

Literature and the Great War

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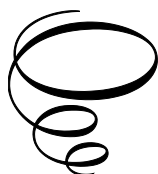
The Fronts of Writing

By

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Literature and the Great War: The Fronts of Writing

By Giovanni Capecchi

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PREFACE

After publishing, in 2013, the volume *Lo Straniero Nemico e Fratello. Letteratura Italiana e Grande Guerra (The Foreign Enemy and Brother. Italian Literature and the Great War)*, I received – thanks to the 100th anniversary of the First World War – numerous invitations to participate in conventions, round tables and conferences, and to write essays in monographic issues of magazines and miscellaneous volumes dedicated to the subject. These invitations not only served to delve into aspects that I had not addressed with due attention previously and that continued to interest and intrigue me, but also allowed me to start giving shape to a subsequent book that I had in mind to write.

With the exception of a few cases, in fact, I myself proposed the topics to be addressed on the various occasions: and these topics – for me – constituted the distinct chapters of the book under construction. Therefore, this volume, even though it brings together contributions presented at different times, has (or I hope will have) the compactness of a monographic study. It begins with an overall picture of the forms, places and times of war literature, and continues with two chapters dedicated to the year of neutrality and to the story of anticipation of war (the first focusing on 1914 in Italian literature, the second dedicated to those who did not celebrate the war, but who observed its outbreak with silent or perplexed attitudes); it traces – through literary pages – the journey to the trenches; analyzes in a deeper way some texts born in the war; it addresses the theme of the writings dedicated to the experience of imprisonment; it pauses to describe the return to peace and the return to war – through memory, but also through physical journeys to the places where the fighting happened; it introduces the theme of *rewriting* (with hints, through exemplary cases, to the evolution that the texts follow between the first draft and the press, and then – over the years – through reprints and new editions); it widens the view on European literature; and, finally, it closes with a chapter that connects – and compares – the story of the “mole war” with that of the Second World War and the “civil war”.

The book is dedicated to my father, Giuliano, who, before me, was fascinated by the theme of the conflict that broke out in Europe in 1914.

I. THE FORMS, THE TIMES, AND THE LOCATIONS OF WAR TIME WRITINGS

The Great War, the event that marked a traumatic watershed between the nineteenth century and the *short* twentieth century, dividing, with an abyss, *before* and *after*¹, mobilized and enlisted even poets. The need for silence and the awareness of the impossibility of realistically representing the tragedy and massacre, hindered, but did not stop, the need to communicate and testify to what immediately proved to be, for the combatants, the most significant experience of their lives. The conflict that swept across Europe in 1914 and militarily drew in Italy beginning in May of the following year has generated floods of popular and even literary writings²: “history’s first mass war has generated a mass memory”.³

Abandoning the libraries and beloved books that seemed to constitute the fulcrum capable of giving meaning to life, a generation of writers, in Italy and Europe, felt the necessity to throw themselves into the present, take to the streets, follow with anxiety the evolution of the crisis, and move from the role of spectator to that of protagonist. This generation participated in debates over the war during the months of its eve, almost always siding with intervention, albeit desiring the war for differing reasons, and

¹ On the twentieth century as a short century and the Great War as a watershed between *before* and *after*, we refer to two “classics” of historiography: E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*, New York, Michael Joseph: Viking Penguin, 1994 and E.J. Leed, *No Man’s Land. Combat and Identity in World War I*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979.

² On the war as a “writing hotbed” cf. G. Fait, D. Leoni, F. Rasera e C. Zadra, *La scrittura popolare della guerra. Diari di combattenti trentini*, in *La Grande Guerra. Esperienza, Memoria, Immagini*, ed. by D. Leoni and C. Zadra, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1986, p. 107.

³ F. Todero, *Scrivere di Guerra: Poeti e Romanzieri*, in *Dizionario Storico della Prima Guerra Mondiale*, directed by N. Labanca, Bari, Laterza, 2014, p. 371. By Todero cf. also *La Grande Guerra e la sua rappresentazione letteraria in Italia*, in *La guerra italo-austriaca (1915-18)*, ed. by N. Labanca and O. Überegger, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2014, pp. 261-276.

immediately, following the outbreak of the conflict, put on the uniform and set out for the front, flowing into the trenches that would soon become the symbol of sedentary warfare.⁴

In the face of war, even past literature becomes mobilized. Dante, who constructed one of the pillars on which to build national identity over the course of the 19th century of the Italian Risorgimento, becomes the defender of native borders and calls for mobilization on postcards and propaganda posters.⁵ Pinocchio, the character beloved by generations of children, serves in the Italian military and, through the pen of Collodi Nipote, performs heroic deeds, lending his popularity to the childhood militarization program.⁶ What matters most, however, is what happens to the literature of the present. While there is no lack of writers who, for reasons of age or of physical deficiencies, remain at home and watch the war from afar, as we will see, poets do not renounce its recounting in 1915 Italy, but head for the front. At times, their destination was the battlefield's rear offices and barracks, or, in some cases, the outskirts of the conflict, but often poets would find themselves in the midst of the war's raging. That war, dreamed of as a deployment of armies, a contrast in broad daylight, a short-lived contrast wrapped in a heroic halo, between enemy armies, but soon revealed with its true nature, was made up of long doldrums and of massacres, of mud and of filth, of lethal assaults and of chaos, of slaughters that can be used to conquer fifty meters of ground or a peak with an unknown name.⁷

⁴ For a look at the war in European Literature cf. *Scrittori in Trincea. La Letteratura e La Grande Guerra*, ed. by F. Senardi, Roma, Carocci, 2008. On trenches as a "Melting pot of wartime experiences of several generations of Italians" see also L. Fabi, *Gente di Trincea: la Grande Guerra sul Carso e sull'Isonzo*, Milan, Mursia, 1997.

⁵ D. Scotto, *La feroce Trine. Cartoline Dantesche nella Grande Guerra*, in «Lettere Italiane», a. LIX, n. 4, 2007, pp. 507-563.

⁶ Collodi Nipote (Paolo Lorenzini), *The Heart of Pinocchio: The New Adventures of the Celebrated Little Puppet*, Translation by Virginia Watson, New York and London, Harper & Brothers, 1919. On childhood militarisation see A. Gibelli, *Il Popolo Bambino. Infanzia e Nazione dalla Grande Guerra a Salò*, Turin, Einaudi, 2005.

⁷ The discussion of the numerous studies on the subject that have appeared in recent years is not one of the aims of this volume. Here, we limit ourselves to recommending, for an overview of the war and its recounting, the volume by Marco Mondini (*La Guerra Italiana. Partire, Raccontare, Tornare 1914-18*,

The tragic face of war resembles the face of life. Renato Serra writes as much in his diary pages, written down in the trench in July 1915, just before storming and falling on Mount Podgora. War constitutes the culminating moment of every single existence, for the horror and for the beauty that distinguish it,⁸ for the tragedy and the shock but also for the excitement that it is able to create, for its capacity to bring out the barbaric, savage component that the social contract confines in the depths of men.⁹ It is a singular moment that allows us to grasp the inconsistency of life, to quote Giuseppe Ungaretti, “a corolla of darkness”, in the face of death,¹⁰ that hurls man in front of his own destiny to exist in time. War puts human existence under a microscope’s lens, bringing out with poignant evidence the proximity of the end, forcing one to walk on the edge of the abyss. “Life”, writes Frederic Manning, of Australian origin but raised in England, engaged on the fronts of the Somme and Ancre, “was a risk shrouded in mystery, and war only made this feeling more acute”.¹¹ Death is a matter of centimetres, as writers never cease to repeat. It is a matter of instants, so close at hand as to make every moment of life more important and intense. Poets feel all of this, and try to recount it in different languages and on different fronts. They try to recount the war, its everyday life, the battles, the moments of respite, but they also try to understand the men, capable of massacres and then of embracing again, of fighting for life and of desiring peace, and of grasping, in the experience of the trenches, the deepest essence of existence.

In the face of the quantity of literary writings born from the conflict, a classification that has the character of accuracy appears complex. Yet the need to give an order to this material has been felt in the past, being

Bologna, Il Mulino, 2014) and two important monographic, magazine issues: «Studi e Problemi di Critica tesuale» n. 91, October 2015: *La Grande Guerra*, ed. by A. Cottignoli, E. Pasquini, V. Roda, G. Ruozzi, and P. Vecchi Galli; and «Annali d’Italianistica» (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), vol. 33, 2015: *The Great War and the Modernist Imagination in Italy*, ed. by L. Somigli and S. Storchi.

⁸ P. Englund, *The Beauty and the Sorrow: An Intimate History of the First World War*, Translation by Peter Graves, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2011.

⁹ On the awakening, in war, of human brutality that slumbers in times of peace, the reflection of E. Jünger, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis (Battle as an Inner Experience)*, Berlin, E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1922.

¹⁰ G. Ungaretti, *The Buried Harbour: Selected Poems of Giuseppe Ungaretti*, translated by Kevin Hart, Leros Press, 1990, p. 74.

¹¹ F. Manning, *Her Privates We*, London, Peter Davies, 1930, p. 133.

perceived, for example, by an *Italianisant* like Benjamin Crémieux as early as 1928,¹² and it is certainly useful in the present.¹³ In this sense, there appear to be three fundamental matters from which to begin in order to outline a comprehensive and overall reliable context: the *forms* of writing generated by the war, the *spatial distance* between the pages and the locations and years of the conflict, and the *temporal distance* between those pages and the locations and years of the conflict.¹⁴

During the respites between assaults, crouched in the trenches, momentarily at rest in the rear, writers take notes, in makeshift notebooks, of events that have taken place, names of comrades in arms both encountered and fallen, observations on the weather, and at times even reflections on the battles. The form of writing most in harmony with war is that of notebooks. It is writing jotted down in haste, in precarious conditions and on limited sized materials, indeed on a small notepad or agenda. It is, therefore, skeletal and essential. Notebooks are the diaries of the days of war; among their common traits, they also possess a posthumous destiny. They are not, in fact, written down so that they might be published. Rather, they are meant for more expansive rewritings to which the writer will apply himself during the months of rediscovered peace,¹⁵ yet not renouncing their essential nature, even if they recognize significant fluctuations. An absolute telegraphic quality characterizes the notebook of Scipio Slataper. The notebooks of Ardengo Soffici and Arturo Stanghellini contain some more extensive reflection. The notebooks of Gabriele d'Annunzio contain the story, be it even skeletal, of his own war, solitary and rich in artistically modelled endeavours and are written down even in exceptional circumstances,

¹² B. Crémieux, *Guerre et littérature*, in *Panorama de la Littérature Italienne Contemporaine*, Kra, Paris, 1928.

¹³ In one of her recent studies, Simonetta Bartolini retraces the writings of war following a generational criterion: the 20-year-old generation, the generation born during the 1880s, and the generation even more mature than the others (S. Bartolini, *L'epica della Grande Guerra. Il Fallimento degli Intellettuali*, Milan, Luni, 2015, pp. 83 et seq.).

¹⁴ For a more complete reflection on these three aspects, refer to G. Capecchi, *Lo Straniero Nemico e Fratello. Letteratura Italiana e Grande Guerra (The Foreign Enemy and Brother. Italian Literature and the Great War)*, Bologna, Clueb, 2013, pp. 13-149.

¹⁵ Franco Controbia too spoke of a “destiny, nearly institutionally posthumous of diaries and notebooks”: *Guerra, Memoria, Scrittura. Il Caso Italiano*, in *La Prima Guerra Mondiale*, ed. by S. Audoin-Rouzeau and J.-J. Becker, Italian Edition ed. by A. Gibelli, Turin, Einaudi, 2007, Second volume, p. 626.

for example during the flight towards Vienna and over the Austrian capital. In those of Fausto Maria Martini, published posthumously in 1931 in the periodical magazine “Nuova Antologia” and unjustly forgotten, among telegraphic phrases and much more highly developed annotations, we find the story of a man who heads off to war and who wants to fight because he knows that when near death, life becomes more intense: “November 28th, Maffii wrote me. He is on the Isonzo. He lives more where one dies more. I envy him”.¹⁶ Serra’s notes constitute an extraordinary case of a notebook, essential and schematic, but also capable of leaving bright openings to poetry and presenting sharply and wittingly the nature of war.¹⁷

Along with the notebook form of writing, the diary is closely related. In both cases, they deal with writing in real time, but diaries benefit from greater space to accommodate considerations and stories. Both have to do with two contiguous forms of writing, often confused, whose identification may not even prove to be essential. But *I Taccuini (The Notebooks)* of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, that for the years of 1915, 1917, and 1918 occupy 400 printed pages, packed with notes that hinge on the agony and courage of the combatant, on the beauty of new technologies that bring about death, on the power, even sexual power, of the soldier¹⁸, must be positioned on the shelf contiguous to, but distinct from, the lines of Slataper. In the same way that Gadda’s *Giornale di Guerra e di Prigionia (Journal of War and Imprisonment)*, the long story of a war that does not bring neither the desperately desired order, rather seeing that triumph of chaos and of the “pickle”¹⁹, nor the action in which to demonstrate to one’s self, to the father that condemned him to the rank of the good-for-nothings, or to the Mother Land, to be worth something.

¹⁶ F. M. Martini, *Appunti di Vita di Guerra*, in “Nuova antologia”, September 1st, 1931, p. 5.

¹⁷ A critical edition and commentary of the text has recently been released: R. Serra, *Esame di Coscienza di un Letterato. Carte Rolland. Diario di Trincea*, ed. by M. Biondi and R. Greggi, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2015. Of Biondi see also *Tempi di Uccidere. La Grande Guerra. Letteratura e Storiografia*, Arezzo, Helicon, 2015.

¹⁸ F.T. Marinetti, *Taccuini 1915-1921*, ed. by A. Bertoni, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1987.

¹⁹ C.E. Gadda, *Saggi Giornali Favole e Altri Scritti*, II, ed. by C. Vela, G. Gaspari, G. Pinotti, F. Gavazzoni, D. Isella, M.A. Terzoli, Milan, Garzanti, 1992, p. 570.

When speaking of notebooks and war diaries, it is worth remembering several, fundamental works; the diary of Giuseppe Prezzolini, acute observer of the militarized Italy; of Commander Valentino Coda, who precisely recounts the days of the “route” of Caporetto; and obviously of Benito Mussolini, who, while in the trenches, observes the patience and the spirit of endurance of the Italian soldier on which he would build his rise to power and consolidation of political dominion. On a different shelf to that of notebooks and war diaries, we find memoirs. These maintain the form of a diary in most, if not all, of the pages, alternating indications of dates to chapters with an independent title, but that have been rewritten at a more or less later date from the recounted events. Often, resorting to notes from notebooks and diaries, the voids are filled by memory while elongating concise phrases into well thought out and, in many cases, poetically constructed sentences. *Guerra (War)*, written in 1915 by Giani Stuparich and published in 1931, is a diary of memoirs, distant from the simplicity of the notebook that the author from Trieste spoke of having been lost and that recently has been recovered.²⁰ These same characteristics are displayed in the diary pages of *Introduzione Alla Vita Mediocre (Introduction to a Mediocre Life)* by Stanghellini, in *Kobilek* by Ardengo Soffici, in the *Diario di un Imboscato (Diary of a Draft Dodger)* by Attilio Frescura, one of the texts that, recounting the days in the trenches with realism, assumes the outline of a book written against the absurdity of war. If these diaries deal with war memoirs, true memoirs constitute another form of literature entirely. Several memoirs come about just several months after the conclusion of the conflict. Between 1919 and 1920, Riccardo Bacchelli published the *Memorie del tempo presente (Memories of the Present Time)* in “La Ronda”, recounting the war as “a buried struggle”,²¹ while a “wood shaving” of Camillo Sbarbaro, written in 1921, was already dominated by a biographical perspective: “There was a time when, seized by insanity, we ran away from home. There were many of us up there: to the front, we would say. Forgetful of tomorrow, forgetful of everything, we would walk. Why, no one knew. We were all young and handsome, and we sang. How insignificant are lives of those condemned

²⁰ F. Bottero, *Sul laboratorio di Giani Stuparich: “Guerra del ’15 (dal taccuino d’un volontario)”*, a doctoral thesis defended on April 18th, 2013 at the University of Genoa, under the mentoring of F. Contorbis, in the setting of the doctoral School of Classical and Modern Cultures (Course of Philology, interpretation and history of Italian texts and novels, cycle XXV).

²¹ R. Bacchelli, *Memorie del Tempo Presente*, Milan, Mondadori, 1961, p. 112.

to death”.²² Some authors, who had annotated notebooks and diaries in the days of war, return to their notes after years to recount their experiences of 1915-1918. Ottone Rosai, who in 1919 had published a diary, *Il libro di un teppista* (*A Ruffian's Book*), went on to publish *Dentro la Guerra* (*Inside the War*) in 1934. D'Annunzio, in *Cento e Cento e Cento Pagine del Libro Segreto* (*One Hundred and One Hundred and One Hundred Pages of the Secret Book*), remembers even the war among the events that accompany his teachings, permanent and congruent, “of the most living and the most feeling”.²³ The war is recalled only a few years after its conclusion. As early as 1922, Giuseppe Personeni published the story of an anti-heroic and insane enterprise, accompanied by an indictment of the High Command, entitled *La Guerra vista da un idiota* (*The War Seen by an Idiot*). However, one returns to that event even with the existential analysis of the penultimate or final seasons, where memories become an essential ingredient of texts characterized by a strong narrative component, beginning with *Un Anno Sull'Altipiano* (*A Soldier on the Southern Front*) by Emilio Lussu.

From war, narration is obviously born. War leaves traces in books begun before the outbreak of the conflict but concluded when referring to the great event that shocked the surrounding world seemed inevitable. Alfredo Panzini, author of an important diary on the eve of war,²⁴ mentioned the armed conflict in *La Madonna di Mamà* (*Our Lady of Mamà*), with the subtitle, in part to benefit sales, of *Romanzo del Tempo della Guerra* (*Novel of the Time of War*). Guido Da Verona executes a similar operation with *Mimi Bluette* (*Mimi Bluette...Flower of My Garden*), hastening to add, in the finale of the novel, a few pages dated “May 1916” that insert the taste of the conflict in the plot. The field of narration proves to be extremely varied. In some cases, the war seems to be only a moment in the story being told, occupying only a part of the novel. This occurs, for example, in the surreal and at times grotesque 1929 novel *La Città Degli Amanti* (*The City of Lovers*) by Riccardo Bacchelli, author also of the more traditional *Oggi Domani e Mai* (*Today Tomorrow and Never*) of

²² C. Sbarbaro, *L'opera in Versi e in Prosa. Poesie, Trucioli, Fuochi fatui, Cartoline in franchigia*, ed. by G. Lagorio and V. Scheiwiller, Milan, Scheiwiller-Garzanti, 1985, p. 272.

²³ G. d'Annunzio, *Prose di Ricerca*, ed. by A. Andreoli, Milan, Mondadori, 2005, Volume I, p. 1699.

²⁴ The diary has recently been reprinted: A. Panzini, *Diario sentimentale della guerra*, ed. by M.A. Bazzocchi, text ed. by R. Gasperina Geroni, Pendragon, Bologna, 2014.

1932. The latter revolves around a protagonist that lives the eve of the war as an interventionist and experiences the “underground war” of the trenches.²⁵ *Rubé*, 1921, by Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, is also a novel about the war, but considers a ‘before’ and, especially, an ‘after’ the war, having the conflict become only one of the many disastrous experiences of the protagonist Filippo. Here he searches for the medicine for his deep pains on the front, but leaves the event a ruined man, as he states by tracing an inner stock of his life, while in Paris he witnesses the jubilant victory demonstrations:

“[...] the war was good, it was right, in this sense: that it shattered all of the shacks. I was a shack in 1914. I am a pile of rubble in 1918. I had gotten it into my head that there was no room in the world but for the superiors, for the first. I flailed towards the high ground, holding on, tormented!, to some blade of grass, and I was always in the same spot, a man half missing, without humanity. Now I am down, worse than missing, worse than insane. I am a failure, an outcast. I have lost the war”.²⁶

Many dedicate one or more stories to the war, including Fausto Maria Martini, Umberto Fracchia, and even Guido Gozzano. Some novels have the prevalent personality of propaganda, such as *Il piccolo alpino* (*The Little Alpine*), by Salvator Gotta, the best seller that popularized an unreliable image of the war, especially with younger generations. There are fictional works about the war that have not known the fortune of success, and yet contain some “truths”, beginning with *La Coda di Minosse* (*Minos’ Tail*) by Arturo Marpicati, based on the theme of unjust, military justice.²⁷ Mario Puccini, the author of diaries recorded during the days of the conflict, also wrote a novel. His *Il Soldato Cola* (*Private Cola*), first published in 1927, the central book of the peasant war that, like the De Amicis-esque volume, joins the goodness and edifying spirit with the ability to recount a historical moment, while even presenting the non-adherence of the mass of combatants to the values of conflict: “Whoever invented war”, Puccini makes the protagonist say, “may God deny him Paradise eternally!”; “The less time spent in the trenches, the more the

²⁵ R. Bacchelli, *Oggi domani e mai*, Milan-Rome, Treves-Treccani-Tumminelli, 1932, p. 31.

²⁶ G.A. Borgese, *Rubé*, Milan, Mondadori, 1994, p. 178.

²⁷ A second reading of the novel *La Coda di Minosse*, released in 1925, is owed to Fabio Todero: cf. F. Todero, *Pagine della Grande Guerra. Scrittori in grigioverde*, Milan, Mursia, 1999, pp. 134-161.

hopes of escaping them grows".²⁸ Gadda, who keeps the pages of the *Giornale (Journal)* in his drawer, an all too living account of his participation in a rousing event in the imagination of the mind and excruciating in reality, begins to recount the war through the mediation of fiction in some pages of *Castello di Udine (The Castle of Udine)*, published in 1934. Whereas works like *Ritornaranno (They Will Return)* by Giani Stuparich and *Vent'anni (Twenty Years)* by Corrado Alvaro, are true war novels. Stuparich, who dedicated to the war firstly the lyrically rarefied *Colloqui con mio Fratello (Conversations with my Brother)* of 1926, and then *Guerra del '15 (The War of 1915)*, one of the most essential books on this topic, published, in 1941, the novel about three brothers from Trieste that choose to fight for Italy. This important novel becomes even more relevant through its look at events from the perspective of women, with the standing portrait of the strong and extremely sensitive mother, Carolina, and it indicates, on an inner journey, the road that veterans can continue to travel, after having experienced the tragedy and having seen their most beloved people fall. In fact, of the three brothers, Sandro is the only survivor who, having gone blind, develops an inner gaze. *Vent'anni (Twenty Years)*, released by the publishing house Treves in 1930 and profoundly revised for the Bompiani edition of 1953, is the novel of a generation that grew up hastily under the blows of war and left the trenches aged. The novel is one of the forms chosen by Alvaro to give witness to the war, together with stories²⁹ and poetry.

Even verses have been known to run from the wounds of war. Alvaro's *Poesie in Grigioverde (Poems in Uniform)*, published in 1917, for the most part represents the soldier who fights despite having never desired the war and who dies as one of the "weak", without patriotic proclamations on their lips: "Don't cry for him; he was not strong/ and he chose death as his masterpiece".³⁰ A few months prior, in December 1916, *The Buried Harbour* by Giuseppe Ungaretti was released in Udine. A notebook in verses, jotted down on makeshift slips of paper, proved to be capable of changing the history of poetry, but especially of recounting, in its existentiality, the excruciating sense of war, the interior and exterior destruction, the attachment to life felt in the face of looming death, and the

²⁸ M. Puccini, *Il Soldato Cola*, Introduction by R. Jacobbi, Milan, Bompiani, 1978, pp. 32, 35.

²⁹ C. Alvaro, *Memoria del Cuore. Racconti di Guerra 1915-1918*, ed. by A.-C. Faitrop-Porta, Reggio Calabria, Città del Sole, 2015.

³⁰ C. Alvaro, *In Viaggio*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 1942, p. 108.

need for human warmth. It is impossible to trace a history of war poetry in a few pages. The anthology, entitled in a manner that harkens to Eugenio Montale, *Le Notti Chiare Erano Tutte un'Alba* (*The Clear Nights were all a Dawn*), edited by Andrea Corellessa in 1998, remains a fundamental reference point.³¹ War passes through all of the poetry of those years, occupying few verses or entire collections, and pushing authors who generally create prose to write poetry, with Gadda being an exemplary case of this phenomenon.³² There is no lack of those who, like Umberto Saba, narrate the ongoing war and, as even life is a war, the conflict that will continue after the armistice. This same Saba that defined Ungaretti as *the* war poet,³³ observes the soldiers from a position of marginality, as Saba spends the war working in a ministerial office in Rome and then in a barracks in Milan, consuming therefore his military life with a sense that is for him constant, of exclusion.

I, almost, did you hate, and you, I loved,
dear companions.
A good soldier such as you, I know, I am not
I am, from you, too different, too far from your ranks.³⁴

The war verses of Saba will be progressively reduced throughout the various editions of the *Canzoniere*. Every poet has his own story, and every work that he writes, in turn, has its own story. Inserting the war into only a few verses does not mean the author did not perceive the tragedy and did not take it with him throughout the years. This is precisely what happened, for example, to Eugenio Montale. He, though quantitatively on the outskirts of wartime literature, was the guardian of a trauma which he would speak about many years later, circa 1967, with his friend Manlio Cancogni.³⁵ War encountered begets death and does not permit rebirth. This is the journey travelled by Clemente Rebora, between the hopes of

³¹ *Le notti chiare erano tutte un'alba. Antologia dei Poeti Italiani nella Prima Guerra Mondiale*, ed. by A. Corellessa, Preface by M. Isnenghi, Milan, Bruno Mondadori, 1998.

³² C.E. Gadda, *Poesie*, critical edition and commentary by M.A. Terzoli, Turin, Einaudi, 1993.

³³ U. Saba, *Prose*, ed. by L. Saba, Preface by G. Piovene, Milan, Mondadori, 1964, p. 698.

³⁴ Id., *Il Canzoniere* 1921, Critical edition by G. Castellani, Milan, Fondazione Mondadori, 1981, p. 115.

³⁵ The interview given to Cancogni appeared in "La Fiera Letteraria" on November 7th, 1967.

the eve of war and the descent into the inferno of the trenches. This descent would permanently traumatize him, causing him to follow a meta-historical and divine light in order to re-emerge. The Ligurian poet, from 1916 to 1920, designed a book on the war, made up of verses and prose, that would not see completion but of which indelible words remain, from landslides of dead to an existence extinguished both inside and out: "Lifeless within, / without life is death".³⁶

Notebooks, diaries, memoir-diaries, memoirs, novels and stories, verses, but also, even in reduced dimensions, theatrical dramas, were mostly dominated by those hints of propaganda that characterize the comedies of Dario Niccodemi and Sem Benelli. This can also be said, however, of *Appassionatamente* (*Passionately*) by the future crime novel author Alessandro Varaldo. Even around the war theatre exist stories of particular interest, such as that of Vitaliano Brancati and the drama *Caporetto*, later entitled for obvious reasons considering its debut in 1932, *Piave*. One could say, in a sense, that it goes from defeat to resurgence. With conclusive praise of Sergeant Benito Mussolini and several pages that deserve a modicum of attention in the first part, the protagonist, Giovanni, not yet converted to the spirit of war, refers to the Italian military as being without shoes and near defeat and speaks of a war in which both the victor and the defeated will be vanquished. However, perhaps the most significant theatrical drama of all war literature remains *L'invasore* (*The Invader*) by Annie Vivanti. It was written to represent the brutality of the enemy, with the German invader of Belgium and the rapist of women, but if removed from this spirit of propaganda that not all comprehended in the Italy of July 1915, it also revolves around the horrors of the conflict.

Within the mountain of writings that fall into the field of literature of the Great War, we have yet to address correspondences, epistolaries, and journalistic writings. In short, these are private and public writings, the words of a two-way dialogue and messages sent to an indeterminable number of readers. Included are correspondences that, excluding censorship and self-censorship, allow us to follow writers' days of war, as they sustain and intertwine themselves with literary works that are written simultaneously or in the subsequent months. Ungaretti is the author of *Buried Harbour*, but his war and his being at war are even presented in

³⁶ C. Rebora, *Poesie, prose e traduzioni*, ed. by and with a critical essay by A. Dei, with the Collaboration of P. Maccari, Milan, Mondadori, 2015, p. 201.

letters written from the front to Giovanni Papini or Gherardo Marone.³⁷ In some cases, it is the letters that constitute the principal text to be used in order to become acquainted with a writer's moments of wartime life. The few and bare lines of Slataper's notebook are coupled with letters that more thoroughly retrace the days in the trenches, the hopes, and the Risorgimento-like idealism of the Triestan intellectual.³⁸ This idealism was also shared by Carlo Stuparich, Giani's brother, an extremely sensitive presence within the brutality of the conflict who committed suicide so as not to be captured by the Austrians. Without his letters and without his unpublished fragments, little would remain of the youth's story. This youth who, while in the trenches, continues to reflect on the external situation with the dream of a war-free Europe, constantly wraps himself in his own inner reality, recognising "an overabundance of an internal life", tracing exams of his own existence, confessing to his friends his own solitude and his need to "communicate and remember".³⁹ The intimate nature of the letter can also blur and even correct the image of an intellectual that published pages offer. For example, Giovanni Boine, author of *Discorsi Militari (Military Speeches)*, written during the eve of war, which was defined by Mario Isnenghi as a "little bible for the social restoration of the gregarious spirit and the militarization of social life",⁴⁰ demonstrates many more problematic positions within the letters sent to Emilio Cecchi. Here he declares that the *Discorsi (Speeches)*, written only a few months prior, already feel old and outdated, inviting his friend to be wary of his militarism. "I do not excessively believe in my militarism", feeling the weight and the blot of the book published in 1914: "[...] I have on my clothes that patriotic stain of the *Discorsi military (Military Speeches)*, I must also redeem myself before posterity".⁴¹

³⁷ For the letters to Marone, refer to the new and recent edition: G. Ungaretti, *Da una Lastra di Deserto. Lettere dal Fronte a Gherardo Marone*, New edition ed. by F. Bernardini Napoletano, Milan, Mondadori, 2015.

³⁸ S. Slataper, *Alle tre Amiche. Lettere*, ed. by and with introduction by G. Stuparich, Milan, Mondadori, 1958.

³⁹ C. Stuparich, *Cose e Ombre di Uno*, Introduction by E. Nistri, Empoli, Ibiskos, 2007, pp. 213 and 217-218. *Cose e ombre di uno* was first published in 1919 (Rome, La Voce).

⁴⁰ M. Isnenghi, *Il mito della grande guerra*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997, p. 79.

⁴¹ G. Boine-E. Cecchi, *Carteggio (1911-1917)*, ed. by M. Marchione and S.E. Scalia, Preface by C. Martini, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1972, pp. 137-167. In this regard, Emma Giammattei pointed out "the necessity to "read the letters to Casati and Cecchi from a new perspective" in order to properly frame

In newspapers, on the other hand, the public voice of intellectuals emerges, during a season in which poets seek daily newspapers more than collections of verses and volumes produced during times of peace. In newspapers, proclamations in favour of war are published, during the months of the war's eve and throughout the course of the conflict. Newspapers will recount the events day after day, from special correspondents and propaganda to articles that are more capable of approaching reality, and reports that represent a *different* conflict to the one actually fought, so much as to become a constant target of scandals and irony of the combatants. In newspapers, some diaries appear in a preliminary version that are then collected into volumes. *Kobilek* by Soffici, for example, was first the Mussolian diary.⁴² Throughout daily newspapers and periodicals, battle hymns dominate, such as those by Papini, later collected in *La paga del sabato* (*Saturday's Pay*). These hymns exalt the "beautiful watering of blood" and the massacre that will fertilize the father land with the decomposing corpses, only to assume, on the first anniversary of Italy's entrance into the war, a more contemplative and less triumphant nature.⁴³ Benedetto Croce entrusted his reasoning of good sense to newspapers. Using his platform, Croce encouraged calmness to all those young people who, in a generational conflict that exhausts itself during this season, are no longer willing to listen to an intellectual who is "shrunk, distanced, and sequestered in a bitterness of pedagogist between unctuous and spiteful". With this definition of Serra, he condenses the judgement of a new generation, who even referred to Croce, and in many cases will return to doing so.⁴⁴ Even the few voices contrary to the war can manifest themselves in newspapers. These are exceptions, and among these, that of Aldo Palazzeschi must be remembered, who in "Lacerba" on December 1st, 1914, published *Neutrale* (*Neutral*). Among those who do not adhere to the bellicose chorus, an attitude of perplexity prevails, a reasoning sprinkled with questions, condensed by Enrico

Discorsi militari: cf. *Il racconto italiano della Grande Guerra. Narrazioni, Corrispondenze, Prose Morali (1914-1921)*, ed. by E. Giammattei and G. Genovese, Milan-Naples, Ricciardi, 2015, p. 263.

⁴² Mussolini's diary has recently been reprinted: B. Mussolini, *Il Mio Diario di Guerra (1915-1917)*, ed. by M. Isnenghi, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2016.

⁴³ G. Papini, *La Paga del Sabato*, Milan, Studio Editoriale Lombardo, 1915: the quote is found on p. 124; the reference to more problematic interventions is inserted thinking especially of *È finito l'anno*, *ivi*, pp. 289-290.

⁴⁴ R. Serra, *Esame di Coscienza di un Letterato. Carte Rolland, Diario di trincea*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

Thovez in an article entitled *La causa (The Cause)*: “It often happens that I wake up as if from a bad dream and painfully ask myself: Why this massacre? What was its cause? Who bears the terrible responsibility? Was it necessary? Was it inevitable? And I find no response”.⁴⁵

The varied range of forms in which war literature manifests itself brings out a plurality of voices and points of view. Every writer lives and recounts the same event in a different way. This does not mean that, within the multitude of nuances, it is impossible to underline some recurring traits. Excluding those that remain faithful to the war that was praised during its eve, and who continue to exalt the beauty of armed conflict and military undertakings (who are not many, but certainly the significance of their cultural affairs does not allow us to forget them: namely d’Annunzio and Marinetti, the latter being an exalter of the war as the world’s only hygiene even in 1921, when he publishes *L’Alcova d’Acciaio (The Steel Alcove)*), poets recount the journey towards the conflict, the departure with baggage full of illusions and hopes and the gradual revelation of the authentic nature of war. They described the days in those trenches that protect and imprison, the daily reality of expectation, mud, filth, and enemy bombings. It was an everyday life whose boredom is only interrupted by assaults that cause massacres. They highlight the role that rest and the years spent on the front assumed in their lives, and the insurmountable distance that separates those who fought and those who stayed home. They recount what the war truly was in order to give service to the truth. Many literary works open with a preface that highlights the dominant realism that is to be found in the subsequent pages. They recount the war because of the need to secure on paper a few moments of that which will forever remain the most important season of their life. In some cases, they even recount in order to condemn. Sometimes they recount, with an evident self-criticism, the war and wars. More often, the management of the first world-wide conflict pushed many young people to ask for Italy’s intervention. The reflection on the anti-heroic heroism becomes central, of those who remained at their post in spite of it all, who accepted to go encounter their own destiny, and who had the courage to coexist with their fears.

It does not appear to be a marginal fact, in the study of war literature, to confront the question of the distance between those who write and the

⁴⁵ E. Thovez, *La Ruota di Issione. Mimi di un Decennio*, Naples, Ricciardi, 1925, p. 38.

locations of the conflict. A geography of war exists that allows the arrangement of combatant poets in a precise point on the Italian front. The white war of he who finds himself on the Alpine-Dolomite front displays many different aspects compared to that of he who is sent to Carnia or the Karst Plateau.⁴⁶ This geography concerns, however, the category of writers who knew the trenches and who participated directly in the battles. From war and, also, in war itself, many books are born, from the Ungaretti-like *Buried Harbour* to the poems of Rebora, from the notebooks of Serra to those of Soffici, from *Trincee (Trenches)* by Carlos Salsa to *La Guerra Vista da un Idiota (The War Seen by an Idiot)* by Personeni, and from the writing of Giani Stuparich to those of Alvaro. However, much war literature is born far from the front. This distance varies in its dimension and for various reasons. One can wear the uniform while being far from the front. Antonio Baldini, after having experienced the trenches and being wounded, lived the war away from the battlefields, observing the conflict from afar, so much so that when he publishes, first in a magazine and then as a volume, *Nostro Purgatorio (Our Purgatory)* in 1918, he feels the need to specify, in the preface, that his pages appear in many respects to be “without war”.⁴⁷ Marino Moretti experienced the war through a hospital in Carnia and his experience, written down in a notebook, would be reused and re-elaborated by himself in the novel *Il Trono dei Poveri (The Throne of the Poor)*, 1928. Distant from the war, and yet fighting in an aristocratic solitude and in constant search for the beautiful gesture, d’Annunzio’s *Notturmo (Nocturnal)* is born. He is distant from Saba’s war, signing up for the Red Cross and serving in l’Ufficio Centrale Stampa di Roma Federigo Tozzi. Even Palazzeschi, the soldier, lives the war dramatically, working in a Roman office, feeling the tragedy and the wounds, interrupting correspondences with his friends who have contact with the conflict, incubating the pages of that which will be his pacifist book, *Due Imperi... Mancati (Two Missing Empires)*.

⁴⁶ For a geography of the war of Italian writers see E. Bricchetto, *La Grande Guerra degli Intellettuali*, in *Atlante della Letteratura Italiana*, ed. by S. Luzzatto and G. Pedullà, Vol. III: *Dal Romanticismo a Oggi*, ed. by D. Scarpa, Turni, Einaudi, 2012, pp. 477-489.

⁴⁷ A. Baldini, *Nostro Purgatorio. Fatti Personali del Tempo della Guerra Italiana 1935-1917*, Milan, Treves, 1918, p. 6. Of this edition, anastatic reprinting has been created (ed. by Corrado Donati: Trento, Università degli Studi di Trento, 1996) and *Nostro Purgatorio* has recently been repropose in the volume *Il racconto Italiano della Grande Guerra*, cit., pp. 107 et seq.

War, however, can be told from afar even without wearing the uniform. For reasons of age, Italo Svevo, Luigi Pirandello, and Federico De Roberto do not fight. But Svevo, who even begins to write an essay *Sulla Teoria della Pace* (*On the Theory of Peace*), an essay of which only a few pages would survive, published posthumously and capable of transmitting a perception of a critical position towards the European conflagration that would impoverish both the victor and the vanquished,⁴⁸ brings the echoes of war into some stories. The echoes of Caporetto can be felt, for example, in *The Nice Old Man and the Pretty Girl*. Svevo too concludes *Zeno's Conscience* with diary pages dated from May 3rd, 1915 to March 24th, 1916 and with the apocalyptic image, born from the context, of the bomb that will explode, destroying the earth and causing it to wander throughout the heavens "devoid of parasites and diseases".⁴⁹ Pirandello does not tell of the fought war, but of the war lived by an intellectual who saw in Germany the reference point of his education, and that now he is forced to identify the enemy in the same German nation, and from that of a father that sees his son depart for the front. Of his novellas, it is undoubtedly *Berecche and the War* that is most closely tied to the literature born of the conflict. De Roberto is able to speak of the war even if from afar. First, he writes newspaper articles that allude to the present through the review of books that concern past conflicts, especially those that saw Italy and Austria sided on opposing fronts,⁵⁰ then later dedicates a series of stories to the war. These stories that confine the conflict to the backdrop, a narrative pretext, are essential for a professional of the pen that wrote during that period, with an unparalleled, grand, exception, represented by

⁴⁸ I. Svevo, *Teatro e Saggi*, Critical edition with genetic apparatus and commentary by F. Bertoni, Introductive essay and Chronology by Mario Lavagetto, Milan, Mondadori, 2004, p. 873. On the Svevian text dedicated to the "theory of peace" cf. R. Cepach, *Il Tristo Animale Guerresco alla Lega delle Nazioni. Italo Svevo e la "Teoria della Pace"*, in *Profeti inascoltati. Il pacifismo alla prova della Grande Guerra*, ed. by F. Senardi, Trieste, Istituto Giuliano di Storia Cultura e Documentazione, 2015, pp. 173-190 and *Italo Svevo. La Lega delle Nazioni*, ed. by S. Buttò and R. Cepach, Trieste, Edizioni Museo Sveviano, 2016.

⁴⁹ I. Svevo, *Romanzi e "Continuazioni"*, Critical edition with genetic apparatus and commentary by N. Palmieri and F. Vittorini, Introductive essay and Chronology by M. Lavagetto, Milan, Mondadori, 2006, p. 1085.

⁵⁰ F. De Roberto, *Al Rombo del Cannone*, Milan, Treves, 1919.

Fear, destined for “La Lettura” in 1921, a supplement to “Corriere della Sera”, but refused for its polemic and antirhetorical content.⁵¹

Along with the spatial distance from the places in which the war is fought, we find another type of distance: temporal distance. Writers give a “live” account of their own experience in the trenches, but also after months, years, and even decades. The war constitutes a reservoir of experiences, images, stories, traumas, and exhilarating moments that can immediately become literature or from which he can draw after the end of the conflict, when the calm of day allows for easy writing or in the moment where time, with its passing, distanced the tragedy, allowing for its telling. If the drafting, and in many cases the publishing, of a first, consistent, group of texts takes place during the years of war, particularly rich with writings, appears even immediately after the war, between 1919 and 1924, during a period in which many works appear, beyond those that we have already recalled, such as *Con me e con gli alpini (With Me and the Alpines)* by Piero Jahier, 1920, *Le scarpe al sole (Shoes in the Sun)* by Paulo Monelli, *Viva Caporetto!* By Curzio Malaparte, both published in 1921, *Trincee (Trenches)* by Carlo Salsa, then that ideally closes this period with its release in 1924. Monelli tells of the same war that, on the opposite front, occupies the pages of *Mountains on Fire* by Luis Trenker. In the high mountain war that was fought by the Alpines, obedient and resigned defenders of the homeland, those who were about to die were occupied in the struggle against the Austrians and the enemy winter.⁵² Malaparte, in a book with a complex editorial history and marked by seizures, the first edition and reprint of the same year being seized, appearing with the title *La rivolta dei santi maledetti (The Revolt of the Cursed Saints)*, and the amended edition of 1923,⁵³ reflects on the war and reads the “route” to

⁵¹ A new edition of the war novellas by De Roberto has recently been released: F. De Roberto, *La Paura e Altri Racconti di Guerra*, ed. by G. Pedullà, Milan, Garzanti, 2015. The ample introduction by Pedullà reflects on the theme of the distance of the works of De Roberto from the fought war and on their relationship with veracity.

⁵² The first part of the memoirs of Camillo Fumagalli is dedicated to the mountain war. Fumagalli, lawyer from Bergamo, director of the “Eco di Bergamo”, and subsequently, appointed to Parliament in the first two legislatures of the Republic: C. Fumagalli, *Il mio cammino. Dalle Stanze di via Prato alla Grande Guerra*, ed. by R. Fumagalli, Bergamo, Istituto bergamasco per la storia della Resistenza e dell’età contemporanea-Il filo d’Arianna, 2014.

⁵³ For the editorial events of *Viva Caporetto!*, refer to the edition of the edited text by Marino Biondi, Florence, Vallecchi, 1995.

Caporetto as a revolt of the infantryman that no longer accepted dying for an Italy that seemed disinterested in their sacrifice. Salsa writes one of the most important books on the hard-fought war and against the “ruinous war”.⁵⁴

The shadow of war does not stop, however, in the years immediately following the conclusion of the conflict. A third season, after those of 1915-1918 and 1919-1924, expanded during the span of a decade, from 1926 to 1934-1935, when several important studies on the subject were released. In fact, 1926 saw the release of the first book on war by Carlo Pastorino, *La prova del fuoco* (*Trial by Fire*), which centered on the transformation experienced by the combatant, from the old to the new *me*.⁵⁵ An initial assessment of war literature, written by Francesco Formigari, was published by the Fascist Institute of Culture in 1935, and it was worthy of interest not only because it theorizes the short century much earlier than Hobsbawm. “It was turning, it was said, the end of 1913, the year that we would be tempted to call the last of the tenth century”,⁵⁶ but especially for some critical judgements, that prove to appreciate books that are everything but dominated by the rhetoric and exultation of armed conflict, such as *Guerra del '15* (*The War of 1915*) by Stuparich, the *Diario di un Imboscato* (*Diary of a Draft Dodger*) by Frescura, and *Trincee* (*Trenches*) by Salsa. *L'Anima Religiosa della Guerra* (*The Religious Soul of the War*) by Cesare Caravaglios, a volume on the importance that faith assumed in the war as a comfort for the combatants, but also as a theoretical manual that finds in religiosity one of the pillars on which to build valid soldiers, capable of uniting worship of the homeland with that of God.⁵⁷ With these, we can cite the *Momenti della Vita di Guerra* (*Moments of War Life*) by Adolfo Omodeo, printed in 1934, even if released in episodes in “La Critica” by Croce between 1929 and 1933. It is not a detached story, complete and objective of the conflict, but a partial story where the war is seen through the diaries and letters of

⁵⁴ C. Salsa, *Trincee. Confidenze di un fante*, Preface by L. Santucci, Milan, Mursia, 1982, p.123.

⁵⁵ For a more recent edition of the war books by Pastorino see: C. Pastorino, *La mia Guerra. La Prova del Fuoco. La Prova della Fame*, ed. by F. De Nicola, Genua, Marietti, 1989. The reflection on the clash between the old and new *me* is found on p. 65 of this volume.

⁵⁶ F. Formigari, *La Letteratura di Guerra in Italia. 1915-1935*, Rome, Istituto Nazionale Fascista di Cultura, 1935, p. 8.

⁵⁷ C. Caravaglios, *L'Anima Religiosa della Guerra*, Milan, Mondadori, 1935.

the “superiors”, the young officers that had fallen on the front, participant where even Omodeo experienced the war and recounted it in an important epistolary, even with a moral goal. He places, in fact, the heroism of a generation in the foreground, a generation that, while not being bellicose, managed to remain in their own battle positions and to speak of the war with manners and language that are distant, compared to the martial chorus of the regime, just as the young antifascist Ernesto Rossi and Vittorio Foa understood.⁵⁸ Between these two temporal extremes, numerous texts came to light, distributed over the course of the decade but with a significant hike in editions between 1930 and 1931, during the period in which *All is Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque was released. As a volume, in Italy, the release came about in 1929 and in a cinematographic version the following year. *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway saw publication the same year. This junction of 1930-1931 appears relevant, not only from a quantitative viewpoint, but also for the literary value of some published volumes. Two such volumes especially stand out: the aforementioned *Guerra del '15 (War of 1915)* by Giani Stuparich and *Giorni di Guerra (Days of War)* by Giovanni Comisso, the story of the war as an extraordinary human experience, characterized by the joy of being in the company of others, of walking together towards their own destiny.

The militarism of fascism and the new winds of death that blow through Europe, that would lead to the Second World War, recall to mind the previous war, fought by many with the hope that it could be the last. *Ritornaranno (They will Return)* by Stuparich, as we have already remembered, began being written in 1939 and was published in 1941, immediately attracting accusations of defeatism. In this same period, other books are published, like *Ed ora, andiamo! Il Romanzo di Uno Scalcinato (And Now, Let's Go! The Novel of Shabby Man)* by Mario Muccini, a book that can be inserted into that which has been defined as “the ‘demystifying’ and ‘desecrating’ sector of the first global conflict”.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ On the value that the *Momenti* had for the young antifascist cf. A. Galante Garrone, *Introduzione*, in A. Omodeo, *Momenti della vita di guerra. Dai Diari e Dalle Lettere Dei Caduti 1915-1918*, Turin, Einaudi, 1968, p. XIV.

⁵⁹ M. Bartoletti, *Memorialistica di Guerra*, in *Storia letteraria d'Italia*, New edition ed. by A. Balduino, *Il Novecento*, ed. by G. Luti, Milan, Vallardi, 1989, Vol. I, p. 643. An overview of war literature was presented by Giorgio Pullini in 1991: G. Pullini, *Gli scrittori “dentro” la Prima Guerra Mondiale*, in “Otto-Novecento”, September-October 1991, pp. 41-65.

Likewise, verses on the war such as those by Sergio Solmi come to light, whereby an especially fundamental book is born: *A Soldier on the Southern Front*. This is halfway between a memoir and a novel, by the exile Emilio Lussu, the antifascist who took refuge in Paris first printed in Buenos Aires in 1937 in Spanish⁶⁰ and, soon thereafter, in 1938. In Italy, meanwhile, it would be published only after the Liberation in 1945. This book by the commander Lussu, the heroic soldier who fought in the trenches, decorated with four medals for military valour, does not deny the historic reasons for interventionism, but, recounting the authentic nature of the war, it imposes itself as the text of the rebellion. That is the true nature of war, wherein the soldier discovers the humanity of the enemy, of the combatant that cries “Down with the war!” and that contests the orders of the High Command, of the military man who loves life and is not able to adhere to the rhetoric of he who continues to exalt the beauty of death.

However, not even this season, ideally lasting from 1936 to 1945, concludes the story of the literature of the Great War. In the 1950s and 1960s, works written during the First World War that long remained unpublished began to see publication. The first nucleus of *Giornale di Guerra e di Prigionia* (*Journal of War and Imprisonment*) by Gadda would be published in 1955. And within this type of text, the *Diario di un Disertore* (*Diary of a Deserter*), at least, written by the anarchist and pacifist Bruno Misèfari during the war and published only in 1973, must be remembered. We see the return to war of writers who had lived the experience of 1915-1918, even if from different positions. Palazzeschi published the six proses of *Vita Militare* (*Military Life*) in 1959, while in 1956 the anti-war *Fuochi Fatui* (*Empty Fires*) by Sbarbaro was released.⁶¹ A new season of historiography even begins, with the works of Giorgio

⁶⁰ G.G. Ortu, *Introduction*, in E. Lussu, *Tutte le opere. Vol. I: Da Armungia al Sardismo 1890-1926*, Cagliari, Aisara, 2008, p. LXXIX. On the genesis of *Un Anno sull'Altipiano* cf. also G. Falaschi, *Un anno sull'Altipiano di Emilio Lussu*, in *Letteratura Italiana. Le Opere*, Vol. IV: Il '900. *La Ricerca Letteraria*, Turin, Einaudi, 1996, pp. 167-199. On the edition of *Un Anno Sull'Altipiano* carried out in Buenos Aires, Remo Castellini presented a report at the conference “Comunicare și cultură în România europeană” Universitatea de Vest, Timișoara, June 24-25, 2016 (the documents are in the process of being printed).

⁶¹ On Sbarbaro (who in 1966 published the letters sent from the front to his friend Angelo Barile and relatives on free postcards) cf. F. Contorbia, *Sbarbaro e La Grande Guerra*, in *Atti del Convegno Nazionale di Studi su Camillo Sbarbaro*, Spotorno October 6-7, 1973, ed. by A. Guerrini, Spotorno Centro Studi Camillo Sbarbaro, 1974, 134-157.

Rochat and the first essays of Mario Isnenghi, in 1967, being *I vinti di Caporetto* (*The Vanquished of Caporetto*). These works and essays launch, for the two scholars, “a very real ‘militancy’ of great, warlike historiography”.⁶² Re-printings and anthological collections are released and series dedicated to the subject are born, especially thanks to provincial editors.

Furthermore, novels by authors too young to have fought in the war begin to appear, as they decided to refer to this even in their writings. Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini publishes, for example, in 1956, *Il Cavallo Tripoli* (*The Tripoli Horse*), set in the surroundings of Koper in the months between the Battle of Caporetto, in 1917, and November 1918. This occurs within the same movement that had already pushed Elio Vittorini to write *La Mia Guerra* (*My War*), a story inserted into *Piccola Borghesia* (*Petite bourgeoisie*) in 1931 and dominated by the memories of a child that hears the rumble of cannons in the distance and who will push Guido Morselli, in *Past Conditional: A Retrospective Hypothesis* in 1975, to turn history upside down, imagining a First World War won by Austria. These works are situated, concluded or only begun, by young writers who, after September 8th, 1943, had begun the civil war between the lines of partisans. Beppe Fenoglio works between 1961 and 1963 on a narrative project regarding the penultimate generation of his relatives on the backdrop of the conflict of 1915-1918.⁶³ Luigi Meneghello on the other hand, with *I piccoli maestri* (*Little Teachers*) of 1964, recounts his partisan experience that occurred on the same mountains and plateaus that conserve the traces of the previous conflict: “There were some rusty remains of war, and a certain abundance of bones of the dead. There were communication trenches and emplacements, in a type of general cave of the mountain”.⁶⁴

The experience of war branded a generation, but it also profoundly scarred the history of an entire country. It has remained alive in the memory and oral stories of the most elderly, it is wide open before the eyes of those

⁶² M. Isnenghi-G.Rochat, *La Grande Guerra 1914-1918*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2008, p. 9.

⁶³ B. Fenoglio, *Un Fenoglio Alla Prima Guerra Mondiale*, ed. by G. Rizzo, Turin, Einaudi, 1973.

⁶⁴ L. Meneghello, *I Piccoli Maestri*, in *Opere*, Vol. II, ed. by F. Caputo, Preface by P.V. Mengaldo, Milan, Rizzoli, 1997, p. 74.

who travel through Italy, from past to present,⁶⁵ and it has left its mark beyond the landscape. That bore out the landscape of the poetic surveys of Andrea Zanzotto, who in *Galateo in bosco (Etiquette in the Woods)*, of 1978, tries to penetrate the terrain in order to bring out the blood of so many of the fallen, the signs of a tragedy that has “remained in the earth and in the people”⁶⁶, or the terrain contemplated by a survivor of the Russian campaign of 1942-1943 such as Mario Rigoni Stern, who began his *Trilogia dell’Altipiano (Trilogy of the High Plateau)* with the story of Tönle, a socialist smuggler that refused to abandon his own country when the Great War broke out, who neither praised it nor desired it. It is a history, that of the recounting of the Great War, that can be extended, with the final paragraphs, up to today,⁶⁷ delineating the mutation of conflicts, but with the periodic re-emersion of the first modern and technological war, in which “that which first seemed impossible becomes reality”⁶⁸ – a bellicose horizon that persists in the literature of the twentieth century and of the new millennium.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Guido Ceronetti, in *Un Viaggio in Italia del 1983*, even travels through the locations of the conflict and visits the war museums that in the meantime were born, “falsehoods” even when scientifically cared for, as it is not possible to bring order to and set up the history of a most terrible chaos in silent rooms (G. Ceronetti, *Un Viaggio in Italia. 1981-1983*, Turin, Einaudi, 1983, p. 186).

⁶⁶ A. Zanzotto, *Galateo in Bosco*, Preface by Gianfranco Contini, Milan, Mondadori, 1978, p. 11.

⁶⁷ Among the most recent novels set during the final years of the Great War, from its eve to the post bellum period, one thinks for example of: A. Molesini, *Presagio*, Palermo, Sellerio, 2014; J. Echenoz, '14 (released in France in 2012 and published in Italy, with the translation by G. Pinotti, in 2014 by Adelphi); P. Lemaitre, *Ci Rivediamo Lassù*, translation from French by S. Ricciardi, Milan, Mondadori, 2014; E. Rasy, *Le regole del fuoco*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2016.

⁶⁸ A. Gibelli, *L'officina della guerra. La Grande Guerra e la Trasformazione del Mondo Mentale*, Third expanded version, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 2007, p. 4.

⁶⁹ The image of the war as a permanent horizon of literature is borrowed from G. Afano, *Un Orizzonte Permanente. La Traccia della Guerra Nella Letteratura Italiana del Novecento*, Turin, Aragno, 2014 (in the volume the reference is not only to the Great War, but also to other conflicts of the twentieth century).

II. RECOUNTING THE WAIT: THE MONTHS OF THE EVE OF WAR IN ITALIAN FICTION

1. The Long Wait

In the “Rassegna Contemporanea” (Contemporary Review) of September 25th, 1914, Luigi Pirandello published the first pages of what would become the novella *Berecche and the War*, chronologically linked – as specified in the 1934 edition – precisely to the months of neutrality (“Rome, late 1914, early 1915”) even if being constructed and corrected over time, with some significant variants, between the first and partial release in September 1914, the edition in the volume *Erba del Nostro Orto* (*Grass of our Garden*) of the following year, the reprinting within the volume of 1919 which takes its name from this novella and the definitive edition, that of Mondadori of 1934.⁷⁰ In *Berecche*, Pirandello recounts the inner conflict of a man that admired German culture and that at the outbreak of the war discovered a brutal and enemy country in Germany: he deals with the issue of – this too, like the latter, being autobiographical – the father that sees his son leave for the front; he makes reference to the nightmare of the citizens of Trento and Trieste who feel abandoned by a neutral Italy; he expresses an opinion of the war that does not undermine his interventionism (of mainly Risorgimento origins), but without a doubt deserves to be remembered when it establishes the “smallness” of that conflict that would be identified as the “Great War” (“No; this is not a great war; it will be a great slaughter; a great war it is not because not great idealism motivates or supports it. This is a war of markets”),⁷¹ but he

⁷⁰ For the reconstruction and discussion of the compositional process of *Berecche and the War* see, in this volume, the chapter *Writings and Rewritings of War*.

⁷¹ L. Pirandello, *Novelle Per un Anno*, ed. by M. Costanzo, Preface by G. Macchia, 3rd, vol. t. I, Milan, Mondadori, 1990, p. 598. The sentence (also present in *Erba del nostro orto*, Milan, Studio Editoriale Lombardo, 1915, p. 173), must be connected to that which has been previously said (with *Berecche* who meditates on the smallness of every human thing compared to eternity, and therefore even the present war that will, in three thousand years, occupy just a few lines in history

also introduces a reflection on the theme of the war's anticipation through the words spoken by Fongi, Berecche's friend:

"All things considered, however disastrous the events will be, however terrible the consequences, we can at least be pleased with this: that we are fortunate enough to witness the dawn of a new life. We have lived forty, fifty, sixty years, hearing that things, as they were, could not last; [...] that eventually the explosion would come. And behold, it has come. Terrible. But at least we are witnessing it. The anxieties, the hardships, the anguish, the cravings for such a long and unbearable wait, will have an end and a release. We will see tomorrow. Because everything will change, and all of us will certainly come out of this frightening upheaval with a new soul".⁷²

The wait that Fongi speaks of comes from afar (even from "forty, fifty, sixty years" away); it accompanied the first glimpse of the history of the Kingdom of Italy (a history to which, especially in *The Old and the Young*, Pirandello offers his painful and critical counter-history) and it had become increasingly unbearable. The war, it is said, will be terrible (Berecche, in the evening, looking at the sky, was taken by the "the nightmare of general destruction"),⁷³ but it will bring about the rise of "the dawn of a new life".

The first glimpse of the 20th century – and, in Italy, the Giolitti era – does not appear to be the beginning of a new era, but the prolonged end between boredom and stagnation, of a long past that, in order to end, must be overwhelmed by an exceptional event like war. Literature listens to creaks that precede the collapse, even before 1914, that in some cases are in line with the winds of war that begin to break out at the dawn of the new century.⁷⁴ If Filippo Tommaso Marinetti sings of the beauty of the conflict with his futurist novel *La Battaglia di Tripoli* (*The Battle of Tripoli*) (1912) and Ardengo Soffici describes the bursting of the impulse towards violence and the desire to beat hands in *Lemmonio Boreo* (of the same year), Enrico Corradini, in 1910, the year of the founding of the

books), it should be referred to the war that was desired and started by the Central Empires (and not yet to the conflict that will involve Italy), and it deserves to be remembered for a reasoning of Pirandello's interventionism that can certainly contain, in the first months of 1915, elements of perplexity and preoccupation.

⁷² L. Pirandello, *Novelle per un anno*, cit., p. 577.

⁷³ Ivi, p. 579.

⁷⁴ On this topic, see M. Isnenghi, *Il mito della grande guerra*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997, pp. 11 et seq.