

The rebel's dark laughter: the writings of Bruno Filippi

Bruno Filippi

1916/1918

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Translator's Introduction

The writings of Bruno Filippi offer something rare in anarchist writing — truly beautiful literature. I hope this comes across in my translations — where it does not, the fault is all mine. Filippi entered upon his brief life of revolt at the age of 15, in the midst of World War I, involving himself in anarchist anti-militarist activity. Several of his brief works reflect the dehumanizing effects of military life and participation in a slaughter that was qualitatively different from any war up to that time in the sheer capacity for destruction. One could not rightly speak of "savagery" in relation to this slaughter since its destructive capacity was the precise outcome of the technological progress of civilization. And at this time, some began to seriously question progress and civilization themselves. Among them were anarchists like Bruno Filippi and Renzo Novatore. In this light of this horrendous historical cataclysm, it should come as no surprise that Filippi's writing is usually very dark and tinged with cynicism.

His essays, stories and prose poems show no mercy for either domination or subservience in any form, and he was as harsh in his assessment of the slaves who resigned themselves to their slavery as to the masters who exploited and oppressed them. He could be faulted, like Renzo Novatore, for his lack of class analysis. But when watching the masses of the poor and working people go out without protest to slaughter each other at the orders of their masters, it must have been difficult for the few who did refuse this slaughter not to be disgusted by such sheep-like behavior. In 1919, when there was an uprising in Italy, Filippi was out there fighting with the insurgent exploited, clear about who was the enemy.

His writing is bound to offend some who can only read through the lens of political correctness. That is their problem. All forms of puritanical morality impoverish existence.

Though his writing is dark and often cynical, in the midst of his cynicism and contempt there is also humor, joy and love of life. His hatred for the world as it is clearly sprang from the love of life and the dream of a world free of all domination.

Who Was Bruno Filippi?

Little is known about Bruno Filippi. He was born in 1900 in Livorno, Italy, the first of six brothers, and his father was a typographer. His family moved to Milan when he was still a child. In 1915, he was already known to the police who described him as a “dangerous element”. That same year, he was arrested during an anti-militarist demonstration; he had a warm gun without bullets. He spent some time in prison. After the war, in 1919, social unrest broke out throughout the country. In Milan, there were often clashes with the police and Filippi was among the rebels. In the summer, several young anarchists, including Filippi, began to attack their enemies. A bomb exploded at the Hall of Justice; there was an attempt to injure one of the most powerful Italian capitalists, Giovanni Breda, with sulfuric acid and a bomb exploded at his house; another bomb exploded at the home of a rich senator.

On September 7, 1919, Bruno Filippi was climbing the steps of the building where the “club of nobles” was located. He was carrying a bomb, hoping to destroy this meeting place for the richest people of the city. Suddenly, the bomb exploded, killing the young anarchist.

Bruno Filippi was a regular contributor to the individualist anarchist paper *Iconoclasta!* In 1920, the editors of the paper printed a booklet with many of his articles entitled *Posthumous Writings of Bruno Filippi*.

In The Circle of Life

In Memory of Bruno Filippi by Renzo Novatore

The people who desire to be themselves never know where they are going.

The final outcome of knowledge consists in recognizing that the soul of man is unknowable.

Without being an imitator of rabid Papinian [Papini: an old Italian author, apparently known for his cynicism] cynicism or a superficial and perfumed “voluptuary” like Guido Da Verona; without feeling the ironic skepticism of and the sorrowful bitterness of Mario Marian on my lips; I feel and affirm that life cannot be at all worthy of the name if we do not live it as Artists, as Rebels, as Heroes.

Schopenhauer, in his powerful and frightful volumes of metaphysics, is anxious to show us that Life is sad and that for this reason it isn't worth the trouble of living it. But the art drawn from the most profound and lyrical human sorrow throbs to exalt the heroic Beauty that in the divinatory exaltation of *symbol* is transfigured by creative joy that shows us savage purity, that sheds light on the loving spirit, that teaches us to live Life madly. If politics, socialism, christianity, humanism, logic, coherence, right, duty, just and unjust, good and evil, truth and justice, are already boring, vacuous and slumbering things, phantoms that have grown dim and vanished in the anthropocentric sun of the unique negator; parodies of a dying civilization that inspires nausea, repugnance and contempt in us; Art teaches us the great love of Life. We have the need to love it “up to the annihilation of being.” *Sorrow* and *Anguish* are the pure fountain of pulsating Beauty for Art. It is in the sulfurous chasms of Sorrow that Art lays its luminous roots in order to be able to fling the verdant happiness of its branches high among the mysterious conflicts of the winds, in the dance of Sun and Light where dreams, hope and Beauty are founded on a tragic song of happiness and Greatness.

Yes! Every snow-covered peak that sings polyphonic symphonies of music and poetry, of love and beauty, on high amidst the ethereal purity of light and the golden caresses of the Sun, still rises from a dark abyss. Thus us Life! Sorrow is our creative abyss, Joy and Happiness our mighty dream!

Even if sorrow does not make us better, “I think” says Nietzsche — “that it makes us deeper.” And in the mysterious depths of our being the unknowable enigma toils and hides itself. Hour by hour, moment by moment, it transmutes itself from *unknown* emotion to *known* thought, luminous and brilliant, that flashes its darting rays on virgin, purple peaks of revelatory knowledge.

And then, just as vast and glittering strings of stars wandering in the clarity of a cloudless night are reflected in the deep blue of a tranquil sea, so the happiness created by and for ourselves is reflected, smiling, in the sad sea of our sorrow; of this our sorrow that gave us Life!

We must never stop bringing our thoughts out of our sorrow and maternally giving them that within us which is of blood, of heart, of fire, of joy, of passion, of anguish, of knowledge, of destiny, of fatality.

“Life for us is to change all that we are and all that touches us into light and flame, because we cannot do otherwise.” This is the circle — perhaps much too limited — of Life where we are perpetually knocked down without being able to escape except through the silent paths of Death! But Death does not frighten or terrorize us. On the contrary! We who proceed out of the Unknown of eternity and go toward the eternity of the Unknown have learned to look upon Death like any moment of our Life. And this is our most beautiful, our most sublime mystery! This is the final word of knowledge. The unknowable!

And it is from this our unknowable singularity that the powerful and diabolical voice of our ravenous desires rises. Desires of youthful flesh eager for pleasure, the cry of the spirit panting for unlimited freedom, mad flights of the mind through the distant, unexplored unknown; howls and ferocious blasphemies of our galloping and vagabond thought colliding with the much too mysterious walls of eternity, triumphant and dionysian songs of a Life seen dimly through the delirium of a dream, a dream composed of a Whole lost and wandering in a Void. And in the void Death waits for us. This Death that is *ours* as Life is *ours*. This Death that we love!

But one should not be lowered into the grave with a heart swollen with sadness and weeping. It is necessary first to have lived in intensely as Artists, as Rebels, as Heroes, without ever having bathed in the bitter waters of repentance that flow in christian rivers. The true original and spirited sinner should not die drowning in the slimy whirlpools of a slimier remorse, but rather enveloped in the rosy blaze of the greatest sin. Before dying, we must be consumed to the last quivering spark of our luxuriant thought, having made a feast of the world and an infinite pleasure of action. Before dying, it is necessary — as Emerson said — to feel everything become familiar to us, every event useful, every day holy, every person divine. Then? “Then comes the nausea, the repugnance, the loathing,” says Bruno Filippi, and then one “dares” and daring one goes with a calm and bright spirit toward the silent realm of Death where the mind disperses in the vast stillness of the Void and matter decomposes in order to live another type of unknown life in the atoms. But for us even Death *should* be a vigorous manifestation of Life, Art and Beauty!

The Hero of Life goes toward Death accompanied by the tragically triumphal march of dynamite and the head encircled with flowers. Yes, anyone who has desired and been able to live as Rebel and Hero wants the freedom to burn in a beautiful blaze ignited by the greatest sin so that the prelude to death is nothing but a sweet and melancholy poem kissing a red dawn where *the voice of Orpheus blends with the sobs of Prometheus* and the roaring, bacchic laughter of Dionysus resounds.

I admire Corrado Brando [A character from a novel by Gabrielle D’Annunzio.] with iconoclastic enthusiasm and atheistic religiosity even if his creator has not known how to die in time and has allowed the long rain of time to fall on his mind miraculously consuming and withering it; even though it was necessary to get drunk on the virgin and dangerous zarathustrian fountains gushing from the dizzying peaks of the merry and playful nietzschian solitude; even if the shitty little Catos [The Roman orator, Cato, was known for his rigid moralism.] of that putrid Thais, of the hateful Circe called Morality, flee in horror before him. Because Corrado Brando did not glorify crime as the fat and skinny idiots claim, but — with appropriate marks of the tragic art — the efficacy and dignity of crime conceived as promethean virtue are manifested. But while I admire this vigorous creature who blossomed luxuriously through the pagan mystery of the

homerically tragic art that, as a symbol of sublime heroic beauty, exalts itself above the sky of Shadow and of Night as the fatal announcement of a brilliant dawn of blood, fire and light, I see “the anarchic individual” standing out from the grey twilight of reality, “he who obeys only his own law” in order to open the passage with bomb explosions” and live life crying like the god of the rynerian parable: “I love you and freely desire you, oh my Necessity!” It is Bruno Filippi! Spirit has made itself Thought, Thought has made itself Flesh in order to reappear as symbol. The tragic Hero of action has made himself the artist of Life in order to transmute himself into the Poet of the deed, as strong and implacable as the fatality of Destiny. Like the D’Annunzian Hero. He too said with his action: “The proof of my dignity is in the invisible miracle.” And just as in Corrado Brando, the intoxication of the will had accumulated in him as a Dionysian frenzy. Like the protagonist of *More Than Love*, he also teaches us *the fury and the whirlwind*, because in him as well “the tempest raised all the forces of the soul and, tossing them about, it slammed them against a solid granite wall.” Like all of the few frantic lovers of Life, he was a heroic poet of the deed who in the destruction of himself and of his Misfortunes created a tragic song to the “triumph of the imperishable will”, to the cult of eternal Joy and Beauty. He offered all the corroding and luminous flames of his ardent, sorrowful and tortured mind. He, Bruno Filippi, in the delirious impulse of his annihilation, wanted to make the most intimate and sublime Sin acknowledge Life. Then he dissolved in the Void, a luminous and wandering voice that remains for us, incessantly whispering: “Dare, dare!” And at the desperately serene cry of this symbolic twenty year old voice, it seems to us that the romantically scented pagan earth smiles at us with a lyrical and amorous smile, saying to us: “hasten destiny and come to rest in my turgid breast, swollen with fruitful seeds.” Since he was a poet, Bruno Filippi heard this voice. He heard it and he answered: “Oh good earth! ... I will come, I will come on the great day and you will welcome me into your arms, good, fragrant earth, and you will make the timid violets blossom on my head.” Now that Bruno Filippi has taken all the roses and thoughts germinated in the vermilion garden of his spring winds into the grave, rejoicing in strength and youth, in will and mystery, “Oh earth, take back this body and recall what was strong for your future labors.” Because I see in Him as well the “necessity of the crime that burdens the resolute man elevating him at last to the titanic condition.”

Who was he? Where was he going?

Fools! And where have you gone? Where are you going?

He was broken while breaking the chains that you, United in a cowardly and hateful way in your manifold quality as dangerous lunatics, riveted *logically and morally* to his twenty year old rebel wrists in order to crush his *Uniqueness*, his mystery, because he was incomprehensible to you, precisely as the complicated mind of one who feels complete in himself must be. Bruno Filippi hated. But the forces of Hatred did not crush the powers of Love within Him. He immolated himself in a fruitful embrace with death because he madly loved Life. We have the need and the entitlement to say of him that which was said of the D’Annunzian hero: “That the slaves of the marketplace turn around and remember!”

The Free Art of a Free Spirit

Row after row of those who are more morally than physically chronic consumptives, pinheads, cripples, hunchbacks, blind; horrible faces sculpted by vice, by syphilis, by alcohol.

Whose toothless, yellow, slobbering mouths vomited against my horrible insults.

All the hatred that gurgles in your throat, forming two rivulets of slobber that run down from the corners of your mouth, does not move me from my indifference.

Still you shake your fist, which was trained to toss dung. And you women insult me as well, you in whose womb human sorrow perpetuates itself. You are all vile, vile! Despicable beings, worthy of the whip! Crawling reptiles in search of one filthy crust of bread, dogs who lick the hand of anyone who beats you! Is it for you, really for you, that I must rise up in revolt?

For you, for your children and your mothers?

Carcasses rotting in resignation, worm-eaten mummies of a decadent society, you deceive yourselves. I wouldn't give the tiniest drop for your cause, nor even waste a cigarette on you.

Go on with your descent into the mud. While you bring yourselves down, I will climb. I will rejoice in seeing the degeneration that makes its way inside you. I rejoice. I rejoice.

Day after day, your forehead recedes, your mouth becomes more sinister. Day after day, the stigmata of putrefaction are noticed under your yellowing skin.

And I laugh, I laugh!

What a joy to be present at the collapse of a world, to see blood, corpses, rot everywhere!

Meanwhile the bourgeoisie and the people deceive each other and slaughter each other.

I am here, amused by all this bustling about.

Here a Kaiser, there a Wilson and everywhere people who moan and don't rise up.

Into the mud, reptile!

I do not want to unite with the multitude of those who flatter the proletariat, excusing them, praising them, adorning them with wreathes. No, oh distinguished windbags, your verve disguises nothing. The "people" is always there, idiotic, cowardly, resigned. And I, who consider myself superior, desire to be so, and both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat will pay for my superiority. You languish in hunger and hardships, you vegetate, bestially fertilizing wombs with a swarm of ragged, filthy, scrofulous, stunted brats.

Force! You raise your cowardly lament in chorus! You say that you are hungry. You stretch out your hand in front of the shop window full of jewels. Do it, take it! You complain to each other about the war when you yourselves are its authors, and it continues because you put up with it! But I flee from your putridity that would sully me. Proudly alone, I break the chains that link me to you and separate myself from the pack of mangy dogs, submissive to the shepherd. I will wander the world alone carrying my hatred and scorn everywhere. Alone in struggle. A one in victory and in defeat. My ideas will be the poison that must end up intoxicating you and you tremble before me as before the King, the supreme!...

And meanwhile, I laugh at your grotesque and bloody throng, I laugh so much that I no longer see anyone, and it seems to me that humanity is an immense gangrenous sore that perpetually

disgorges thick putrescent pus. And this sore is moved, shaken, covered with scabs that later disappear in order to make way for another disgorging of putrescent matter.

And I laugh and laugh!...

* * *

Most ancient roots of a sentimentalism that has already ended,
why do you persist in your moldy ideas? Don't you here the thundering life that pursues and teaches?

Absorbed up to now in a placid dream of peace, in a shining future, you fought this way, with your eyes lost in your illusions. But now we pose a problem, and you must have the courage to confront it and discuss it.

To you we pose the problem: *to be or not to be*. Up to now, your dream was altruism, sacrifice for humanity, for the future. And so you sacrificed your entire being in this inversion. Why should you care about the future? Why should you care about the progress of the people? Since you, who call yourselves anarchists, are sure to engage in a battle that is already lost for you before it has even started, since you will certainly not see the society of which you dream, and even if the people rebel, social conditions would not change for you and your rebellion would have to continue.

So what's the use of going down among a mass that cannot comprehend you since its conditions are such as to render you unintelligible to them? If you are rebel geniuses as you claim, you should not replace Christian self-denial and patriotic servitude with the altruism of the anarchist who sacrifices himself for a future he will not see and this for people who do not comprehend you. You must recognize that, being born into a society that is harmful to us, we rebels are in reality the best slaves. Being slaves of evolution, by means of our sacrifice, we allow humanity to take a tiny step. If only that were adequate, but since progress never ends and is, therefore, useless, since once society has attained the social form for which we fought it will not stop, but will need to go on toward a goal that we cannot imagine at all today, we must admit that all of our bustling about is utterly without purpose. So we observe that the strongest and best energies of every epoch are exploited by this immense leech that is humanity.

Socrates, Christ, Bruno and a vast multitude of great thinkers have been the victims of this rising movement, which is harmful for anyone who submits to it. For it is natural that the slaves in Rome, being born in that era, were content with their condition just as wage-slaves are today.

Relative contentment, let's be clear about it, formed of resignation, cowardice, ignorance, etc., etc. Defects that the mass will always have in greater or lesser degrees because collectivities are always inferior to individuals.

The people are conservative: they are satisfied with the society they find. The minority are innovators instead and therefore they rebel. The mass restrains revolutionary action with its brute weight and submits to it.

It grows accustomed to the new state of things. It rots there until the minority rebels once again.

And do I have to suffer through this entire balancing act? I, who have the strength and awareness to be my own motive force, will not be the little cog that is overwhelmed, annihilated by the heavy social gears.

Rebel, because today society oppresses me and tries to prevent the free expression of my being, I use every weapon to fight it.

Rebel against the mass that is also my enemy with its superstitions, morals, degradations, etc. I fight against the mass as well. In struggle only for MY redemption, for MY freedom, for MY present.

I don't give a damn for all the rest.

The priest triumphs, alcohol kills, the government slaughters; it means nothing to me because it doesn't touch me.

I, I defend only *myself* from attacks.

And if I should fall in this unequal struggle, certainly not alone [* Alas, you did fall alone! (Italian editor's note)] , I will have the sublime satisfaction of having risen up against a world and having won intellectually if not materially.

Scholars, scientists, poets, novelists, painters, this is why your genius is worthless in front of me. You are a reflection of life, I am its essence. And you certainly, feel atrocious pain in your hearts at seeing rhetorical castles collapse, and in spite of it all you continue to support them out of hatred for anything new. And, after all, you do well. You are born to crawl, I fly. For you the mud, for me the peaks. For you cowardly annihilation, for me the sublimation of being. And surely if life is for the strongest, I will have it. I will take it by force and by force I will steal well – being and enjoyment.

And you, parodies of human beings, continue on your march through darkness. The light shines on my path. You are afraid to be: this is the truth. The true human being frightens you. In spite of your rhetorical bluster, reality frightens. You dream, you dream. I live. You are not; I am.

I have solved the problem. You howl at me from behind.

* * *

“I would like to lie down on a soft, fragrant bed of roses...” “Watch out for the thorns” they cry out to me. “And what do they matter to me? Since thorns are not lacking in life, I prefer those of the roses that give joy with the pain.”

* * *

And fine. You who are reading this can say that my prose is crazy, abnormal, as you have called my actions crazy and abnormal. But your judgment doesn't interest me at all nor do I solicit it.

I only desire superior minds to know why I hurled myself into the darkness due to an indescribable feeling; I want the opposing mercenary pen to be unable to cover my name with the trash that is in their baggage. I alone am the reporter of myself: I flee the intermediaries who would, in good or bad faith, deform my ideas. And since I will probably not be able to reveal them, I desire that after my disappearance it is known how I determined this struggle against society. Therefore, I entrust these thoughts to a person who does not know my project and who will reveal them when the curtain falls.

* * *

Is it the haziness of the universe that still saddens me with its hazy mist? Is it a dark fate that threatens me? I don't know what causes this melancholy that depresses me, delighting in tormenting me, snatching all that I fool myself into loving and believing away from me.

Oh! The joyful faith of times past when I gladly fought the good fight for the Idea, without fears without doubts. Now, however, it all seems vain to me; for everywhere I perceive dense and impenetrable darkness.

I have destroyed everything, everything, and now I am left with my sad thoughts, doubting everything, all of it. And I feel this need to spread my thoughts on this blank sheet that has not shuddered at learning of the storm that torments me. Who will read these lines? Perhaps nobody. They will remain unknown as nothing is known about those who are familiar with the weariness of my thought.

* * *

This evening, as usual, I was reading when a passage of the piece struck me vividly and I then stopped reading to reflect. I was just then musing when, turning my eyes absent-mindedly about the room I looked, and more, *I saw myself* seated on the bed. Not I, but yet it was I, because he was absolutely like me. Amazed, I gazed in silence, and he, *the other I*, looked at me as well, but with a certain ironic smile.

“Who are you?” I asked him. “Your shadow,” he answered. “I have come here for a bit of discussion.” “Let’s discuss, then,” I replied.

“Well: why are you an anarchist?” “Why, because currently we are exploited, trampled by rulers.”

“Rhetoric, rhetoric, my dear. Listen: you are an anarchist and you don’t even know why. I have always noticed this: that in every society there have been innovators who end up on the stake, on the cross and so on and so on. So these innovators with all their dreams and sacrifices failed miserably, because any renewal, anticipated by any individual whatsoever, occurs a long time after the death of that individual. And this is what will happen with you anarchists. You will die without seeing any one of your ideals carried out, and the generation after you, which may live in an anarchist society, will long for a higher ideal and will die in their turn without achieving anything. It’s a vicious circle, an eternal chasing after oneself.

* * *

Today as never before, the shadows surrounded me. And indeed it happens that after living for some time surrounded by the warmth of the sun, when it is eclipsed, one is shaken with a sudden chill.

The cold has entered my mind that dreams of a future of warmth and sees it in the far distance, or, *as someone told me, almost out of reach*. How sad these words are. You say to the swallow that takes flight in search of the spring that she will never reach it; you will see her fold her wings lost, discouraged. I do not stop, I do not fold my wings. Who knows that the distant dawn cannot be reached; who knows?

My spirit is dry as a desert, my eyes burn as if with fever. And it seems that with each stroke something inside breaks with a mournful crash. Who, who could describe what I feel? Not even I myself can do it. At times I feel my mind spreading out, expanding, glad, confident. And then, at a stroke, it shrivels suddenly with a most acute sorrow. What does the world, what does humanity matter to me? I no longer see anyone. My eyes see only one thing, a distant dawning. Everything else is shadow.

Laughing nature irritates me since it clashes with my sorrowful thoughts and almost seems to mock me. I would prefer that the sky was dark and flashing like me at these times. Like the shipwrecked person who finds himself in the desolate vastness of the ocean and trembles at the baleful solitude, keeping an eye on the horizon in hope of seeing a friendly sail appear, I also feel alone, painfully alone, lost in a fearful vastness. But I will not let myself be overcome by waves. I will plow the sea with my vigorous arms in my search, an untiring and daring wayfarer.

Fluctuat in porto. The Latin motto spurs me on and I gaze like the helmsman at the lighthouse in the distance that pierces the fog with its beam of the light. And I want to reach that light. I will, I will! No obstacle will keep me from it, neither reefs nor blustery gales. I will be strong, *I will arrive.* Like the Arab caravans preparing to cross the Sahara and observing the sandy vastness that they will have to cross with fear, with the anxiety of being lost along the way, that still go on and on and on, under the blazing sun, amid the raging of the simoom, thirsty, hungry, tired, beside humped camels that widen their nostrils in order to steal a little coolness from the dry air, with the urgent, fixed vision of a slender white mosque from which the muezzin salutes Mecca in the evening, of a cool village in which to rest, thus I also go on and on and on with a single vision in my eyes. Untiring, I go on, choking with an entire tempest inside me. If what I feel could be changed into wind, I would pass like a devastating storm, destroying everything under my violent blows. And I go on, I go on. My mind suffers, my eyelids close; I feel a need for peace, for rest, the enticement to remain so on the sand, to vanish, to disappear under the sun, to return to the void. The jackals would come and make a feast of my body, leaving only my blanching skeleton as a mute mockery of life. But I rise up, I kill the germ of peace and go on. I will arrive because I desire it. And if I don't arrive? Then the desert will take possession of me.

* * *

I have fallen ill with the same disease as Nietzsche and it displeases me to admit having anything in common with this or the other world. I am restless and neurasthenic. I have an iron hoop on my head that crushes my skull, and my eyes throb in their sockets, swollen and bloody, tired of dreams. I am destined to pass through this world, wandering like an invisible meteor. Precisely because I am superior, I will have to empty the entire cup of sorrow and distress with no joy to cheer me. But the harsh intoxication of drinking from the chalice of sorrow is a superb pleasure that only one who tears his soul to shreds by himself, with his own hands, is given to taste. Still I sometimes covet the other cup, the cup of joy, in order to moisten my greedy lips with it, but it flees and now, day after day, the chasm that separates me from others frightens me. Who will come with me? Who will have the courage to fly over the gulf in order to listen to my truth, in order to disperse a little of my sadness? Who? ... Yesterday at the peak of my weariness, I received a postcard from an unknown woman. Three violets that cheered me up a bit with my gaiety of the thought and the symbol: twelve words that made me dream pleasantly.

I thank the unknown woman for her thought and for her mysteriousness that allows me to rise in flight on the winged horse of reverie. Gentle unknown woman, where are you? Perhaps in passionate Andalusia or in gay France? Who knows? Any one who knows that she, the unknown woman, is the ray of light! ... No., impossible! Inside me lies thick darkness. I don't think, I don't speak, but I desire the sun, the light.

* * *

I wander through the voracious city, immersing myself in the din of life in order to kill a germ of melancholy that is developing inside me. I wander aimlessly and observe the incessant hustle and bustle, the continuous parade of stereotyped and indifferent faces. Flashy women pass, and in all their movements and their simplest gestures you see the effort, the ostentation, aimed only at arousing desire. And men stop, follow the gaudy, buxom figurine with a greedy eye and make vulgar comments. Here is a crowd of orphans, badly stuffed into poorly made clothes. They go by guided by a stocky, vulgar priest. Poor babies! Raised in bigotry, in the corrupt atmosphere of the boarding school, they are resigned, the helots of tomorrow. I see a church. A coarse pastor talks with the devoted women who listen to him, repentant and attentive, and the priestling shakes the hairy hands and turns his eyes away throwing sidelong glances. The well-fed one in the shadow of the temple of lies hears the howls of work and misery that seem to hover over the great city with anger. "Spare change, sir," a filthy ragged being moans... "Spare change, sir..." And the crowd goes by, uncaring, thinking of the evening's soup, the tavern, the bowling game. And the call of the beggar continues, annoying and implacable, making my head pound, making my brain throb.

I quicken my pace; I am in the wealthy district. Carriages, automobiles, liveried servants with idiotic faces open car doors and bow. I see women wearing make-up and perfume, preened dandies with kid gloves, monocles, walking sticks, tricolor cockades. These people collide and mingle: they speak of dinner and dancers. A nauseating scent rises that takes me by the throat and chokes me. But I remain, nearly spellbound, hearing the rustling of silk, the twittering of the gentlewomen. The notes of a patriotic anthem come billowing out of a cafe: there is a cripple standing near to me, leaning on crutches, who watches the endless stream in amazement.

I flee. I walk through solitary, half-lit streets: I come out in squares, in alleys.

Ragged, dirty children, pregnant women, people black from smoke and stinking of cigarette butts. Dump, crumbling houses, corners smelling of piss, taverns full of drunken, shouting customers. Here are the soldiers: with heavy steps, in rhythm, sweaty, dusty, furrowed faces, bent backs. The people go out, look, comment, commiserate and then go back to drinking, shouting, singing.

Again I flee. On the corners I see the announcements for various operettas and cafe chanteuses: I hear a crowd of young men discussing soccer and cycling. Poor humanity that rises!

I leave the streets, I go deep into the meadows. I want to forget, to dream. A figure comes out from a group of trees and approaches me. I feel the scent of wine strike my nostrils. "Come, you will give me thirty cents!"

* * *

I have dreamed of a world in flames, rolling in the infinite and hurling red-hot meteors and sparks through the starry spaces.

* * *

I have a god like everyone else; but this god is myself. [In Italian this is a wordplay that does not translate. In Italian, "god" is "dio" and "I" is "io". A literal translation of this sentence would be: "I have a god (*dio*) like everyone else; but it is without the 'd'".]

* * *

Decadence.

Today various nations butt their heads together like enormous rams, each desiring supremacy over the others.

The romantic Latin lands and mercantile Albion against imperial Germany while the tiny Balkan lands trail behind with the picturesque baggage of their backward eastern customs. And Russia blazes on the horizon as it enters a new phase of its life.

In the East, civilizations renewed and reinvigorated by fresh energies look to the north where the fine odor of corpses can be smelled, and the little children of the sun hope that they can spread their over-abundant population here in a renewed expansion of Asiatic civilization.

And yet this spectacle, this mad squandering of energy, this relentless struggle for life, reveals no ardor for real and conscious strength to me at all. I see only an immense breakdown, a demolition of castles, a mortal collision between nations, while the indifferent earth opens its breast to receive the young flesh that will fertilize it. This magnificently terrible decadence occurs in the titanic light of a colossal fire, suitable for the collapse of this civilization.

So I see this vast entanglement of people, I see death by alcohol, tuberculosis, cannons. I see cripples, consumptives, idiots, delinquents.

Literature, art, science, the influx of this monstrous invasion replaces everything. The whole world is nothing but a teeming putrefaction that rises, rises and invades everything and swallows it up.

Humanity considers itself noble. It speaks of heroism, of progress and is not aware of its infection. The abyss has opened up and humanity falls into it singing, howling, quarreling, with its god, its fatherland, its murderous civilization, its elegant degeneration.

Everything falls, everything collapses. Moldy morality, twisted and lying philosophies, outdated rhetoric do not redeem the situation. The disease has advanced and there is no longer any way to prevent it. The tidbits that adorn the old structure have become the home of infectious microbes. Everything is already condemned to disappear, crushed under the enormous pile of old rubbish. History closes this curious phase, which presented the incomprehensible spectacle of inertia in members devoted to a throng of various non-existent phantoms, and which saw continuous ridiculous construction in order to then destroy, the continuous patient suffering of the multitudes and the revelry of the few, everything creating an ensemble of cowardice, inversion, wickedness that they would try to pass off as heroism, everything a withered mentality that they call inspired.

So this age has ended. Good riddance. In the presence of such ruins, I sing of the disaster, a new Nero. I revel in seeing it. Then on these ruins, I will build *my* edifice, *my* civilization, *my* world. Therefore, I sing...

* * *

“HIM”

That imbecile was a living puzzle. You never knew what he had in his skull.

Ugly, with a head of hair like Absalom, he looked like a Rasputin who had bathed. Two clear eyes that never flashed, but at certain moments blew an ice-cold wind.

If you want to know any more about him, go into the tunnel. You will see a great wool scarf with a hat above it. That's him. Stop him. Greet him. Even if he doesn't know you, he won't be surprised to see you. Offer him a cigarette (otherwise, he will ask you for one!) and he will

graciously speak with you. Later, if you pay him a bottle of Judas' blood [A name for a kind of red wine in Italy.-translator], then he will clear up some paradox that disturbed you. But don't fool yourself into think you understand his idea. Within one quarter hour, he will be anarchist, bourgeois, aristocrat, occultist, futurist, etc., etc. He will break your eardrums with the words he spouts; he will mock the hell out of you with an air of seriousness.

And don't take offense, because, after all, at that moment he will feel a great fondness for you. He might even kiss you. He is horribly neurasthenic. If you notice that he has grown silent and is smoking furiously, you will only manage to draw inconclusive words from his mouth. At that moment he desires two people; the one most desired is of no concern to you, the other is his dear little numbskull.

If he finds her, if he takes her in his arms, if he leaves with her. What carnage then!

They are capable of breaking windows in houses, trying to derail streetcars, spitting on old men's coats...

Creatures from another world, I tell you... marvelous rascals. This is "He"!

A Closed Chapter

The sad task of obituary writer is mine. It is sad to write a page with a heart that asks: and then what? But we are dedicated to the struggle: or to succeed in disappearing. It is inevitable and so one of us inevitably vanishes.

Uh! And how the imbeciles will howl: willful anarchist! Who can understand the storm that roars in our brain? Who can understand our hunger for joy, for life? Who can understand our defeat due to human cowardice?

We are alone. We did not find the group of daredevils ready to participate in the struggle for the conquest of life.

Therefore, we were defeated.

And one of us has vanished. The other remains with his eyes fixed on the horizon. He cannot, he must not depart. This is our destiny. Will we find comrades?

Otherwise, each in our own way, we will disappear, silent or tumultuous, from the stage of the world.

A chapter has closed.

A chapter of struggle, of hopes, of illusions. But the end has not come. As these strange, unusual lives come to an end, we will come to understand that it would have been better if they had never been born.

And that's all there is to say.

(Summer 1918)

The Customs of Moles and Gallants

It happened at the Black Cat tavern.

It was a stormy night, filled with lightning and thunder; I don't remember which season it was, maybe autumn. They were seated on a wooden board that had become detached from the chair back thanks to who knows how many drunken battles. The innkeeper, a fat and oily woman who oozed the grease of her saucepan from every pore, watched these singular events with amazement.

And she had good reason! Such odd fellows are certainly not found everywhere. Mud-stained, with great, black cloaks and hats that dripped, they would have frightened the tranquil bourgeois and raised suspicion in the wary police officer.

And then, such talk... She kept listening and hooted.

"Hey! Maker of poisoned meatballs, bring us some wine!" The wine was served, and they paid and drank.

"Listen, dear little Numbskull, if they hadn't opened our S.

Martino quickly, there would not have been a gross."

"You are right. It is already three months since I have had the Pinecone. I am hopeless."

The others listened and nodded, then: "The moon is hidden."

"But we are the shadows."

"Let's call the roll."

The roll call began; a fellow named Maggot with a frightful head of gypsy hair called the names.

"Little Numbskull..."

"I'm awake."

"Tooth."

"I'm waiting."

"Spike."

"I'm drinking."

"Doll."

"I'm sucking my finger."

"Glass-eye."

"I'm yawning."

"Wormwood."

Doll stopped sucking his finger and said: "He's in prison."

Maggot wrote and afterwards asked:

"I see two others here, who are they? Who is introducing them?"

Tooth came forward:

"Illustrious Maggot, I dare to propose that two new moles be made part of our brotherhood. Their academic qualifications are:

"#1 They drink like Russians."

The assembly grunted with satisfaction.

"#2 They hate work."

The grunt became clearly friendly.

"#3 They have already spent twenty years in prison. They live by night. They are fearless. They are ready for everything, if only they could be well off and live. That's all. I'm honored to ask the illustrious Maggot to graciously accept them by giving them a tap on the nose. To him and the assembly, the judgment. I am done."

Then Maggot said:

"You have heard it, Gallants; will you accept them?"

A formidable hurrah made the worn-out tavern ceiling crack even more.

"Okay, you two, step forward!"

The two initiates came forward.

"You see that our favorite wine is Judas' blood. You are in the league of those who laugh. Take care never to weep."

After saying this, he gave them the customary tap on the nose. "You will be Scratch, and you Gridiron, return to your places and celebrate."

There was an uproar. Songs, shouts, wild leaps. Glasses and bottles danced from hand to hand in dizzy confusion.

In the outburst of joy, Little Numbskull went to embrace the innkeeper who fearfully protected herself. Then at a gesture a chorus arose:

Today we are dark
Tomorrow we will be fair
And youthful once again
That will not fail me
To I...I...I...I...

Maggot howled like a wolf and silence was established once more.

"Attention," he said, "smoke."

Everyone took out cigarettes and began to smoke. A cloud of smoke surrounded them.

"Gallants, a sad situation, a chain has bound the world. Everywhere you see surly mugs, everywhere, neckties are carefully knotted and hair is cut. Everywhere you turn your eyes you see curled up whiskers and derby hats. The books, the newspapers, in short, everything is grey, foggy. People speak of affairs and backroom politics. People struggle against alcohol and applaud members of Parliament. It is necessary to kill the tyrant who brings this about. In order to laugh at the world, for joy, freedom from worry, folly, we must get rid of this pestiferous odor. Gallants, it is necessary to kill 'Gravity'."

An immense "bravo" echoed.

In the meantime, the door had opened and individual had entered after leaving a black horse at the window grating. Upon hearing these last words, he came closer and said:

"I stand with you in this as well."

"Who are you?" they asked.

"Don't worry about that since I am here."

Maggot chimed in:

“You must at least tell me your name.”

The stranger hesitated a moment and then whispered softly in Maggot’s ear. Maggot regarded him with amazement and shook his hand. Then he turned to the others:

“He can come along. I am not responsible. Let’s go then and get on with it.”

They all left. The storm had ended and the sky was filled with stars. The group marched in silence, led by Maggot and the stranger.

When they came to a crossroad, Maggot turned and spoke:

“Everyone will wander through his street and pick up a piece of gravity. We will meet again at midnight in the graveyard and justice will be done.”

Everyone left to do his part. Maggot and the stranger remained alone.

“So, are you really Christ?”

“Does this surprise you?”

“A little, I must admit.”

Christ sighed and said:

“What do you desire? I desired the good man and I had the hypocrite. I desired the natural man and I had him corrupted. I who believed in being great myself and lived in such hope, have seen the birth of the idiot. Then I said: Let’s feel the madness, since everyone is mad and then man will harmonize with his environment. I have met you and I will help you.”

They set out for the graveyard in silence. When they arrived, they entered and waited, sitting on a grave.

Midnight struck slowly, slowly. Suddenly the shadows stirred on every side. Maggot whistled and everyone gathered around him. They all had such huge loads that no one could figure out how they had managed to carry it all there. They started to build a fire. And with what did they fuel it? With books of philosophy, history, science and so on. Astronomical instruments, paintings, statues, military uniforms and priest’s robes, furniture, museums, hospitals, schools, universities. In short, everything that formed the heritage of our times, because all of it was serious. The gigantic pile was prepared and someone was already approaching it to light the fire when the stranger stopped him and said:

“Stop! What has humanity ever done for you that you choose to liberate it? Nothing! What will it give you when you have liberated it? Nothing! Let’s allow it to rot in its sadness. Let’s think of ourselves. Every one of us has a little gravity inside ourselves. Let’s pull it out. I’ll give you an example.” And saying this, he pulled out a book and threw it on the ground. A few of them looked. It was the Gospel. Everyone then threw something, and a small pile was raised next to the mammoth one. The flame was kindled. When everything had burned, the breasts of those present no longer felt oppression. They were all glad and laughed heartily. And laughing, they disappeared into the night as the sound of their anthem echoed in the silence. But Christ remained behind. He scampered like a madcap splitting his sides with laughter. Then he opened a tomb and hid in it, saying:

“I think I’ll pull a prank on the gravedigger!”

* * *

This is how gravity was put to death in a graveyard by the *Moles and Gallants*.

De Profundis...

Le Chateau Rouge

They had seen her one morning as she left her bungalow hidden among the rose bushes and set out on mountain trails damp with dew and soft with moss. And they had followed her, drawn by the spellbinding power of her beauty.

They walked along, softly singing, amid the rays of the sun that made her hair shine and surrounded her like a halo of light. Seen in this way, radiant, with all the gold around her head, she seemed to be a vision from a dream, impossible in reality.

After a long walk, she found herself once again in front of her bungalow. In their contemplation, they hadn't noticed that they had come too close. So she glanced over at them, seeing these men so singular in their persons and dress, she paused a moment, dismayed. Then she laughed suddenly and disappeared among the roses.

They were left speechless, with a final vision of gold and white, and with the ringing laughter that continued to tinkle in their ears.

* * *

La Chateau Rouge rose in an utterly desolate clearing in the mountains. It was already an ancient ruin, picturesque and melancholy. It was beautiful in its collapse, covered in ivy and moss with dense undergrowth as a background, so thick that it extended as far as the eye could see. The mountaineers from the surrounding countryside shunned these places with the customary fear of ghosts, and so solitude and silence reigned there. It was night. The moon illuminated the castle with a picturesque play of shadows. One saw dark spaces, menacing battlements, massive iron gates; and the ear waited for the sound of a mandolin or the warning of a sentry.

Suddenly, strange profiles sand out in the semi-darkness. Whistles are heard, footsteps, and then silence.

* * *

We are in the underground passages of the castle; a singular assembly of people is gathered there. One of them speaks:

“Comrades, I have noticed that you are disturbed. I have seen the admiration in your eyes. This woman is a symbol for us, she must be ours, and this will be. But, comrades, are you certain that no individual selfishness is beginning to develop, and that none of you desires her to be his and his alone? Because then our little world would be forced to disappear for the sake of a woman. Think about it, comrades.”

There was silence. A shudder passed through the men. A sob was heard. It was the youngest of them who wept. No one was surprised. They all felt a bit of this sadness within themselves. The weeper stepped forward:

“Listen to me, Maggot; listen to me, comrades. I am a vile creature. I have let myself be bewitched by this female and I feel that I would do anything for her. I would even betray you. Comrades, punish me.”

He stood there waiting.

A deep emotion filled them all. No one dared to reproach. Those words and that anguish were in all of their hearts. Maggot stood up and said:

“You will have to leave it to me to do this. Consider, however, that I will lock you in this passage until I return.”

They all clasped his hand wistfully and he departed. They sat in melancholy reverie as the sparkling torches wasted away.

* * *

Two weeks went by, and in the underground passage, the suspense was gnawing at everyone. They paced feverishly, ears pricked. Fear, anxiety and suspicion raised commotion in everyone’s mind.

But around eleven o’clock at night, they heard the locks squeak. Everyone jumped.

Maggot entered. By the light of the torches, everyone noticed a change in him. He was more bent than ever, with dark circles under his eyes and a sad and ironic curl to his lips. Everyone clasped his hands in silence.

“Comrades, it is all done. I managed to recognize her and followed her into the stormy city that we caused to tremble. And I learned who she was... She was a courtesan. A famous courtesan, privilege of the high bourgeoisie. Yes, comrades, that beauty gave herself away in exchange for banknotes. When I learned this, I was horrified. Like all of us I have no prejudices, but that symbol of beauty that we pursued had to be something pure, something superior...”

“Once again, reality was victorious. I saw her on the boulevard hand in hand with a stupid vain financier, smiling at his sugarcoated foolishness as it rolled off his tongue. I saw her half-naked at supers and revelries, rousing lust at the feast.

“And I was filled with disgust when I learned that this women’s lover was a deformed horror about whom she was crazy!

“Imagine, comrades, that the filthy natural deformity on the divine breast of that woman... ?!”

The sharp, implacable voice hammered the words with hatred and malice. The listeners shuddered. He went on:

“I saw all this, and at that moment I wanted to be a god in order to strike down the disgusting society that sullies our illusions in this way. I was no god, but I acted just the same. Suddenly she disappeared. Her lover was found murdered in his bed.

“The city was in an uproar, then in the fury of the event everything was forgotten.

“She was with me in a shack a little ways beyond the developed areas. She was my prisoner.”

The voice took on a joyful, triumphant tone; the others listened with baited breath.

“She was my prisoner. I saw her in all her beauty, nude, with long blonde hair flowing over her shoulders. One night as she sleeping and I kept watch over her, I removed all of her clothes and kissed her all over her body in an orgy of adoration.

“She woke up with triumph in her eyes.

“But at the thought of the mercenary kisses that had passed over her body before mine, the poet rebelled, it rebelled and I killed her.”

The voice howled this last phrase tragically. The motionless listeners saw everything as if in a dream and gasped.

The sepulchral voice continued: "I killed her with a quick poison. I watched her writhe and die... It was then that I triumphed. And now she is ours. You will see her."

He went out and whistled. Two men entered with a box on their shoulders. They laid her down. Without removing the veil that covered her, Maggot continued:

"Comrades, I give you the greatest gift. Pure beauty alone is feminine. I have purified the courtesan with the fever of my thought."

Suddenly, he tore off the veils. Behind the glass, her nude body still appeared to be alive. Everyone fell on their knees and gazed at her, murmuring incoherently, their eyes filled with a new light. Maggot pronounced the final words triumphantly, joyfully, with a new melodious lilt to his voice:

"Comrades, here she is, immortal, pure, ours. Our eyes will be able to rest on her without disgust because she now belongs to the dream and lives within it. She is among the Cavaliers of illusion!"

* * *

The seasons followed one another without interruption on those mountains, and gales and tempests howled around *La Chateau Rouge*. The bungalow of roses is inhabited by tranquil bourgeoisie, and the beautiful young lady, as the mountaineers called her, is forgotten.

From time to time, whatever the season, strange individuals climb up the cliffs to the castle.

We can say that they are the Moles and Gallants who come to forget the powdered and vulgar mugs that they see in the city, admiring the pure beauty, the bodiless beauty, the beauty that lives in the dream.

In Defense of Mata Hari

“Yesterday, in the courtyard at Caponiere, in the Vincennes forest, the former dancer, Mata Hari was executed.”

The short, cruel words of the telegram filled my heart with sadness. Oh, Mata Hari. Oh, Mata Hari, surely you never imagined such a sad end. Surely, in spite of your skepticism, you still did not believe that the men who were crazy for you could be so vile.

Nobody tried to defend you, nobody wanted to risk a thing for you. These gentlemen who fell at your feet like rotten fruit, who revealed all the most secret documents to your eyes, who did not hesitate to ruin family and fatherland in order to possess you, these gentle men were afraid to try anything for you. And so they let a squad of common soldiers kill you like a rabid dog in a damp courtyard, by discharging red-hot lead into your divine body. And probably some of those high-toned Catos will publicly rejoice in the severity of the judges. Phew! A spy!

Cowards! Those who wouldn't hesitate to make thousands of workers die of hunger, solely for profit; those who would risk the prosperity of entire provinces at the stock exchange simply to sate themselves with gold; those who would betray that which they call fatherland in an instant for their selfish ends; they feigned a feeling of horror when the preliminary investigation revealed what they already knew. Phew! A spy!

In order to possess you, they revealed the most delicate secrets of the nation; in order to possess you, they delivered the plans the plans for the strongest fortress to you; in order to possess you, they gave you the lives of thousands of men as a gift. Now that you are dead, they trample you with disgust, insult you and wash their hands in your blood. Mata Hari has been executed!

Poor Mata! Who would have thought that you would meet such a savage end? When the luxurious automobile took you through the magnificent boulevards of Paris, charming in your costly gowns, who would have ever thought that a lowly prison cell would one day be your home. When your nude, throbbing, willowy body, the body of an enchantress, roused the whispers and lust of a thousand gentlemen in swallow-tailed coats and monocles in the golden salons of the high aristocracy, who would have thought that you would fall in the mud of a filthy fortress courtyard, your body riddled with bullets on a sad, rainy day? Poor Mata!

I don't pity the soldiers who die because of you.

The brute mass that lets itself be dragged to the slaughterhouse without any impulse toward rebellion, that lets itself be butchered in such a way with no reason, that abandons everything that is most dear at mere orders from a leaflet affixed to a wall, is too vile: it deserves death, it deserves the executioner's blade. But you, poor Mata, you were beautiful! And supreme beauty is beyond good and evil. Dying because of a marvelous woman is always the best death.

Rest in peace, poor Mata! Someone who never knew you has sworn to avenge you. And the memory of your blood-drenched eyes will drive his dagger; the vision of your mutilated body will render his bomb more effective.

Iconoclast

Yes, my dear, I have committed a crime, a crime that will fill you with horror. I confess it to you with the cynicism that is typical of me, the cynicism that cannibals claim is characteristic of criminals.

Listen then. The other night I was on duty. Sitting on a stool, I absent-mindedly stared at the walls of the barracks, which were strangely illuminated by a feeble lamp. I thought of you. I peered into the blue-green waters of memory and presently sighed in reverie. I took your picture out of my wallet and began to gaze at it telling you so many sweet things with my thoughts and with my eyes. I called out to you at that moment, and surely, if you would have come, the crime would never have happened. But you didn't come. I withdrew from this contemplation, heard the plebeian snores from the barracks, the cadenced footsteps of the patrol in the road, and all this was like an icy splash of water. I lit a cigarette and suddenly, for no reason, I felt an intense hatred, an atrocious hatred, toward you.

A sequence of nasty, hostile thoughts followed the original outburst. Smoking nervously, I mercilessly destroyed the entire rosy edifice of our dreams. Ugh! the white cottage! The faithful little wife who awaits you in the evening! How stale, how bourgeois! Faithful, then! What a grand word! Who is faithful nowadays? The one who knows that the sister was wrong. What they say about jealousy is fitting, but when she nearly threw herself at my feet, weeping, imploring me to believe her... And to that end she named names...

Nonetheless, I stupidly sent her away, saying "Don't play Lydia Borelli with me!"

And then the fashion!. Always talking to me about it, talking to me about hats, bows, ribbons... what boredom. This is decidedly a sign of fickleness. Did she really love me in the end? Can one say with certainty that a woman ever loves? Perhaps it was more from ambition, to be able to tell her friends: "You know Mr. So-and-so, that famous etc." — "yes, and... ?" — "Well, he loves me!"

A common phenomenon among women. Haven't I seen it so many times? Then that intense affection, the idolatry with which she surrounded me, perhaps it was all an act. Imagine her asking me if I wanted her to die! What a joke! Did she consider me such a cretin that I would fall for her melodramatic phrases?

The butt of the cigarette burned my finger. I flung it away furiously and set out walking.

Yes, yes. Without a doubt, it was better to end it, to live alone without a female underfoot... Free, free, I am bored with having my mind enslaved.

I lit a match and set the photograph on fire. Then I watched it being slowly consumed and reduced in the end to a shapeless pile of ashes. I stomped on it and then I laughed. I laughed convulsively. The barracks snored. Someone cried out in a dream: "Hey, innkeeper, what will you give me to drink?"

Hero or Assassin?

The commander of the submarine that torpedoed the "Lusitania" speaks:

Well, now I have become famous, but also infamous. When I walk through the streets of any German city, thousands of obese women with the sulky faces of bulldogs gaze at me with love in their eyes, while, contrarily, if I dared to do this in other European capitals most likely there'd be chamber pots poured upon my head! And that at best! And yet I don't understand the hatred that they pour out on me.

On the contrary, in my opinion, millions of people should thank me. Why?... I see a miserable little boat go by loaded with people. I make a heroic sacrifice and launch a torpedo worth several thousand dollars at its prow. (Goddamn, how my heart weeps launching it this way! I could have drunk so much good beer! Enough, what's done is done.) Well, in spite of this sacrifice, everyone pours a load of insults on me! I don't understand it one bit!

I thought I was doing a favor to all the newspapers of the world, causing them to sell the most teary-eyed prose. Thanks to me, they are able to print millions of supplements, and in spite of this they are the first to insult me. Thousands of orators have made their speeches glow with heat in quite successful recitations about me. But they have not even had the decency to send me a postcard.

And the navigation societies? I put down a dangerous competitor; I would be content with a small dividend, but no! Have you noticed? It's the same here. Here we see how commerce really hardens the heart. Lusitania this, Lusitania that! All the people who never know what to say have been talking about it for six months, are still talking about and will go on talking about it for at least as long again! And yet they too are ingrates, ingrates...

And the survivors? They had no emotions, I procure one for them and I am not acknowledged in the least. They read, they start to feel, they dream terrible things and rejoice in it. I dish it up to them, live, throbbing. Is there applause? Of course not! They wish me bad luck, Misfortune that they raise to the heavens. I received an inheritance, life insurance payments, I did this as well. But my position does not change.

For example, a visitor comes. And how is his mother? Oh poor woman, she was one of the passengers on the Lusitania, she is dead, my God!

Isn't there any satisfaction in having a parent, a friend, die from the torpedo attack?

You can tell everyone, it is almost like knowing a member of Parliament, but no one thanks me for this. Ah! It is quite true that the world is ignorant and selfish.

Someone could at least tell me that they enjoyed the spectacle of the torpedo attack. Yes, and what a beautiful show! The ship sank awkwardly, sputtering like a seal. The sea was full of boats like with drenched passengers who screamed like lunatics, and the people who drowned made such stupid faces like someone drinking castor oil. I assure you that I was not amused by anything. After all, I am a philosopher and resign myself; to those who do not want to acknowledge my merits, I simply respond like this: ships are made to stay afloat and torpedoes are made to sink them. Stop making ships and there will no longer be torpedoes. It's logical! And, after all, at

some point or another the Lusitania had to come to an end. I simply anticipated it. And it isn't worthwhile to make such an uproar over a little anticipation. All things considered, since the Germans are in love with me, I am satisfied with this: the future reestablishment of my good name as a man of honor, as it is customary to say.

But only if this is not also a lie...

Bah, I am born under a bad star! And, indeed, my mother's name is Stella ["Stella" is the Italian word for star — translator] and I assure you that she spanked me without pity! What a fate, eh? The Kaiser often honors me with compliments.

He says that I am a hero, etc., etc.

I tolerate all this with the pleasure that can be found in eating a lemon. So much the better, don't spoil it! But the truth is that I am misunderstood. They insult me as an assassin, and they honor me as a hero. But no one is right. They don't have the complete view of what I have done,

How stupid the world is!

The main thing is that the English didn't take me.

These damned souls are furious not because of the dead, but because of the steamship that I sank, and if they caught me, they would hang me. They are so jealous of their interests that I am deeply convinced that they would give me a fine hemp necktie without even allowing me to pay my respects to 'the creator,' if they had the chance. But I trust in the good. Posterity will do justice in every way. It is true that I will be dead, but this is always an honor...

Time to go? Goodbye then. Yes, yes, thank you and the same to you!

The Federation of Sorrow

I am gathering all the agony of the world together. Anyone who has a hidden worm gnawing away inside him, anyone dressed in mourning for the ideal, anyone who laughs scornfully at the ruin of the mind, may come. I need my sorrow to become a flood, a storm; I need to hear the cries of suffering, the moans of despair.

For there is laughter in the world, and I am not able to listen to laughter.

Brothers in chains, comrades in suffering, the battle is at hand. Soon we will launch our attack, intoxicated with vengeance; the enemy will flee, because the *Federation of Sorrow* is terrible.

* * *

From the day I was born, I have carried a heavy burden. And my back is bent and my eyes sunken. The worm gnaws and gnaws; it has already destroyed me.

Enough, by god! I am tired.

I throw off the burden and stop; I have enough of this in my life. I have not been capable of living, but I will know how to get my revenge. I will croak on some sidewalk, with the final blasphemy on my lips and the final flash of hatred in my eyes.

* * *

How odious!... The filthy cobblestones of the city give off the foul odor of the sewer. It has poisoned me. I was once so strong!

I still laughed then... But then... Should I really howl at what happened, should really unveil myself before you?

But, imbeciles, it is the same old story!

One loves, one hopes, one acts, and then comes disgust, emptiness, despair.

* * *

One day they led me to war. Then I dreamed I was a child again.

The first burst of the machine gun cruelly rattled my nerves; I opened my eyes and I saw blood, and then nothing else. I remember a huge blaze, a continuous thunder... death, death... and that stench, the stench of corpses...

I never understood how the nasty odor of this stench has remained in my throat. It seems as if I am in a vast graveyard... crosses, coffins, stench.

Society reeks of corpses.

* * *

My ears ache horribly. The cannon caused this. The thundering beast made deep scratches in my brain.

I always hear a far distant cry, like the sob of a hopeless giant. But who is it that cries in the world?

* * *

The war has reawakened the beast in me. My jaws contract convulsively, my eyes widen, and my hands want to clench, to grasp...

When I look at someone, I am surprised by a strange desire to tear him to pieces. Why do I have the urge to kill and tear someone to pieces?

There are no longer any Germans to kill; so who should I kill?

* * *

Maybe I am crazy. But my madness is the most terrible rationality. I see further, I feel life more vividly.

I don't know why, but it is certain that I suffer enormously, much more than before.

Before this? To think that before this, I was a child!

* * *

But why is this? What have I done? I watch the daisies growing peacefully; the swallows come and go across the paths of the sky. I too am a daisy or a swallow. The dew and the open blue pleases me as well.

And instead... handcuffed, splashed with mud, starved. Without love, without freedom.

* * *

And that's how it is, since you want it this way. You transformed me into a wolf, and a wolf I shall remain. But up to now, I have only clawed my chest; tomorrow I will want other blood. Don't beg for mercy then. You have written on my brain: *carnage*. And carnage it is.

Maybe humanity is filthy. It needs to cleanse itself, and for this bath it desires blood.

Maybe after the cleansing and destruction... Maybe then we will be like the daisies and the swallows... How beautiful it would be.

* * *

Souls who are grieving for the world, this is why I call you to gather together.

The flag is already waving.

It is black; it stands for mourning. Forward then, wild Promethei. [Plural of Prometheus, the Greek god who defied the ruling Olympians to bring fire to human beings. — translator] The cry of vengeance is music sweet and dear.

Today it is necessary to kill, to destroy... tomorrow we will be daisies...

Forward, *Federation of Sorrow!*

from *Iconoclasta!*

Il Me Faut Vivre Ma Vie*

[* “It is necessary that I live my life” — Jules Bonnot, anarchist bank robber]

I don't believe in the *right*. Life, which is all a manifestation of incoherent forces, unknown and unknowable, rejects the human artificiality of the *right*. *Right* was born when life was taken away from us. Indeed, originally, humanity had no *right*. It lived and that was everything. Today, instead, there are thousands of rights; one could accurately say that everything which we have lost we call *right*.

I know that I live and that *I desire* to live.

It is most difficult to put this *desire* into action. I am surrounded by a humanity that wants what everyone else wants. My isolated affirmation is a most serious crime.

Laws and morals, in competition, intimidate and persuade me.

The “blonde rabbi” [I.e., Christ or christian values.-translator] has triumphed.

One prays, one implores, one curses, but one does not dare. Cowardice, caressed by christianity, creates *morality*, and this justifies baseness and begets renunciation.

But this desire to live, this *will*, only desires to develop freely. The christian takes a good look around to see if anyone is watching him and, trembling, commits a sin. Desire: sin; love: sin. This is the *inversion*.

“Harlot, everybody's female, you have no shame in the world. You are frank and sincere. You offer yourself to anyone who pays, never giving or taking illusions.

“Society, on the other hand, modest and clean in appearance, but horribly infected with gangrene throughout its body, makes me vomit, fills me with horror and loathing, kills me.”

* * *

I envy the savages. And I will cry to them in a loud voice: “Save yourselves, civilization is coming.”

Of course: our dear civilization of which we are so proud. We have abandoned the free and happy life of the forests for this horrendous moral and material slavery. And we are maniacs, neurasthenics, suicides.

Why should I care that civilization has given humanity wings to fly so that it can bomb cities, why should I care if I know every star in the sky or every river on earth?

In the past, it is true, there were no legal codes, and it would seem that justice was done summarily.

Barbarous times! Today, instead, people are killed in the electric chair unless the philanthropy of Beccaria [18th century aristocrat whose work ‘On Crimes and Punishments (1764)’ inspired reform in the Italian penal system. — translator] only torments them in the penitentiary for the rest of their lives.

But I leave you to your knowledge and your legal codes; I leave you to your submarines and bombs. Still you laugh at my beautiful freedom, my ignorance, my vigor. Yesterday the sky was beautiful to look at; the eyes of the unknowing gazed at it.

Today, the starry vault is a leaden veil that we vainly endeavor to pass through; today it is no longer unknown, it is distrusted.

All these philosophers, all these scientists, what are they doing?

What further crimes are they plotting against humanity? I don't give a damn for their progress; I want to live and enjoy.

"Monkey of the Borneo jungle, Darwin has slandered you!"

* * *

Meanwhile, my whole being cries out to me: "I want to live!"

I rip the thorns of christian renunciation from my brow and drink in the perfume of the roses.

I am well now. I am delighted to live.

The sirens blare and the blissful crowd goes to the slaughterhouse.

And you as well, oh rebel, you climb your Calvary, you too are
rotten!

How I envy the great Bonnot!

"Il me faut vivre ma vie!"

* * *

It's useless, I am *rotten*. Society has vanquished me. And hatred. I furiously hate the brutal humanity that has killed me, that has transformed into a human hide.

I wish that I could change myself into a wolf so I could sink my teeth into the belly of society in an orgy of destruction.

A Day Off

I am a strange beast. I live in the midst of lice and feed upon dried codfish. I inhabit dirty and oppressive prisons that are called “barracks” and I am learning to kill. During these long years of degradation and butchery I have lost my human conscience. So I am heading sadly toward the city in my tattered olive drabs and my spiked clodhoppers.

* * *

Who calls me “glorious soldier”? What great glory, by god! Because I lived for four years among corpses and blood, because I rushed to the attack a thousand times drunk on a hatred that was not my own, you call me “glorious”. Take this infamous glory away from me! I cannot forget death’s enormous eyes; the huge gangrenous wounds, the pools of blood that have stained my hands and mind.

* * *

Can I still even love? Can I still hold little children in my arms? Don’t you see that I have an unending vision of carnage in my eyes? Can anyone who has lived for four years among the dead still love?

Yesterday (how distant this yesterday is!), I dug the plow into the fat earth and sang with a mighty voice surrounded by the sun’s golden rays and the scent of the crop. The call came, the trench, the thousands ambushed by death. The bread of labor was hard. The arrogance of the master made it scarce and well loved. But my arms were strong and my heart hopeful. Now, however, here I am with emptiness in my brain and laxity of nerves.

* * *

The war is over. But I am still a prisoner; I still wander up and down through the great sunny streets with my heavy backpack and my damned gun. The orders and the bugle calls still echo and like a beast I obey. The mama? The babies? But could they be mine?

Now I am something else. I have become the “glorious soldier”.

Oh good earth! Never more will this child of yours dig grooves in your breast and sing under the sun. I will come, I will come on the great day and you will take me in your arms, good fragrant earth, and cause the timid violet to bloom upon my head.

* * *

And yet... I remember the impetuous fury of the attacks. Why did I fight and kill? Why didn’t I acknowledge the terror in my veins?

I still have yesterday’s rifle, as yesterday my heart beat so intensely. Why don’t I renew the attack against the truest and most malicious enemy? Why have I become so cowardly?

* * *

The retreat sounded. I return to the sad barracks and will throw myself on the cot awaiting the peace of sleep. I watched the sun die. The sky looked like a huge splotch of blood, a monstrous wound opened in the belly of infinity.

And the earth spoke to me. It whispered sweet words of encouragement. *Dare...* it said. And the wind repeated *Dare* and the leaves rustled *dare*. And even the final bugle blast seemed to say, triumphantly: *Dare, dare!*

Whenever I will know how to dare!

from *Iconoclasta!*

Dynamite Speaks

Since the explosion in the court, a series of actions has thrown the fat Milanese bourgeoisie into disarray and fear. The first to be attacked was the industrialist, Giovanni Breda, owner of the well-known warmongers enterprise of the same name.

He escaped an attack with sulfuric acid and a bomb that exploded at his villa. Then it was Senator Ponti's turn. He was president of the mechanical Society of Lombard. A bomb was thrown at his house as well. But it was all limited to formidable explosions and damage to the homes. Fortune favors the warmongers! Another bomb was found unexploded in the central station.

The delivery of bombs goes forward with diligence! It is only done at home.

It is natural that a thousand rumors about the motives behind these attacks would spread. The fact that the unknown dynamiters have chosen the big shots of the metallurgical industry lends support to the idea that it is a matter of retaliation for the truly disgusting arrogance of the masters. While these warmongering gentlemen have a good time in Cova and Biffi, the poor strikers gulp down a little rice and tighten their belts. Those who are hungry do not fight against capital with folded arms and hope; that is slow agony. But the masters want it this way, and, protected by the murderous guns of the King's cavalry, they make profit from misery.

Meanwhile, from the side of the reactionary press, The witch hunt for anarchists has begun, and the usual laws demand capital punishment. We are not among the number of armchair pseudo-subversives quick to repudiate every confidence for fear of going to prison. But to anyone who accuses us of having provoked these attacks, we respond with figures or direct questions:

Who spread hatred and pain during four years of carnage? It was the various Gratiens, those filthy, decorated assassins.

In spite of the 507,193 dead sacrificed to the trust and the bank, when the war ended, the bloodthirsty bourgeois beast wanted and still wants to kill.

From April 13 up to now (bloodshed in Lainate, 3 dead), 54 people have been killed by royal bullets. This is the propaganda for hatred! The monopolizers deprive us of food, and the industrialists place us at the crossroad between a most abominable exploitations and hunger. And someone cries out: "It is necessary to produce!" I read the other day that a young man killed himself for lack of work. I say: "What must be produced? Coffins for the dead?" So the provocation comes from the top. There are the various Bredas protected by the state camorra[A secret criminal association for terror and extortion. (the translator)]; there are the cynical Centannis decorated with madness; there are the military brass, filthy with blood and maddened with lust.

A reaction? It is surely coming. The anarchists don't fear it. They have faced it for too long. Now the bourgeoisie has created a desert around itself. And true law endures there.

from Iconoclasta!

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Bruno Filippi
The rebel's dark laughter: the writings of Bruno Filippi
1916/1918

Retrieved on October 1, 2009 from www.omnipresence.mahost.org

This young Italian anarchist (he died at the age of 19 in a failed attack against the ruling class of Milan) offers something rare in anarchist writing-beautiful literature. His dark, often cynical essays, stories and prose poems show no mercy for domination or servitude, but in the midst of the cynicism and contempt there is also humor, joy and love of life. Translated by Wolfi Landstreicher in 2008.

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