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Italy's Colonial Future According to Giovanni Pascoli

Adriana Baranello

Pascoli Politico: the Historical and Ideological Context

At the hundredth anniversary of Italy's invasion of Libya, as the effects of European imperialism continue to reverberate in Africa, it seems an especially appropriate time to reconsider the texts that helped shape the discourse in that era and to reflect on the continuing effects that they exert. In this context, I present the translated text of Giovanni Pascoli's "La grande proletaria si è mossa."¹ Pascoli was a poet, prose writer, pedagogue, political activist and public speaker who assumed a prominent role in the public debates that surrounded both the 1911 Italian invasion of Libya and the nation's projected colonial future in the Mediterranean. Pascoli's interventionist politics were not unique in Italian intellectual circles, which were intimately involved in the run-up to the 1911 war (Cunsolo 1965). Pascoli's rhetoric, like that of Enrico Corradini and Gabriele D'Annunzio, helped to shape the public mind and to create feelings of patriotism, of fraternal pride, and of a shared destiny in a still emotionally divided nation.² The work, which originated as a public oration, was delivered at the Teatro di Barga near Bologna on November 26, 1911 at a benefit for the dead and the wounded of the Libyan war (Pascoli 1946). The text is both densely poetic and stridently ideological. Although rarely analyzed in any detail, this text has been widely cited in discussions of Pascoli's political ideology and of the political discourse in Italy in the years preceding World War I.³

Pascoli's rhetoric was timely; the process of building loyalty to the Savoy kings and to the Italian state had been ongoing throughout his lifetime. The formation of a structured Italian national identity was delayed compared to other European nations, Pascoli claims, by the country's relatively late unification, though the idea of Italianness as an ethnic identity is one of the oldest in Europe (Luzzi 2008, 169). In his oration, Pascoli emphasizes both the need to reinforce Italian national pride and the plight of the Italian immigrant. The first paragraph of the text and several other passages in the speech are directly addressed to the Italian poor who were forced to emigrate to find work and

¹ The translation is based on the edition of the text in Pascoli 1946. I would like to thank Nicola Labanca for his input on the translation of the military terms.

² The speech, also known as "L'ora di Barga," was published in *La Tribuna* on November 27, 1911, and sent in thousands of copies to the soldiers overseas; it was then reprinted by Zanichelli in December as a separate pamphlet (see Pascoli 1911). On its impact, comparable to that of Enrico Corradini's propaganda, see Gramsci (1975, Vol. 1, 205). See also Nardi and Gentili (2009, 200-201). On the topic of Pascoli's importance for the creation of the cult of the *Patria* and the myth of the *Terza Italia*, see Gentile (2006, 13-15, 75).

³ For an insightful reading of the politics of race in Pascoli's text, see Re (2010). Mario Pazzaglia (2002) and Mario Isnenghi (1996; 2007) each devote only a few lines to this speech. For a brief analysis of the text see Schiavulli (2009). And for an analysis of theme of the *fanciullo*, see Truglio (2007, 113-116).

who, because of extreme prejudice abroad, were forced to renounce their heritage. Pascoli was deeply opposed to Italian emigration; he claims that the exodus weakened both the Italian nation and its people. In the eyes of those who supported it, the invasion of Libya would only strengthen Italy, because it would both enlarge the nation's territory, permitting internal instead of external migration, and because it would also increase her international stature and glory, not least of all because it would mean reclamation of Roman territories (Pazzaglia 2002: 59, 263-264).

Perhaps because Italy's colonial ventures were limited both in their scope and success, its history of Orientalism and colonialism has received far less scholarly attention than English and French imperialism in Africa, Asia, and the Subcontinent. Yet not only does Italy have a history of its own Orientalist discourse, it also has a history of being itself Orientalized by Northern European—predominantly English—travelers who spoke of Italy in much the same terms as they did of Egypt and the rest of the Middle East, as well as of being self-Orientalizing (Re 2010; Palumbo 2003). The nineteenth and early twentieth century writings of influential intellectuals within Italy, such as Cesare Lombroso, Guglielmo Ferrero, Paolo Mantegazza, and others portrayed southern Italy in many of the same negative terms as Europeans depicted the “primitive” regions of Africa and the Middle East. Some authors extended their arguments even further, claiming that southern Italians constituted an inferior race because their blood was mixed with that of Black Africans or Arabs.⁴ This perception was subsequently used to label Italian migrants to the United States as racially inferior; though technically labeled Caucasian by immigration authorities, they were not “white” (Guglielmo 2003, 9-11). Immigrants were, as a consequence, the victims of extreme and frequently violent discrimination and racial prejudice, a tendency which Pascoli's text directly addresses and denounces through an extended attack on the Italians' oppressors abroad.

Pascoli's speech demonstrates that issues of race played a central role in the formation of Italian identity, and that race was conceived of in both fraternal and oppositional terms. He encourages fraternal devotion and solidarity by stressing the idea that all Italians, no matter what part of the country they hail from, are equals and blood brothers, again reinforcing the need for national unity, especially in the face of the north-south divide. In these sections, Pascoli employs oppositional language to underscore the Italians' supposed superiority over the African and Middle Eastern races. At the same time, Pascoli's specific invocation of the Renaissance and the Roman Empire also sets up an oppositional relationship with the rest of Europe, hinting that it was time for Italy to reclaim its position of superiority and leadership within Europe. Pascoli believed Italy's triumphant return to the world stage was imminent, made possible by the significant strength that “she” had gained in the fifty years since unification.

Pertinent not only to discourses centered on racism and nationalism, Pascoli's text is also relevant to studies of feminism and gender politics in turn-of-the-century Italy, which were, in turn, discursively linked to these new racial theories. Coded into his discourse on race and the fraternity of all Italians, there is also a lengthy comment on sexuality and the role of women in the Italian state (Guglielmo 2003, 9-11).⁵ Within this

⁴ See Bryce (2007); Guglielmo (2003, 9); Moe (2002). See also Norelli (2009) and Hartley (2004).

⁵For a discussion of historical representations of a feminized Italy, see Luzzi (2008, 163-194). For the myth of Italy as other, see Banti (2011).

larger framework, Pascoli's maternal metaphor is densely anthropomorphic; he creates an active, willful matriarch out of the Italian nation. More specifically, he creates an expressly proletarian female figure. This metaphor is meant to dispel the specter of the real proletariat (as depicted for example in *La Folla* [1901] and in *La sanguinosa settimana del maggio '98* [1907], both by the socialist writer Paolo Valera) that was then very much haunting the nation with its own vision of a very different future. Once himself an anarchist, who then spent a decade as an internationalist and a socialist, by 1910 Pascoli had embraced a conciliatory vision of the relationship between capitalist and proletarian, in the name of civil peace at home (Cencetti 2003). The fraternal bond must replace class enmity, thus displacing violence and warfare outside the great maternal body of the nation and quelling the threat of civil disorder and chaos. In the speech Pascoli constructs the whole country as a mother, whose duty is to nurture and provide for her children. So not only is it the duty of the patriotic and properly nurturing Italian mother and citizen to raise her sons, it is also the duty of Mother Italy to send them off to war, without tears; to send them to conquer the "fertile land" of Libya, so that she can then further provide for and reward her triumphant sons, and their families.

This anthropomorphized proletarian woman also embodies Italy's "fifty year miracle": through her virtue she has, in a very short time, raised herself out of poverty and illiteracy to reclaim her place on the world stage. Much like the Fascist imperial rhetoric of less than two decades later, Pascoli's speech recalls the victories and glory of ancient Rome, reminding his audience that Italy had left traces of her might across the Mediterranean—*il nostro mare*, as he calls it, echoing explicitly the Latin *Mare Nostrum*. In another similar verbal pun, Pascoli says that the "Doric colonizers" have returned to Libya. The words *coloni dorici* are clearly meant to pun on *colonne doriche* [doric columns] and the majesty of Roman architecture. For Pascoli, Italy's colonial future of expansion is firmly rooted in its Roman past, which he demonstrates through numerous references to Roman conquests and landmarks and through the recourse to classical rhetoric and poetics.

Pascoli's linguistic deftness and rhetorical skill are at the forefront in this work; his use of language is both precise and densely layered. As several passages will demonstrate, the text is extremely convoluted and often difficult to render into English. Pascoli's reliance on classical rhetorical conventions also lent considerable weight to the impact that the oration would have had on its contemporary audience, and it retains much of its rhetorical power for the modern reader. Principle among the techniques that Pascoli uses are the rhetorical figures of anaphora, prosopopeia (discussed above), and apostrophe. While the use of apostrophe was easily maintained in English, that of anaphora often was not. Given that the text is a speech, and that Pascoli spends most of it directly addressing his audience, the use of apostrophe is natural in both Italian and in English. The constant invocations of both the living and the dead give a sense of heroic drama to the text. Similarly, Pascoli uses anaphora extensively, that is, series of long, parallel phrases, in which repetition helps to create a sense of logic and order. For the sake of readability, however, the elaborate syntax of the original has been simplified as necessary in this translation.

One of the central issues that I faced was how to translate Pascoli's use of the word *Patria*. My initial instinct was to choose "Fatherland," since it reflects the etymological relationship that *patria* has to *pater*, Latin for father, and the ideological associations that

the term has for nationalistic pride. It was clear, of course, that Pascoli had chosen to evoke a feminine “proletarian” in the title because *patria* is a feminine noun, and I initially believed this to be a linguistic quality that would be lost in translation. Instead, it quickly became clear that I would need to find some way to incorporate gender into the translations of both the title of the work and of the word *Patria* throughout the text. The fact that Pascoli’s anthropomorphized Italy is conceived of as a beneficent, yet bellicose mother figure, and that he structures his entire argument around this figure, demands that the translation of *Patria* also be feminized. Additionally, the poetic and grammatical structures throughout the text made the use of Fatherland impossible. I ultimately settled on Motherland after carefully contemplating several options, all of which were unsatisfactory to varying degrees. Though Motherland may still seem too mild, given the war-mongering tone of much of the text, it is the only option that incorporates some echo of the political overtones of fatherland, while displaying the crucial feminine and maternal qualities.

Pascoli’s text stands in the space between literary work and historico-cultural and ideological artifact, and as such deserves it to be considered more fully in studies of 19th and early 20th century Italy’s national political development. It should also lead us to consider more carefully the effect that nationalist ideology may have had on Pascoli’s other works, including his political poems. Today more than ever, the work also continues to be thematically topical. Much of the recent interest in the subject of national identity has been generated by the ever-increasing tension between European governments and their non-native populations, especially with regard to immigrants of African and Middle Eastern origin. Italy, along with countries like France, England, and Germany, has faced significant internal pressures to exert greater control over its borders and to reflect on the implication of migration from across the Mediterranean for its future national, ethnic and racial identity. In the Italian case, the 1911 invasion, colonial occupation, and subsequent 1947 Italian withdrawal from Libya, mean that Italy still retains residual political ties with the African country. Italy thus exerts some influence over Libya’s policies as they regard immigrants into Libya from other, and especially Sub-Saharan African nations.⁶ Hopefully, greater access to documents, such as this, that helped to form the foundations of contemporary political and social tensions will also serve the needs of current scholarship and policy.⁷

⁶ For a recent look at the effects of Europe’s policies in Africa, see Liberti (2008).

⁷ Between the writing of this introduction and its publication, the Libyan revolution, spurred by the Arab Spring, has removed the Muammar Gaddafi led government. The Italian political landscape has also shifted dramatically, given the current economic crisis and resignation of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. It remains to be seen what the two countries’ relationship will be, going forward.

The Great Proletarian, She Has Risen!

by

Giovanni Pascoli

Translated

by

Adriana Baranello



Pamphlet cover, Zanichelli (1911)

The great Proletarian has risen!

In the past she sent her workers away, because in the Motherland there were too many and they were forced to work for too little. She sent them over the Alps and across the sea to cut canals, to dig tunnels, to raise embankments, to erect piers, to mine coal, to clear jungles, to plough new fields, to sow new crops, to erect buildings, to populate factories, to mine salt, to quarry stone. She sent her workers to do everything that was most difficult and tiring, everything that was most humble and therefore more difficult. She sent them to open paths through the impassable, to construct cities where there had

been virgin forest, to plant orchards, citrus groves, and vineyards where there had been desert, and to shine shoes on street corners.

The world took them as laborers, the workers of Italy; and the more the world needed them, the less it showed its gratitude. They were paid little, treated poorly and insulted. They were called: *Carcamanos! Gringos! Cincali! Degos!*

In America, they became a bit like the Negroes, these compatriots of the man who discovered her. And like the Negroes, they were sometimes outlawed and dehumanized; they were lynched.

Whether near to or far from their Motherland, a land noble above all others, that gave the world the strongest conquerors, the wisest civilizers, the most profound thinkers, the most inspired poets, the most marvelous artists, the most benevolent investigators, explorers, and inventors, whether near or far, these day laborers were forced to emigrate, to relinquish their nation, and to no longer be children of Italy.

It was an embarrassment and a risk to be heard to say *Sì*, like Dante, to say *Terra*, like Columbus, to say *Avanti!*, like Garibaldi.⁸

They said, “Dante? But you are a nation of illiterates! Columbus? But yours is the honored society of the Camorra and the Black Hand. Garibaldi? But your army was annihilated, by barefoot Africans! Long live Menelik!”⁹

The miraculous feats of our Risorgimento¹⁰ were no longer remembered, or more to the point, were remembered as mere miracles of fortune or cunning. The Italians were no longer the victors of San Martino and of Calatafimi;¹¹ they were the defeated of Abba Garima.¹² They had never shot a rifle, pointed a lance or swung a sabre; they knew only how to handle the knife.

Thus these *day laborers* returned to the Motherland as poor as before and even less content, or else they vanished into the anonymous maelstrom of other nationalities.

⁸ *Sì* meaning ‘yes,’ *terra* meaning ‘earth’ or ‘land,’ and *avanti* meaning ‘charge.’

⁹ Menelik II (1844-1913) was the king of Ethiopia who resisted the 1895 Italian invasion of Eritrea and Ethiopia. The battle stemmed from a dispute over the wording of the 1889 Treaty of Wuchale between the two kingdoms, which awarded Eritrea to Italy. The Italian version claimed all of Ethiopia as an Italian protectorate, while the Amharic text contained no such clause.

¹⁰ The Italian word Risorgimento means both ‘rebirth’ and ‘resurgence.’ It is the term used to refer to the Italian unification in the nineteenth century. The significance of the word is particularly important to bear in mind for Pascoli’s text.

¹¹ San Martino refers to a village that was the site of a fifteenth century battle between the Florentines and the Venetians, won by the latter, as well as of a Risorgimento battle between the armies of the Austrian Empire and of Piedmont. The battle of San Martino is more commonly referred to as the Battle of Solferino; it took place on June 24, 1859, and resulted in the Austrians losing control of the Veneto. The Battle of Calatafimi took place on May 15, 1860 between Giuseppe Garibaldi’s army of volunteers and the army of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The battle resulted in the swelling of the ranks of Garibaldi’s Mille (the Expedition of the Thousand) by some two hundred troops, and the eventual siege of Palermo. On May 28 Garibaldi declared the Bourbon reign to be at an end.

¹² Pascoli here refers to the Battle of Adwa (also known as Adowa, but called Abba Garima in Pascoli’s time), which took place on March 1, 1896 between the Italian and Ethiopian armies. The embarrassing defeat of the Italian army was the climax of Italy’s first attempt to secure Ethiopia as a colonial territory, after the rest of the African continent had been divided between earlier arrived colonial powers such as France and Britain. Throughout the text, when the place names used by Pascoli have remained the same, the spelling has been modernized. Where the name has changed, the name Pascoli used has been maintained, and the modern name given in a footnote.

But the great Proletarian found a place for them: a vast region bathed by our sea and that our small islands watch over, like advanced sentinels. Our great island impatiently reaches out toward this vast region, where once, by the work of our forefathers, water was abundant as were the crops. It was covered with trees and gardens, but now due to the inertia of the nomadic and indolent populations, it has long since become mostly desert.

There they will be workers, not day laborers, poorly paid, poorly valued, and insulted; they will not be foreigners. They will be workers in the noblest sense of the word, and they will farm *their own property*, on the soil of the Motherland. They will not be forced to renounce allegiance to their Motherland, but instead will clear paths, cultivate new land, channel water, build houses, and open ports always seeing our tri-color flag flying high over the waves of our great sea.

Neither will they be turned away, like damaged goods, at first landing; nor will they be expelled like brigands at their first sign of protest. Not even the smallest error committed by one of their number will cause them all to be hunted and chased, butchered like wild animals.

The laws that they voted for will safeguard them. Their lives will be free and peaceful on that soil, which will be naught but an extension of their native lands, connected by the familiar sea road. Just as in the Motherland, at every turn they will find the vestiges of their great ancestors.

There, too, is Rome.

And they will be called *Rumi*.¹³ May this be a good omen and a sure promise. Yes, Romans. Yes, *to do and to suffer as the strong*. And above all, on those peoples who know only rule of force we will use war, but only to impose peace.

“How is this possible?” The world looks on, astonished or hides its wonder behind a derisive sneer. “The *Proletarian Nation*, who furnishes us with workers at a reduced price, had nothing but the pick, the shovel and the wheelbarrow. These are her arts; these are her arms—the arms that she knows how to wield, other than the knife with which she cuts her bread and holds her own in a brawl. Some used to say, once upon a time, that she was even a world power, and in truth Italy had a reawakening that was called the Risorgimento. But what Risorgimento? Through the victory of a benevolent allied people she won Milan. Through another she won Venice.¹⁴ Taking advantage of a moment in which these two allies proudly battled one another, she seized Rome. Thus, the nation was reborn. And once reborn, wanting to prove herself, she was defeated by Black peoples and half-Blacks. And now...

That is what happened, once upon a time, and what is happening again.

¹³ [Editors’ note: “Rumi” is an Arabic word used to mean “Christians” (and foreigners) by Muslims. Pascoli here adds the association with “Romans,” to turn a negative connotation into a positive one. We thank Professors Barbara Spackman and Mia Fuller for their help with this.]

¹⁴ After being defeated by Napoleon III in the battle of Magenta on June 4, 1859, the Austrians ceded Lombardy to the French, who then immediately allowed their ally, Piedmont, to annex the region, though Austria reneged on the agreement to facilitate the annexation of Venice and Venetia. (The term Venetia refers to area comprised of the Venetian state, the Veneto and Friuli and was current at the time of the Unification.) Despite the crushing Italian defeats at Custoza and Lissa, Venetia finally became part of Italy through the Austro-Prussian War (1866). It was Prussia’s victory that obliged Austria to cede Venetia.

Now Italy, the great martyr of nations, only fifty years after her resurgence, has presented herself to fulfill her duty; she will contribute to the humanizing and civilizing mission in Africa. She has the right to be neither suffocated nor impeded on her own seas. She must fulfill her maternal duty, to provide to her eager sons their sole desire: work. She is solemnly committed to making her Third Age no less glorious than the august centuries that comprise her two Histories.¹⁵ She presents herself as powerful and serene, ready and rapid, humane and strong, on the sea, on the land and in the sky.

Not even the richest or largest nations have ever succeeded at such a feat. Feat? What feat? Everything seemed so easy. There was no conflict, no resistance! The principal ports of the long coast were seized and occupied in only a few days. Two armed divisions are now encamped there. Oh Tripoli, Berenice, Leptis Magna! (Those who deserted and destroyed this land do not have the right to rename its cities!)¹⁶ Behold, once again, after many centuries, the Doric colonizers and the Roman legions!

Look up: even the eagles have returned!

Thus, suddenly our people have shown their worth to the world. After only a few years in which it silently transformed itself, behold the first nation to use all the modern inventions and discoveries, the immense ships, the monstrous cannons, the mines and the torpedoes, the short spades for digging trenches and your invisible spirit, oh Guglielmo Marconi, you who write with flashes of lightning. The nation benefited from new scientific discoveries and its centuries old heroism. And she did it with her *good little soldiers*...¹⁷

Oh but are not the sailors and legionnaires of Italy also sometimes called *good little soldiers*? Has not the new Italy, in her first great war, put to work all the daring of science and of all her ancient history? Was she not the first to beat her wings and rain death onto her enemies' encampments? And has she not, at a short distance from the Promontory of Pulcher,¹⁸ reclaimed her Roman ports? And has she not already impregnably entrenched herself in the ditches and on the ramparts, according to the military arts of her forefathers, so that she might advance, secure and unstoppable?

There they are. They are still workers attending to the same tasks, workers who the world took on and continues to take on to labor. There they are, spade in hand. There they are to strike with the pickaxe and with the axe, the ditch diggers and the farm hands, sought out for every task and yet despised for it. With their spades they dig ditches and raise embankments as they have always done. With their pickaxes, they demolish ancient walls, and with their axes they chop down the great forests as they have always done.

¹⁵ Pascoli refers to the Roman Empire and the Italian Renaissance.

¹⁶ These are sites of important cities in Libya in both ancient and modern times. Pascoli is referring to the fact that in modern times Berenice had been renamed Benghazi and Leptis Magna renamed Al Khums (Homs in Italian).

¹⁷ Pascoli uses the term *soldatino* a total of three times, always emphasized with italics. The term refers, specifically, to a toy soldier, and its use would have been an insult, but here Pascoli transforms the term, appropriating it as an affectionate diminutive.

¹⁸ According to Livy (29, 27, 5-12), during the Roman invasion of North Africa in 204 BC, prior to the battle of Utica, on being told that the nearby promontory was called the "Cape of the Beautiful One," Scipio thought this was a good omen and, steering towards it, ordered the Roman battleships to land there. He had landed on what is now known as Cape Farina (Ra's Sidi'Ali al Makki or Ras Tarf) in the bay of Tunis, thirty-five kilometers west of ancient Carthage.

But the great roads are not paved for others' benefit; they open a path for the triumphal and redemptive march of Italy.

They dig the war trench. They clear space for the artillery. They stand there, beneath the rushing water, beneath the rain of fire, and they sing. The gay song of love and adventure is so often the funeral hymn that these twenty-year-old heroes sing for themselves. Heroes? What am I saying? Proletarians, laborers, peasants.

The populace that resurgent Italy did not always find ready at her call, at her invitation, at her command, is there. Oh, fifty year miracle! The peasants that were reluctant and repugnant, and who, even though they were far from Lombardy and the Veneto still called the emperor of Austria their own, when the empire of Rome was in the hands of the last Dictator, the peasants who Garibaldi did not find in his ranks...look at them!

Now is the hour of insidiousness and betrayal. The trench is, in some places, overtaken. Our men have been shot in the chest and stabbed in the back. The battalion, having only just disembarked, comes to a vertiginous gallop. Revolver in hand, eyes spurting fire, yearning on their lashed and spur bloodied horses, here come...the Italian peasants. In no time at all the horses have been left behind, the carriages unhitched, the cannons put in place. The onslaught of war engines thunders ominously.

So great and so profound a transformation! It bears repeating: fifty years ago Italy did not have schools or roads. She did not have industries or commerce, She was not aware of herself. She had no memories of the past. I cannot say she had no hope, but she had no desire for the future. In fifty years it seemed like one could only make mistakes and commit crimes; one did not begin anything if not to always do it poorly and one did not finish anything if not to finish it without ever accomplishing anything. The criticism was fierce, interminable and insatiable. Perhaps impatient desire enlivened Italy.

Well, in fifty years Italy has securely, strongly, and immortally reshaped her destiny.

He who wishes to know about Italy's current condition: look at her armada and her army. Look at them in action. Land, sea and sky, mountains and plains, peninsulas and islands, north and south, they are perfectly fused. The rosy and grave Alpine fights near the thin, brown Sicilian; the tall Lombard grenadier swears brotherhood to the small, sallow Sardinian rifleman. The infantryman, the artillery of our Piedmontese homeland (but who would want to assign to the infantrymen, flowers of the Pan-Italic youth, a particular origin?), share between them the risks and the guard duties with the mariners of Genoa and of Venice, of Naples and of Ancona, of Livorno, of Viareggio, of Bari. Scan the lists of the glorious dead, of the wounded, rejoicing in their luminous wounds; you will immediately be able to review the entire geography of Italy, Italy that a short time ago existed only as a "geographical expression."¹⁹

And there are classes and categories there, too.²⁰ But there is no conflict; or rather the conflict is over who will be the first to reach the standard of the enemy, who shall seize it first, or who shall be the first to die. Thus, the low classes fight beside the nobility

¹⁹ This phrase "...voi avrete agio di ricordare e ripassare la geografia di questa che appunto era, tempo fa, un'espressione geografica" refers to a disparaging remark that the Austrian Prince Klemens Wenzel von Metternich once made about the peninsula and its attempts at shaping and governing an Italian state.

²⁰ In Libya.

and the bourgeoisie. And so, there, in this conflict, dies the artisan and the peasant, next to the count, the marquis, the duke.

This is not rhetoric. In truth, class exists neither here nor there. This is not that which perennially and continually changes. Any given class is not, even for a moment, comprised of identical elements; a class into which one can enter and exit from endlessly is never substantially different from any other class. Therefore, what conflict can exist but that from within?

And yet still we fight. But let their battle, that of our Motherland, that is to say chosen by our Motherland, be our fight, too. If I could leave this word—Motherland—in lowercase, I would. But no! *Uppercase!* There is a fight between brothers, officers and soldiers, but it is a fight over emulation, to prove who loves our shared mother the most. Our mother rewards them equally, with the same prize, the same honors, and she shrouds them with the same flag in death.

Oh you, our armada and our army, are the grandest, the most beautiful, the most benevolent school that Italy has had in her fifty years.

They say that one is taught to laze about in this school! No. One is taught to be ever vigilant. They say one is taught to take pleasure! No. One is taught to suffer. They say one is taught to be cruel! At every forest fire or flood, at every earthquake and every pestilence, these cruel men are firefighters, incense bearers, sisters of charity, governors, nurses, undertakers. They say one is taught to kill! One is taught to die.

This is the school that, besides spreading literacy, is an exemplary teacher in mankind's exercise of his rights and of the heroic fulfillment of duty. She responds now to those who confuse the desire for peace with resignation to barbarism and servitude.

"We," say these our teachers, "who are Italy at arms, Italy at risk, Italy at war, we fight and shed blood, foremost our own, not to devastate, but to cultivate; not to degenerate or to corrupt, but to humanize and civilize; not to enslave, but to liberate. Our reality is not that of the Turks. Our war is therefore a defensive act, not an offensive one, despite how our individual strategic and tactical actions may appear. We defend our men and their right to feed and clothe themselves with the products of the land worked by their own hands, against others who seize for themselves and close off, without cultivating it, land that is necessary and workable for all men, taking bread, foodstuffs, clothes and homes from the greater collective that has need of them. We are closely linked to this land, unjustly taken from the world. We have already been there. We left signs that not even the Berbers, the Bedouins or the Turks have succeeded in destroying, the signs of our humanity and civilization, signs precisely that we are not Berbers, Bedouins or Turks. We are returning. In our eyes, this is a right; in your eyes it was and is our duty.

This is how belligerent Italy responds to the supporters of the pacifist Turks and their benevolent scimitars. This is how belligerent Italy responds to the supporters of the humane Bedouin Arabs who are accustomed to violated and mutilated corpses. This is how belligerent Italy responds to the supporters of the industrious plunderers of Negroes and slave merchants.

This is how she responds, with a virtuous and symbolic act of heroic and maternal piety. An infantryman, one of those who has been shot in the chest and stabbed in the back, takes an Arab baby from amongst the cadavers. He keeps her with him in the trenches. He nurtures and covers her; he keeps her safe. The artillery guns are thundering.

They are her cradlesong. Grenades rumble past. The baby is well sheltered, and she believes them to be what? Noisy and luminous toys. She is saved; she will be raised Italian, this daughter of war. Is she not barbarism, itself? Not decadent and vile, but virgin and wild? Is she not naked, hungry and abandoned barbarism? And he who saves, nurtures and clothes her, is he not our army that has both deadly weapons and a pious heart, he who is forced to bring death, but wishes to bring nothing but life?

Oh slandered army! And yet we smiled, despite the disdain and disgust, despite the insults we read in the foreign newspapers. Who has not seen, at least once, our handsome, armed youths dividing their mess tins and ration bread with poor old men? Who has not seen, at least once, one of our dear boy soldiers with a baby held to his neck? Who has never seen them running to stave off misfortune, presenting themselves for every exhausting task, confronting everyone else's perils? And yet, already they are seen as brigands...

Yes, we would smile if the accusation, however absurd and foul, were not directed at that which we hold dearest and most sacred. Addressing your army, they hurled obscenities at you, you our pure, saintly mother, Italy! Even if these words do not reach your shores, we cannot pardon them, oh mother of all humanity, oh mother who is as strong as she is pious!

We will remember these insults. We will remember that you, oh foreigners, have attributed to the people of Italy the very traits of barbarism that you still harbor in your hearts. You have attributed them to the very people that by the grace of Saint Francis—if it is possible—rendered even Jesus of Nazareth in a more humane light. Our sweet artists made the inaccessible heavens into a warm, orderly, earthly home, full of love. We are the people that, with Beccaria, abolished torture, who, nearly unique in the world, no longer have the death penalty. In Garibaldi, the people of Italy had a portentous warrior who hated war and preferred the spade to the sword, Garibaldi who cried over the conquered enemy, pulled from his throne, who pardoned even his torturer, and who did not order the destruction of grain fields where his enemy could take cover because the grain was nearly mature and close to becoming bread.

Oh our great and saintly martyrs—Pellico and Oroboni, Tazzoli and Tito Speri²¹—you made a great temple of your bitter, subterranean imprisonment and of the scaffold, an altar!

We know from whence came these unfair accusations. From this fact: that the example of Japan, who renewed herself in so short a time, was supposed to remain unique! The day laborers of the world became, in the right time and place, formidable *little soldiers*. The great Proletarian of All Nations (our laborious and populace nation from the Occident, identical to that nation from the extreme Orient) entered the

²¹ Silvio Pellico (1789-1854) was an Italian poet, dramatist and patriot, known primarily for his autobiographical work *Le mie prigioni* and for his imprisonment for associating with the *Carbonari*. Antonio Oroboni (1791-1823) was an Italian patriot, and one of the founding members of the *Carbonari*, a loosely affiliated network of Freemason-like secret societies, whose goals were largely patriotic and liberal. Enrico Tazzoli (1812-1852) was an Italian priest condemned for speaking out against the tyranny of the Catholic Church and of the Austrian Empire. Tito Speri (1825-1853) was an Italian patriot and hero of the Risorgimento, who was later executed for associating with Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), one of the principal philosophers and politicians of Italy's struggle for statehood.

battlefield, and demonstrated on earth, in the sea and to the sky, that the simpler and the harder working she became, the more she desired suffering above pleasure, the more she became aware that her rights had been infringed upon, the more inspired she was by the sublime thought that, once redeemed, it was her turn to be the redeemer; the more powerful she then became.

Thus Italy is affirmed and confirmed. Now she is infallible. She can be (pardon the blasphemy, she really cannot be) pushed back to the sea, forced to abandon her enterprises, invaded, run off, trampled, divided or further subjugated; no matter. She *is* and she *will remain*. A nation in which mothers encourage their sons, departing for war, to *bring themselves honor*, cannot die. A nation cannot die in which children at school break open their banks for the wounded, in which the poorest among us who has a son in the trenches at Tripoli, gives his last poor pennies to the alms collectors for the Motherland. (Listen well: this has happened in a neighborhood here, in Conti.) The Motherland holds this offering to her breast, next to her great heart, like an invaluable treasure.²²

Our wounded will not be forced to drag their mutilated limbs through the streets, their lives made impotent. No. The wounded will be, for their mothers and brothers, like the son or brother that was born or made unhappy and deformed by birth or disease. They will be the best cared for, the most highly regarded, the most beloved. They will remind us of our first moment, in many years, of self-awareness, of glory and victory, of love and concord.

They will not need to extend their hands. Instead, we will extend our hands, to receive a clasp that will make our hearts swell. They will not need to beat at our doors. We will throw them open to seat these heroes at our hearth and at our table, to hear their simple and magnificent tales, so as to consecrate our house and our children to that which inspires all good things, that which keeps cowardice at bay, that which accompanies us always, and never changes: the Motherland. And when, so voluntarily, so gaily, with such wide smiles, the life she gave us is rendered back to her, she weeps.

Blessed are you who died for your Motherland! Gentle heroes, your names exulted but humble! Rejoin your predecessors who were less venturesome than you, only because they died for that which did not yet exist!

Italy, already great, has collected you into her embrace!

What a reception the dead from Calatafimi and San Martino will give you! The giant Schiaffino, killed grasping the flag of the Mille,²³ oh how he will gather up the little gunners of the 84th, conquerors of the Prophet's flag! But do not pause too long with them! Oh Al Khums infantry²⁴ together with the Palestro infantry,²⁵ oh cavalry of Tripoli, oh cavalry of Montebello!²⁶ Victory makes glad even the dead.

²² Here Pascoli inserts the following note: "We must remember the name of this man, poorest of the poor, who has given his son, in the flower of youth and his last coins to the Motherland. His name is Carlo Castelli. His son, Giovanni, is in the 40th rifle corps, 7th company."

²³ Simone Schiaffino (1835-1860) was an Italian patriot who fought heroically under Garibaldi. He was killed at the Battle of Calatafimi on 15 May 1860.

²⁴ Al Khums (Leptis Magna) was seized by the Italian army in 1911.

Go to console the conquered! Oh Bianco, saintly first fruit²⁷ of war, oh Grazioli,²⁸ oh De Lutti, oh mariners of Tripoli and BENGHAZI,²⁹ console the dead of Lissa!³⁰ Oh Bruchi, oh Solaroli, oh Granafei, oh Faitini, oh Hombert, oh Orsi, oh Bellini, oh Silvatici, oh three hundred dead in an hour,³¹ console the dead of Custoza!³²

Oh! Do not forget those who suffered the greatest pain, and if it may be said, those that are the most valorous, the dead of Amba Alagi³³ and Abba Garima. These are the most recent martyrs for Italy; they are still waiting at the threshold.³⁴ Embrace Major Toselli,³⁵ so worthy of guiding an audacious advance on Ayn Zarah! Kiss Major Galliano,³⁶ so able to defend the trenches at Bu Meliana and Shara Shatt!³⁷

²⁵ The Battle of Palestro was part of the Italian struggle for independence; it was fought on May 30, 1859 between the Austrian army and the combined armies of France and Piedmont. Though the French and Piedmontese were victorious, their death toll was high.

²⁶ The Battle of Montebello was fought on May 20, 1859 (ten days before the Battle of Palestro) between the Austrian army and the French and Piedmontese armies.

²⁷ The first to fall in battle.

²⁸ Bartolomeo Grazioli (1804-1853) was an Italian priest and patriot who was active in the fight for independence against the Austrians. He was also an Irredentist. Along with Tito Speri and Enrico Tazzoli, Grazioli was one of the Martyrs of Belfiore, a group of independence fighters condemned to death in 1853.

²⁹ Benghazi is the second largest city in Libya and a major port. It was first settled by the Greeks and then taken over by the Romans who renamed it Berenice. It was the site of fierce Libyan resistance against the 1911 invasion by Italy.

³⁰ The Battle of Lissa (Vis, an island off of Greece) was a naval battle that occurred on July 20, 1866, between the Italian and Austrian armies, during the third war for Italian independence. Though the Italians outnumbered the Austrians, they suffered a decisive loss.

³¹ The “three hundred dead” refer to the members of the Sapri Expedition, an attempt made by Carlo Pisacane and other associates of Giuseppe Mazzini to free political prisoners from Ponza, so that they could join the fight to liberate Naples from the Bourbon kings. After multiple failed attempts, on June 26, 1857 Pisacane and his companions succeeded in liberating more than three hundred prisoners. But on June 28 the entire company was massacred by armed peasants, when they attempted to land at Sapri. Luigi Mercantini wrote a poem 1857, “La spigolatrice di Sapri” whose refrain reads “Eran trecento: eran giovani e forti:/E son morti!” (They were three hundred; they were young and strong;/ And they are dead!).

³² Custoza is the site of two battles (1848, 1866) between the Austrian and Piedmontese armies during the first and third wars for Italian independence.

³³ Amba Alagi was the site, on December 7, 1895, of the first of a series of battles between General Oreste Baratieri (1841-1901) and King Menelik of Libya. The battle ended, as did the war, in a major defeat of the invading Italian forces.

³⁴ Referring to the threshold of the Gates of Heaven, and implying that so many died that St. Peter is still in the process of admitting them into Heaven.

³⁵ Pietro Toselli (1856-1895) became famous for his role in the battle against King Menelik II, in Italy’s first African campaign. He was killed at the Battle of Amba Alagi on December 7, 1895.

³⁶ Giuseppe Galliano (1846-1896) was famous for his courage in many battles during Italy’s first African campaign. He was killed at the Battle of Adwa on March 1, 1896. He was held up as a model of self-sacrifice and dedication to duty.

³⁷ At this point Pascoli inserts the following note: “One of those marvelous majors of the indigenous Brigade wrote to me these words that all Italians should now welcome with renewed love and pain, and with a bit of remorse: *Felicitations and also thanks, inasmuch as that until now it was almost a demerit to have taken part in that momentous combat where men, for hours and hours, held their own against one hundred thousand Abyssinians.*” Shara Shatt was the site of a surprise attack by Libyan fighters on their Italian occupiers shortly after Italy’s invasion.

Oh Captain Pietro Verri,³⁸ who in the moment of greatest peril guided the counterattack, out of the trenches, by the sixteen and seventeen year old cabin boys, the boys from our sea. Oh sublime Captain Verri, go directly to Caprera;³⁹ go tell the tale to Giuseppe Garibaldi. He will repeat to you, your plea, “Garibaldini of the sea!” and he will remind you that he had his battalion of *hopefuls*, boys collected from the streets, divine youths whom they will save at Velletri.⁴⁰

Blessed are you, who died for your Motherland! You do not know what you mean to us and to History! You do not know what Italy owes you! Fifty years ago Italy was made. On her sacred fiftieth anniversary you, our soldiers, proved that which our great men vowed would happen, but which they did not hope to see in such a brief time. You have proved that Italians were made, too.⁴¹

³⁸ Pietro Verri (1868-1911) was a secret agent for the government of Italy during the invasion of Libya. He received several military honors for his years of service, and Gabriele D’Annunzio also dedicated a poem to him. Pascoli’s reference to the *Garibaldini del mare* (Garibaldi’s naval forces) is also a reference to D’Annunzio’s poem.

³⁹ Caprera, part of the Archipelago della Maddalena, off the coast of Sardinia, was the site of Giuseppe Garibaldi’s estate. He purchased the land and built the villa (today a museum) in 1855, on the occasion of his return from exile in South America. Garibaldi died on Caprera June 2, 1882.

⁴⁰ A historically significant site, on May 19, 1849 Velletri was again the scene of a battle, this time between the armies of Garibaldi and of the Bourbon King Ferdinand II. The victory for Garibaldi’s army was decisive.

⁴¹ The Italian reads: “voi avete provato che sono fatti anche gl’Italiani,” which is a reference to Massimo d’Azeglio’s famous declaration in the introduction to his memoirs *I miei ricordi*: “S’è fatta l’Italia, ma non si fanno gl’Italiani”

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