come from near and far, more probably in order to amuse themselves than for treatment, I believe. The baths are a pretext for all these gentlemen who do not know how to spend their money and kill time. At the *café* we too behave like gentlemen, and with a

²⁰⁷ Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla Trincea*, p. 229.

little expenditure we adopt the airs and graces of millionaires. Moreover, the wounds we have suffered are a wonderful passport, we are regarded with curiosity. The village is small, they ask us about the war, everybody wants to know when it will be over.²⁰⁸ (p. 273)

[Guerrieri] Costa di sotto, 30 July 1916. Dear Mum, I'm writing once more today to tell you of my joy at having seen Dad again, here, right here, where I have suffered so much and where the unfriendly grenades of the irksome Austrians are still exploding. I thought he would have had a stronger reaction, he was very calm even when a blast ended up hitting a soldier close by, it is a pity that he is not a military man as well. I showed him everything, our positions and the enemy's, he touched and trod those much-contested mountains, he visited and walked through our trenches and the Austrian ones, ruin on ruin, but I did not notice any sign of shock or wonder in his eyes, and how could you not wonder at that? He liked the illuminating flares and he stayed all night at the window of my palace watching what happened with an investigative eye, two grenades passed over him roaring, I was sleeping from exhaustion, but I woke now and then out of habit and then saw him standing tall, his head out the window. The devastation of villages, those ruined houses, I would say he enjoyed everything, both beautiful and ugly. He stayed with me for a long time. (p. 275)

[Idem] The fact of having Dad so close made such an impression on me that, I would say, even now it's almost like a dream that I can't fully believe. I don't know how he could do so much, how he managed to make it here where no one can get. He must certainly have struggled and worked very hard. The officers of the battalion welcomed him very kindly, they offered him all they had and since here we are not rich in news they covered him with information. Even the colonel welcomed him, which is odd as my highest superior is normally fearsome and in a bad mood. I would like to know which saint watches over Dad and which special prayer he recited. (p. 277)

²⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 230.

[Idem] I could not give him many war souvenirs. I had many, but then, as easily as I collected them, I left them behind. I have always hated parcels, and right now they are a special nuisance. Plus, who could guess that he would be able to come and collect them in person. I accompanied him to the truck which was to take him to Thiene, and even here he was lucky. He will have a nice journey by car and will have his own heroic quarter of an hour. But this is not all, do you want some more? Just this morning while he was regretfully talking about his departure we were ordered to go back again to rest. (p. 278)

[Idem] Mum, that tops everything, that women cannot come here is not a strategy to keep you at home, but it is true. You would have fainted several times, and you never would have arrived. Skirts are out of place here, not even the ladies of the Red Cross, not even those from Ferrara, come here. Danger is not for you. You see that deep down we men generally treat you right? We take you to the baths, on holiday, to the theatre to help you overcome all those sorrows that you always have in your head. But whenever we need to risk our lives, we want to be on our own. You see how good we are!!! (p. 279)

[Guerrieri] In order to remind you as well of this lovely day I wrote you a postcard at lunch and all the officers signed it. You see how kind we men are!!!! And now it is over, I no longer know what to write, I would like to insert so many exclamation marks to fill the page. I'll leave with a kiss for you and everybody. (p. 279)

[Idem] Tonight we will have the changeover and we will go to stay in a village of refugees. Everybody feels good, nobody has a fever or headache. Health in general has never been as good as now, it's a real resurgence of happiness and wellbeing, even Dad noted that. As soon as I get to the new location I will write again and I will

describe that blessed village which we all love already for the sole reason that it will welcome and restore us, and make us live again. (p. 280)

My Dear Dad, We received your wonderful letter, the lively youth of the battalion thanks you for your thoughts and sends its regards from the mess where it is gathered. Now we are living in this quiet village (Zugliano) near Thiene, where we spend our time training the new arrivals, who leave a lot to be desired. How long will we stay here? Nobody knows. A lot of guesses are being made but nothing is certain or even likely. Everything is up in the air. We are doing well here. Not only am I staying in a house but I also have a comfortable bed where I enjoy a magnificent night's sleep. The hard work involved in training the new arrivals prevents me from writing at length, so I will do it tomorrow.²⁰⁹ (p. 281)

[Idem] Trenches Cima Arde-Le Fratte 14 August 1916... I am still on the Trentino front but no longer where Dad was. (p. 281)

Yesterday I saw an alpine partridge; it passed by only a metre above my head crossing the rocky ridgeline with a great flapping of wings; and I saw it well: it's bigger than a medium-sized pigeon, completely white, a dazzling white. I saw another one that had not yet completely changed its plumage and still had some grey markings on its tail... I thought of you, who knows what fun you would have here hunting them!²¹⁰ (p. 285)

On these rocks the wheatear shows off in the sun, its snowy tail shining from time to time, and the mountain redstart circles incredibly cheerfully opening and lowering its ruby wings and enlarging its throat of a coal shiny black... Rarely, and timidly because of the unaccustomed altitude, even the swallow brings us a family atmosphere of grace with its flights and trills, then goes back to the valley. The blackbird reminds us of the joyful vineyards of distant hills.²¹¹ (p. 285)

²⁰⁹ Guerrieri, *Lettere dalla Trincea* p. 164-165.

²¹⁰ Ibid. p. 132

²¹¹ Valentini, Ibid. p. 57.

Read these observations to Dad and tell him that hunting the Austrian pig I long for the Maremma boar (the apple doesn't fall far from the tree) and I feel I am getting the hunter's blood.²¹² (p. 286)

I saw De Pontis. And yesterday night, leaving the office, I met Leo, who wrote to you and says hello. Then, stopping near the Demetrio we saw Mrs Gilda who was coming back from our place... While the three of us were chatting Sciascia passed by and he also sends his greetings.²¹³ (p. 287)

Here there are still several engineer officers, different everyday, who, when I leave the office in the evening, cheerfully crowd the Demetrio for dinner. I think of your too-short honeymoon, when you were based in Padua.²¹⁴ (p. 287)

The university has been silent (almost completely) so far and the historic lecture room VI is quiet God knows until when!²¹⁵ (p. 288)

The state of health continues to improve, with a few exceptions. The city is beginning to come alive... It is still uncertain though when the schools will re-open. From tomorrow onward – after many months eating stale bread – we will have freshly baked bread again. It is a positive prelude of our return to normality.²¹⁶ (p. 289)

21 May 1917. Here nothing new. It keeps raining. The Ticino, overflowing its banks, has flooded Milazzo Street and Porta Nuova. Thanks to General Poggi I have arranged that transport will be undertaken by boat and men from the Engineer Corps, otherwise neither boats nor men would be available. Let's hope that the flood does not bother us further with the damage to the harvests that are so promising in our beautiful and very fertile countryside.²¹⁷ (p. 289)

²¹² Ibid. pp. 57-58.

²¹³ Vivanti, *Scrivimi*, p. 150

²¹⁴ Ibid. p. 165.

²¹⁵ Ibid. p. 170.

²¹⁶ Ibid. p. 346.

²¹⁷ Ibid. pp. 271-272.

30 May 1917. Here nothing new. And what is not new is the bad weather that rages with rain and wind, causing us a flood which is worse than that of the past days. I have just come back from a visit to the banks of the Ticino, which is very swollen and in a few points show serious risks. Meanwhile, the incessant work by the civilian Engineer Corps aims to reinforce the points which are most at risk.²¹⁸ (p. 290)

1 June 1917. Yesterday at 11 pm while I was reading in bed, they called to tell me that the Ticino had broken its banks at the Riottino for about 100 metres. I got up and went to check for myself and then stayed until 4 because the work was massive and urgent. Today - even though the Borgo is flooded - things seem better, because the Po is decreasing and the good weather is back.²¹⁹ (p. 291)

Of these houses/ nothing remains/ but the rubble/ of a ruined wall/ Of the many/ who were so close to me/nothing remains/ not even that/ But in my heart/not one cross is missing/ My heart is/ the most ravaged village.²²⁰ (p. 292)

Dear Parents, Here is an interesting picture in which you can see a general visiting the first line a few metres from the Austrians and me providing detailed tactical explanations. It was a picture taken suddenly and without my knowledge, but it is really beautiful and interesting.²²¹ (p. 295)

Photography is rarely a goal on its own. It is a medium which completes other individual witnessing practices such as diaries, correspondence, drawings and engravings.²²² (p. 297)

²¹⁸ Ibid. p. 274.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 275.

²²⁰ Translation by Jim Friel 2003 av. at <<http://www.beilharz.com/poetas/ungaretti/>>. Last two verses: my translation

²²¹ Campodonico, *Lauri di Gloria*. pp. 89-90.

²²² Caroline Fieschi, Christian Joschke, Anthony Petiteau 'Photographier la Guerre en Amateur' in Sylvie Le Ray-Burini, Caroline Fieschi, Aldo Battaglia, Benjamin Gilles and Anthony Petiteau eds. *Vu du Front Représenter la Grande Guerre*, (Paris: Samogy Edition de l'Art, 2014), pp. 80-88.

Dear parents, I am sending you a nice photo. I have already sent you many since the first days of war and so you should have many. They could form a decent collection. I have others and will take more in order to send them to you. The camera fixes the figure of whoever passes in front of its mystical lens and in the instant the deep black of the box opens up to the light, the latter floods suddenly the entire cavity. The luminous subtle substance penetrates in waves more rapid than those of the wind on the sea and of those of the unshakable faith that has led humans to die and win.²²³ (p. 297)

And I have dealt with all kinds of weapons, from the primitive stone with which David killed Goliath, as told by the biblical tradition, up to the modern Mauser and the brilliant revolvers spitting flames as cracking arrows of death, to the powerful and terrible giants that destroy the restless crowd.²²⁴ (p. 298)

I am sending you five nice pictures taken at my command, that is, as you can see a nice building with a garden and pool, in which, as you can see in the pictures, a major from my regiment and I are about to throw the chaplain. I marked my portrait with a black cross because in some pictures it is a bit confused.²²⁵ (p. 300)

It is never the case of covering war in an exhaustive way, the perspective is rather connected with that of the combatant's war itinerary.²²⁶ (p. 301)

²²³ Campodonico, *Lauri di Gloria*. p.91

²²⁴ Ibid., p.90.

²²⁵ Ibid., pp. 137-138.

²²⁶ Caroline Fieschi, Christian Joschke, Anthony Petiteau, 'Photographier la Guerre en Amateur', p. 84.

Chapter six: Combat

Artillery, the best means of attack and defence, requires another point of view. It requires a view from above on the front, from which comes the search for observing spots (hills, trees, church tower). As a result, it provides a sense of control to artillery officers, envied by infantrymen.²²⁷ (p. 308)

In such conditions the war of movement becomes impossible. It is compulsory to go to ground. Horizontality replaces verticality.²²⁸ (p. 309)

In these nine months our war, like that in almost all European theatres, has taken on the characteristics of siege warfare. Once it was the cities that were placed under siege whereas now it is nations. Many sieges were ended after a forceful attack, the exhausted enemy was struck; others came to an end when the enemy surrendered out of hunger or lack of munitions. Which of these two options will represent the end of this colossal siege?²²⁹ (p. 309)

My dear parents, I was requested by my mother to write the description of a battle, but describing such a complex event is too difficult. Therefore, I will only share with you a series of impressions on the evolution of war.²³⁰ (p. 310)

²²⁷ John Horne, 'Le Front' (pp. 18-28) in *Vu du Front Représenter la Grande Guerre*, (Paris: Samogy Edition de l'Art, 2014), p. 22.

²²⁸ John Horne, *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²²⁹ Colonel Pasquale Gagliani, *Anno 1915- 1916-1917 Campagna austro-italiana Impressioni e Ricordi*, consulted at Archivio Diaristico Nazionale Pieve Santo Stefano. Parts of the diary have been digitized and are available at <<http://espresso.repubblica.it/grandeguerra/index.php?page=autore&id=118>>.

²³⁰ Campodonico, p. 111.

In the heroic times, the impetus of the troops was human impetus reinforced by the iron will adopted for defence and offence, but more than in the weapons, the strength was in the body of the warrior, in the powerful harmony of his limbs, from which the art of war and strength emerged. The art of sublime aesthetics, the foundation of beauty from which the artists of the Iliad drew inspiration.²³¹ (p. 310)

Our time wanted to destroy this strength, it wanted war to become a scientific war, its leaders were scholars rather than warriors, the means to gain victory were those of technology rather than those due to the force of human nature. But this resolution met the obstacle of the sublime military virtues that celebrate courage, strength, and sacrifice.²³² (p. 311)

The night of the 24 April was one of bad luck for many soldiers from my regiment because it was able to steal an advanced spot from the enemy... everything seemed lost, but towards 10 in the evening the artillery was starting to focus on our new position and all the area behind was hit by incessant rounds... Around 12.30 am the telephone communications began to fail. Then the captain leaves the telephone as he can no longer communicate with the battalions, he cannot stay there, motionless, with no news. Captain Balestrieri is up high on the sinkhole to watch the flare signals, observing where the rifle shots increased and where the enemy artillery was aiming'.²³³ (p. 314)

[Zanivolti] Our cannon were tearing our ears. At midnight I received the order to go and support the Alpini on the left at the abandoned barracks at the foothill of Vodil.²³⁴ The night went by in darkness, as if it wanted to hide so much blood. It was a huge effort, sneaking through the mud among the broken wire fences, I got there. We are not yet positioned well when my commander falls wounded. The other second

²³¹ Ibid. p. 111.

²³² Ibid. p. 112.

²³³ Ibid, p. 23.

²³⁴ Zanivolti. Interestingly in his service record states a different date for the battle, that is to say 30 September 1915, this means that he either mixed up the dates when he was hospitalized or that it was recorded in the wrong way at a subsequent stage.

lieutenant (from the reserve unit, who had recently joined the company) takes the lead. The captain from the Alpini falls too, he is seriously injured and after a little while dies. (p. 316)

[Idem] In any case, the action seemed to go on well, normally. The sky started to open up. Towards the east a beam of pale light allows me to distinguish the even paler faces of my soldiers. All of a sudden I hear loud shouting coming from my right, where the trench took a step down. 'Urrà Urrà!' I turn almost puzzled and I see a long line of big coats who came running towards us with their bayonets pointed. Those who were in front of them began to run away. (p. 317)

[Idem] Even my soldiers and the Alpini began to run here and there, making a big fuss. Then I feel a shiver passing right through me. I shivered, I trembled out of rage, out of indignation. 'What about that commander of the company, where is he?' I asked myself. (p. 319)

I did not hesitate for long. I stood up there against those who were coming forward more and more... and with a will never known before, with a resoluteness which I could have never imagined, I called my company and the Alpini. Those poor things who did not know where to hide hearing the voice of a commander were immediately around me, shocked, pale. In a flash I make them lay down and open a hellish fire. At that resolute spray of gunfire the enemies disappeared. Some fell, some hid. I no longer saw them. Then I heard the soft voice of the commander of the company...

I do not want to go on. The memory of this saddens me... Maybe I will go on with this when I am home on leave. Those who saw me when I arrived should really have laughed out loud. I was covered up to my ears in mud, ragged, messed up, I carried all the miseries with me. (p. 320)

[22 September 1916] It was like hellfire that day. Four times we tried to assault the enemy positions and four times we had to retreat. In the end the colonel himself jumped out of the trench shouting 'This is how we advance' and opened his arms as if embracing something big, and longed for... He took two steps and was hit in the chest. That longed for death, that hero's death which had probably been his ideal when he was still a soldier had kissed his heart... At that point no one could see anything in the souls of the soldiers who saw in the barbed wire a certain and purposeless death. 'They are killing us... forwards... forwards... we die'. I stopped in front of my captain, he was pale, his eyes wide open, his lips trembling 'Zanivolti, this is not an advance - this is a massacre.' I held my rifle firmly and watched. Many machine guns had opened fire with explosive bullets, everything was noise, swearing, suppressed cries, a black smoke, pungent, bitter. (p. 322)

[Idem] 'Holy Mary I am wounded...', I said. The Captain whispered: 'It is nothing!' I immediately continued: 'only a tiny hole in my arm'. I ran behind a hideout to bind my arm. I did not want to let my soldiers know but it was impossible. When I left, the captain kissed me, crying. The sergeant could not speak, he looked at me with puffy eyes. I remember drying a couple of tears from my eyes. Yours Peppino (p. 323)

How and why do I tell you this evening about this event which I never talk about, given that it still gives me a sense of excitement and some sort of disorientation? I don't know, maybe it's because I can still hear our cannon so well, roaring in that place where on that day I struggled so much. The account is fragmented, lacking; it is told in the way in which the memory lightens up, invaded by those flares and that despair. I needed the rest!²³⁵ (p. 324)

[Guerrieri] My Dears, outside is a terrible bombardment, the ground around us is peppered with bombardments aimed at Mount Cimone (p. 325)

²³⁵ Filippo Guerrieri, *Ibid.* p. 158.

[Idem] When the batallion attacked, led by Captain Veggian, together with Angiolino, we were not yet at the slope of the mountain when a furious hail of grenades began. It was impossible to go any further; the sacrifice would have been enormous and useless. Yet someone had to go forward and, regardless of the enemy fire, find a way through. (p. 326)

[Idem] I never saw such precision shooting as I did then. I was there with my men near a peak and I was called (selected) to go and find a way through. The task was terrible, every single metre of the road was covered by enemy fire at short regular intervals and with an unimaginable violence. On the faces of my superiors and of my mates I saw the paleness of death, while they were watching me facing my death. Horrible scenes, I fell many times and stood up again, at some point my way was interrupted by a mine, how to go further? I threw myself into a deep hole hoping to be able to go around and get out on the other side, but on that side another mine had exploded and another hole opened its huge and infamous mouth under my feet. Beneath, the soil was collapsing and dragging me into the river. Above, the incessant and continuous fire (making you crazy). How did I get back up back and find the way through? I don't remember well, I know that a solid rock kept me from falling; I grabbed it with my hands and continued my mission until evening to find the path through for my battalion. (p. 327)

[Idem] It was myself and Gigi, all alone. Captain Veggian and the second soldier I'd called had been wounded by another shell. We took shelter in a cave, pursued by that hellfire, but the Austrians had spotted us from above. They were shouting and shooting. Then we had to run for it, though we were duty-bound to press forward. A terrible day, but the mission was accomplished to the last word, and the colonel proposed a reward for all of us in the small patrol. We won't get it of course, it'll go

the way of the one for Monfalcone, but I learned about motivation and that is enough for me. I will share it with you in due time.²³⁶ (p. 329)

[Idem] When I think of the dangers so happily overcome I cannot grasp why I am still alive, healthy and I'd say, even happy, because in the end I am not really sad, sometimes I laugh, even loudly, and I always tuck in into what little food which, from time to time, I get... (p. 330)

The war on these steep mountain peaks, a war waged at incredible heights, has a character all its own. One of its main characteristics is the physical struggle it requires because of the never-ending climb up impassable roads where even mules stop halfway up and turn back.²³⁷ (p. 330)

Too hard those scenes of wounded people who cannot be assisted, of soldiers who gather in a cave with an arm covered in blood, with their face deformed waiting for a brotherly hand to help them, the friendly hand of a mate that will arrive late, in the evening when one no longer sees a thing, and when the Austrian rage shows the first sign of tiredness [...] Scenes of pity and horror which stay here in the heart and in the mind, which you always see, which we will see for all our life. In the middle of that ruin, no matter how victorious, luck still keeps protecting me, she follows me like a good friend: no doubt it is the high protection of God who does not yet want my end.²³⁸ (p. 330)

[Vitelli] Today towards two pm while I was in my hiding place tidying up the documents of the battery, I heard in the covered walkway soldiers running here and there and some harrowing cries of pain. Bounced out with a jump I began to run

²³⁶ Ibid. p. 157.

²³⁷ Ibid. p.143.

²³⁸ Ibid. p. 143.

towards the cave that led to the battery, but once near the huge hollow in the rock for the great recovery of the troops, a horrible scene made me pull up abruptly. Among three or four companions, who were also a little burnt and blackened I saw a man burning alive in a screeching, and an irrepressible smell of burnt meat, and in a sooty smoke that chokes the breath in your throat. In the black and confused mask that appeared before my eyes I spotted the features of a minor, Soldier Serragli, one of the most handsome and talented men of the company. But what a terrible metamorphosis. (p. 335)

[Idem] The accident was provoked by inattention: while running out of the cave the poor Serragli after having lit a mine inadvertently threw the still-lit fuse into a jar containing almost half a kilo of gunpowder (meant to prepare the charges) and which he had previously left right there on the walkway. The flame surrounded him and reduced him to that state, the other three who were a few steps away from him got away with a few slight burns. (p. 337)

[Idem] While I'm writing the terrible black mask of the unlucky miner stays in front of my eyes, and in my nostrils I feel that horrible gloomy smell of burnt human meat. (p. 339)

Chapter 7: Breakdown: the trauma of Caporetto

What savage techniques! The details of the death by asphyxiation caused by the gas adopted by those infamous are devastating!²³⁹ (p. 345)

[Spina] Few troops now walk on our road. Some soldiers who either linger in the deserted camps, (crossed out: maybe considering passing to the enemy) or have the order to burn the barracks mock us, saying that there is not enough time to escape from the encirclement. An artillery sergeant responsible for the Command of the 9th Siege Group reached us in a hurry and tells us he was given the order to destroy artillery material left behind on M. Santo, he says that he is now back from his mission and that he saw the enemy, organized in many compact squads, descending on the banks of the Isonzo. (p. 353)

[Idem] There should be, but I did not see it, a golden booklet by Gen. C. Cadorna entitled "The frontal attack" in which he argues with a series of valid arguments taken from experience and from history, that in the offensive it is necessary to launch a series of intensive attacks, similar to those by a water hammer against the enemy lines in order to break their defences, penetrate in the second lines and try to bypass them and cause panic and disorder provoking a defeat. (p. 354)

[Idem] I do not have the necessary knowledge to evaluate this theory, not even the elements to state whether it is appropriately set in place in the assaults that are reciprocally launched by the trenches of Gorizia against the formidable defences on Monte San Gabriele and Monte San Marco. I can only say that for over a week, regiment after regiment, brigade after brigade, launched assaults against one position after another to pierce the unassailable enemy lines. They were inexorably mowed down by machine guns placed in caves, dug into the rock or overwhelmed by the uninterrupted shell-fire or mangled by the terrible projectiles spewed out by cannons of all calibres firing from the surrounding hills. (p. 354)

²³⁹ The published edition of Gagliani's manuscript does not record the exact date.

[Gagliani] 21 October 1917 A big offensive is about to take place which they say will involve the whole front defended by the 2nd and 3rd armies from Tolmino to the sea. From several days one could see a growing activity of enemy's artillery, adjusting the shots on crossroads, batteries, etc. In the last few days the heavy artillery shells have been aimed at the rear areas, especially the villages in the valleys and the bridges over the Isonzo. Everything suggests that the offensive will develop against the 2nd army in order to regain the Bainsizza plateau and remove the threat from S. Gabriele. A deserter let us know that the attack will start on the 23rd. Today, especially during last night, the bombardment of the rear got more intense. (p. 355)

[Spina] The gunfire ranges along the whole frontline and enemy batteries of all calibres contribute their infernal chorus. Today I was supposed to go on leave, but an order arrived to suspend the sending of troops to Italy. So rather than going home I have to leave and lead the contingent which is now on the Sabotino. Last night a telephone message from the Commander of the 9th company arrived requesting an officer in Val Peumica. (p. 357)

[Idem] At times I let off steam by writing to my friends and [from here crossed out but still legible] to my new friend from Venice. I imagine them as distant, indifferent, busy [my guess] at their business, close to their homes, caught in their dreams, forgetful of us, of war, maybe ignoring battles that furiously rumble or maybe even looking for joy and pleasure. (p. 358)

What of the generals who got the plans wrong and the commanders who were unable to hold the positions we took, and issued tragic and contradictory orders ... now babble, they criticize the dead and the missing, and tarnish the reputation of great acts of heroism.²⁴⁰ (p. 360)

'with the same gravity' [from here crossed out: 'someone else would have dedicated to solving a strategic military problem connected with the battle flaring up in Gorizia.'

²⁴⁰ Monelli, *Le Scarpe al sole*, p. 140.

and substituted with:] 'he might have been dedicated to solving a strategic military problem connected with the battle flaring up in Gorizia.'²⁴¹ (p. 361)

27 October. At about 7 we hear rumours that the Austrians have breached line near the Monte Nero, but at first I don't believe that and I said to my comrades that it could be, but the second and third it's impossible! Especially in such a short time. Later on the reports become more frequent, and, at the end of the day, they become a fact because we are ordered to retreat and leave the line.²⁴² (p. 363)

[Spina] 23 October This circumstance engenders endless comments among us and within the artillery command stationed nearby. Is it possible that the Austrians deployed a heavy gun like the one that bombarded Paris? (p. 366)

[Spina] Under the bulkheads an anxious and emotional crowd roams in search of news on the enemy advance and avidly reads the war bulletins posted on the [unreadable] to reassure the citizens. The souls are so emotional that no-one believes the optimistic news coming from the front. (p. 367)

[Idem] With a heart full of a sweet hope I proceed through the labyrinth of alleys that surround my friend's house. (p. 368)

[Gagliani] At ten comes the news that the enemy has been repulsed and that there is relative calm. (p. 369)

[Idem] Brigadier Nobili commander of the artillery corps announces that, because of the disturbing news from the Second Army, it is necessary to prepare to retreat west of the valley. (p. 369)

[Idem] Rather disquieting reports circulate of the defeat suffered by the Second Army: it seems that an entire army corps has been breached and driven to flight. (p. 370)

²⁴¹ Spina, original manuscript notebook. The published edition does not record any correction or deletion of the original quoted here. For a comparison see Spina, *Un soldato siciliano alla guerra* p. 52.

²⁴² Manetti, *Maledetta Guerra*, p. 58 (the grammars mistakes of the original have been maintained,)

[Idem] ...The news of the disaster suffered by the Second Army is unfortunately true: the enemy is at Caporetto and is aiming for Udine! The Third Army must retreat to the Tagliamento! (p. 370)

[Spina] Filled with inner turmoil we go down onto the Cerovo plain. The vast area of the engineer corps is devoid of materials and troops, and everywhere we notice signs of retreat. [...] On the way I sadly and shockingly note that some centurions are adapting the cement trenches in defence of Cormons. Is it possible that our troops should retreat so far from the frontline! Have we thus met total disaster? (p. 371)

[Gagliani] These notes that were started as a diary inevitably became desultory depending on events. (p. 371)

[Idem] I get the order to go back to the left bank of the Tagliamento to find two field artillery units and to see how many army units are retreating... I watch the miserable scene of an escaping army breaking up. Something that breaks the heart! It was necessary to blow up almost all the heavy artillery batteries on site, really slowly, as it was impossible to move them. The roads are congested because of all the various vehicles trying to reach the bridge. And what traffic there is in the area near Codroipo bridge, the Medrisio bridge, built by the engineer corps, is useless because the Tagliamento has overflowed and flooded it. (p. 373)

[Idem] Here flock directionless soldiers from all armies and corps, especially those of the Second Army: they all look tired, hungry and are without rifles. It was the first thing they threw away! They followed the internal enemy's advice and suggestions that they received at the home front during their leaves: "Throw away the weapons and peace will come!" they told them. The weapons were thrown away but rather than peace the worst military disaster in history befell our poor Italy. We have to say that out loud: we were not beaten by an external enemy that we have already beaten off and scorned for two and a half years. No, we were beaten by pacifist propaganda disseminated in Italy by socialists, Giolittians, and by the fatal Papal initiatives! In a few days they have ruined the work of three years: our army had become a perfect organism with everything needed to lead us to victory. What has gone missing is the

morale that wins any battle, and this was corrupted by internal enemies. What will become of us? What news of the country? Will the people withstand this setback? Our poor families!... (p. 375)

The lack of esteem emerged from Caporetto; this was something that should not have happened and that could have been avoided if only they did more for the war, if something was done for combatants. If there were and still are many who are content when they are held as dear and useful for their Fatherland, there are also many who consider the Fatherland a redundant word. Instead, what is needed is perhaps a renewal of property rights, so that, in defending the fatherland, everyone would feel like they were defending something of their own. We made war considering it as something transitory and we did not think that this transitory thing could take fatherland and freedom away.²⁴³ (p. 377)

[Gagliani] Each day has passed by in fervent anxiety and in the incessant attempt to move the medium and heavy artillery further and set up on the line where the Austrians retreated. We have prepared efficiently to launch a new attack but the weather obstructs us: it's impossible to fire with the necessary precision...if one cannot see well. (p. 378)

[Idem] Who is responsible for this? No one will pay for it and if someone does it will not be the person or people actually responsible! So today we have to watch this depressing scene of a mass of 100,000 artillery soldiers without guns grouped in a camp for reorganization!... (p. 379)

²⁴³ Tocci, *Fede il Dovere*, pp. 130-131.

The dark sky is traversed by the menacing flashes of artillery: from the North you hear the rumble of an infernal barrage. I feel in my heart the vague premonition of impending misfortune.²⁴⁴ (p. 381)

'The Lightning' And sky and earth showed what they were like:/the earth panting, livid, in a jolt;/the sky burdened, tragic, exhausted:/white white in the silent tumult/a house appeared disappeared in the blink of an eye;/like an eyeball, that, enlarged, horrified,/opened and closed itself, in the pitch-black night.²⁴⁵ (p. 381)

[Spina] Towards nine a captain from the engineers of the 6th army corps orders me to suspend the works at the zip-line and to pull back the unit into the barracks. Once I had carried out this task I call my company command for instructions. The old telephone operator answers with his stuttering voice, now even more uncertain because of the fear, he warns me that almost no-one from the corps is left and that even the captain had already left for Udine that morning in an artillery command car. [crossed out: I imagine he might have gone to get the usual provisions but that evening] I learn that he has cowardly fled without even bothering to provide me with the instructions for the retreat of the troops. Then I called the artillery command and after a massive effort I managed to talk to the service officer Lieutenant Mayer who, in an nervous tone, urges me to take lead of the two contingents and to bring them to Novoli at the command of the 90th company where I should wait for further directions. (p. 382)

[Idem] As soon as I hang up a high-calibre grenade falls a few metres from the barracks raising a cone of shrapnel that falls loudly onto the bed. It is a warning: the enemy has noted the mass of troops in the valley and has started the bombardment. I give the order for rations to be eaten and backpacks to be sorted trying to control the

²⁴⁴ Spina, Manuscript. The entry is dated 25 then corrected with 24 (this might suggest a retrospective writing).

²⁴⁵ Translation taken from <literaryjoint.blogspot.com/2016/10/the-lightning-il-lampo-by-giovanni.html>.

emotions pervading me. But the men have understood everything and after eating quickly they pack up and march. (p. 383)

[Idem] The dismay and restlessness are painted on everybody's face. Ghedini and I who are already in the mess hall ate almost nothing and we do not want to believe the news we heard there. The officers of the battery, disheartened and tired have told us that their new position on the Isonzo is under a violent attack and that on all bridges, congested by the retreating troops, enemy bullets cause mass casualties. Due to this no one takes care of the wounded and disorganisation begins to prevail in the services. Many shells land on the road that we have to take and many army batteries proceed in vain toward the rear. (p. 384)

[Idem] At about 12 o'clock we left marching two abreast. Ghedini is at the head and I close the march. [Cancelled: On the bridge at Peumica a heel from my boot broke off completely, I put on the only pair of shoes that I had with me and even though I am not superstitious I saw the incident as a bad omen.] On the road from San Moriano to ... we stop to rest. The enemy fires ... and seems to aim at the food warehouse: an immense Gotha, surly and menacing with its black cross, flies low directing the shooting and spying on our moves. In the Friulian plain a formless haze rises near Cividale, an immense column of smoke which seems to be the result of a fire in a city. It is a grand and apocalyptic vision, at the sight of which we are puzzled and start guessing at how big the misfortune is that is about to hit the fatherland and how close the danger is. (p. 384)

Dear Dad, I send news on a daily basis hoping you receive them every day. At the moment it's useless talking about details. Just remember that, in the end, I'm fine and that today my watchword is "hope". We need faith, especially in the country and we need everybody to collaborate however they can.²⁴⁶ (p. 386)

²⁴⁶ Vivanti, *Scrivimi*, p. 300.

I haven't got much time, I have to put off to tomorrow the long letter I have wanted to write for a few days. For today, think of me in great shape and in the office that you know... Let's hope the next days will see victories return to our war and victorious it has to end.²⁴⁷ (p. 387)

To his wife S. Michele Tagliamento 2 November 1917. As I was writing today, in a postcard, I'm waking, I'm looking around: in the past few days _ from 27th evening _ I have been dazed: that was a massive shock! We were in the first line yet we were the last regiment to go down the Carso: we retreated in good shape, and in good shape and full efficiency, we got here. The soldiers are in high spirits: if we have to work, we will do it with dedication. But... will they call us to work? Or shall we conform passively to events?²⁴⁸ (p. 388)

News about us _ we soldiers _ I cannot send you: news from Italy, from the rest of the army, we don't have any (the last time I read a paper it was the 24th!): scraps of news of us is of no interest now. I would not be able, now, to waste my words telling you what I eat, where and how I sleep: I'll just let you know that I'm fine, I don't need anything, I am not affected negatively by the two days I spent marching under the rain: no arthritis, my Truci! And you know what? Many soldiers got malaria _ more than a month ago _ and I didn't, although I had it in the past.²⁴⁹ (p. 389)

Italian postcard free of charge. Correspondence of the Royal Army. Addressed to Antonio Zanivolti 23 October 1917 I am waiting with resignation to turn twenty-two, those abhorred twenty-two years. The Germans will certainly respect the big event with perfect calm. Thousands of kisses. Beppino (p. 392)

[Zanivolti] War zone 25 October 1917 Dear all, I was waiting for news from you, but I haven't received any.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 300.

²⁴⁸ Cambini, Epistolario, p. 191.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 192.

Are you waiting for my birthday? I need to wait a bit longer, then... I thought I was going to spend winter up here, but I don't know where I will end up, actually.

Tomorrow we will go down to Vallonara and then we will leave for an unknown destination. I will keep you informed day by day about every move. While I am writing, it is slowly snowing. Twenty centimetres are already on the ground. Moving will be troublesome tonight in this iced whiteness. The via crucis has started, alas. I'm happy anyway. I send my mates away melancholy with my mandolin. They say we are going to Carso, to Macedonia, to Palestine. Who knows, maybe we are coming home.

Everything is possible these days, even an unexpected death. But I joke around. I rather think that if I am going to Macedonia, goodbye my high school leave. I should have tried to sit for all the final exams. But who knows what can happen. We have to smile even when we see our castle, the one we built with patience and sacrifice, breaking into pieces. We have to laugh, even laughing at death, and life will be happy. Tonight we are playing, singing and to hell with the war. Kisses Beppino (p. 393)

[Idem] War zone 31 October 1917 Dear All, I don't know what is causing your silence. Does it mean you are scolding me? If that is the case, you should be loyal and frank and show it openly. After all, you know I can act freely and sometimes I can take advantage of it. I don't think it's too demanding to expect at least a 5 lira greeting card after fifteen days. Am I boring you with my regular, yet short, letters? After all, I don't think at such moments we can still pay attention to rumours and accusing people who really wish to be useful during this urgent time. Unfortunately, I'm still here in Sasso. I wish I could be where my goodwill and sacrifice are needed. But we don't know anything yet about the enemy intentions in our sector. Waiting for your reply, kisses Yours Beppino (p. 395)

[Idem] Sasso, 1 November 1917 Today I received your letter from 26 October. I didn't know you got my letters so late; anyway, it's not a good habit not to write to me before you get my reply. If I did the same, we would not write anymore. I think you received many letters from me these days. Did you forget that the 25th was my twenty-second birthday? It seems so. Only Teresa Casagrande remembered it.

Anyway, I inevitably and inexorably turned twenty-two. Today is All Saints Day. Nice day; and it's golden sunny indeed, it warms our heart. Tomorrow we will

commemorate our dead. I cannot stop blessing our Lord who wanted a saint by his side looking after me. He is completely responsible for all the good luck I am having. Who knows how many from our town have passed away among the blessed? Maybe most of the ones who have stopped writing are prisoners in Austria. So far I'm still lucky. Here it's still hot and it does not look real that these Germans opposite us have invaded so much of our land. Always courage. Good luck won't always be by their weapons. The sun of victory will rise for us too, and let's hope it's going to be soon. Kisses, Beppino (p. 397)

End of section 12 written with fresh memory in the prison camp between 1pm and 4 pm on 7 November 1917.²⁵⁰ (p. 400)

We left the line after having monitored it, and on the 25th of October 1917 after three o'clock the order to retreat came. We brought with us all four machineguns, from the Krašj to the Isonzo (between Ternova and Caporetto) causing extreme fatigue. On the Isonzo while we were seeking to cross it in vain we were made prisoners. - The file of soldiers on the road over the Isonzo: I believe to be Italians. They are Germans! The spiritual horrors of the day (artillery pieces left behind, machineguns torn apart etc.) I damaged my two weapons. In the evening the extremely hard march to Tolmino and beyond, through unknown places.²⁵¹ (p. 401)

He was separated from me under heavy rain, in a camp where thousands of prisoners were mixed together. A terrible sadness on his face. He left me as an order came stating that the orderlies should be separated from officers.²⁵² (p. 403)

This order stunned and shocked me: I remember that my mind was crossed by an idea like a scene struck by lightning. "Leave the Monte Nero!" Leaving this rock, taken at such a high cost, and leave, retreat to the Wrata, the Vrsic.²⁵³ (p. 403)

²⁵⁰ Gadda, 'La Battaglia dell'Isonzo Memoriale', pp. 265-309 in Gadda, *Giornale*, p. 270.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid. p. 233.

²⁵³ Ibid., p.290.

While marching we saw on the other side of the road, a line of black soldiers coming from Caporetto, preceded by some others riding horses. My heart swelled as I thought they were reserves, and at that time that black uniforms made me think of riflemen (how stupid of me)! It did not come to mind that in combat they wear a grey-green uniform. When someone voiced doubt I shouted: 'But are they our reserves taking up position on the other side of the river!' and that sounded logical. In fact, given that the bridge of Caporetto had been blown up, I imagined that German soldiers to be ahead of Caporetto, but on the other side of the river Isonzo! I had no idea of their route! After a while I heard the crackling of gunfire and rifle shots: it was then that I started to fear and sense the truth. The Germans had come up from Tolmino! They are about to surround us.²⁵⁴ (chap. 31) (p. 405)

²⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 303.