

A voice that carries

DELIA CASADEI

Few elements in Italian nineteenth-century history were as unheroic as the Crimean War. Italy's modest participation in the war alongside the Western allies was spearheaded by the Kingdom of Sardinia, the northwestern territory governed (in the years before national unification) by the House of Savoy. The Kingdom was at the time under the political leadership of Camillo Benso di Cavour, the canny statesman who sought to unify the Italian peninsula under the House of Savoy, and indeed succeeded in doing so in 1861. Cavour masterminded Italy's involvement in the Crimean War as a strategic move to gain favor with France, whose military support was needed to assume control of the north-eastern parts of the country still under Austrian rule. The small contingent—18,058 men and 3,496 horses—left Genoa on 25 April 1855, eighteen months into the war. They arrived in early May and fought little, the only exception being the battle on the Tchernaja River in August 1855—an attack launched by the Russian army outside the main theater of war at Sevastopol—which the Sardinian and French troops successfully repelled. Thousands of Italian soldiers perished nevertheless, many of them victims of rampant cholera. The disease remained entirely untreated in the Italian camp because of the burning of the *Croesus* (a ship loaded with medical supplies destined for Crimea) shortly after it departed from Genoa.¹

¹ Within Italian historical scholarship, the Crimean War is treated as part of larger Risorgimento histories written by and large between the late 1930s and the late 1960s, and reflecting therefore the shifting ideological aims of the passage from Fascism to democratic governance, across World War Two. See, for instance, Franco Valsecchi, *L'unificazione italiana e la politica europea dalla guerra di Crimea alla guerra di Lombardia, 1854–1859* (Rome: Istituto per gli studi di politica internazionale, 1939) as well as his *L'alleanza di Crimea: Il Risorgimento e l'Europa* (Milan: Mondadori, 1948); a sizable section on Crimea is also found in Piero Pieri, *Storia militare del Risorgimento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1962). Monographs on specific aspects of the Crimean expedition have since been published, such as on military correspondence, the role of the Catholic Church, and the impact on Ligurian mercantile

Unheroic it was. Yet as a tactical move in international diplomacy, Italy's participation in the war was to prove momentous. Cavour's participation at the ensuing peace proceedings—an occasion on which Italy's grievances against Austria were finally heard by an international assembly—opened the way for an alliance with France that eventually made possible the Savoyard appropriation of Austrian territories, and, ultimately, the unification of the peninsula under the Piedmontese crown. This imbalance—between the war as a military event and its weight as a tool in ensuring international support for national unification—persists in the historiography of the Italian Crimea War. It may even explain why sustained literary accounts—consisting, between 1858 and 1896, almost exclusively of memoirs written by high-ranking officers—began to appear only two years after the war had ended. Indeed, this post facto literary archive thrives on the war's relative obscurity and geographical remoteness. For, in contrast to more famous highlights of the Risorgimento that took place around this time, the Italian Crimean War offered those who reminisced a key tool of myth telling—a “floating signifier,” an insignificant item whose meaning could be respelled again and again according to poetic and political purpose.² Such myth telling is, as we will see, riven with currents of anxiety regarding national belonging within the Savoyard monarchy and Italy's geopolitical relationship—as southern periphery—to Central Europe, and, simultaneously, to the Orient.³ These geopolitical anxieties were incarnated, I want to suggest, by a particular aural attitude to sound, and especially to voice.

trade. The only attempts at exhaustive historical accounts of the Italian Crimean War are rare and of relatively recent vintage, and are to chalk up the combined recurrence of the 150th anniversary of Italian unification (2011) and the rising tensions between Ukraine and Russia over Crimea, which culminated in Russia's occupation of the peninsula in early 2014. See Franco Rebagliati, Furio Ciciliot, and Liliana Betruzzi, eds., *La spedizione d'Oriente: Volontari italiani ed esercito sardo alla Guerra di Crimea, 1855–1856* (Savona: L. Editrice, 2011); Alberto Caminiti, *La guerra di Crimea, 1853–1856* (Genoa: Edizioni Liberodiscrivere, 2013).

² This expression, which has since been appropriated by thinkers as disparate as Jacques Lacan and Ernesto Laclau, was first coined by Claude Lévi-Strauss in “Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss,” *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, by Marcel Mauss (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950), vii–lii.

³ The many problematic tendencies involved in representing the Orient have given rise to a critical tradition, departing from Edward Said's seminal *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, [1978] 2003). (On the topic of orientalism in the Crimean War see, in this volume, Andrea F. Bohlman's “Orienting the Marshal: Polish Legion Songs on the Map” 118–23 and Kevin C. Karnes' “Who Sings the Song of the Russian Soldier” 135–37.) However, my use of “Central Europe” in this chapter may require some clarification: it roughly covers an aggregate of the Prussian-Austrian-Hungarian Mittel Europa of the mid nineteenth century, Switzerland, and France. It stands for a “center” that is viewed from a position of southern peripherality, and specifically, of Italian peripherality to that which lies beyond the Alps.

We can begin with a particular voice: that of would-be Italian king Vittorio Emanuele II. As his troops prepared to embark for Crimea, he spurred them on their way with a rousing address—one that subsequently echoed down the whispering gallery of Italian memoirs of the Crimean War. Near the close of the nineteenth-century, officer Antonio Ricci recalled the event:

On that occasion, His Majesty the King delivered to the troops the order of the day that became so famous, in which, among other things, these words were said: “You will see distant territories where the name of Italy is not unknown” [“Vedrete lontane terre ove il nome d’Italia non è ignoto”]. I said that the order remained famous, and indeed you often heard soldiers repeat the words I have written above. They repeated them especially in the painful circumstances in which they found themselves on arrival in Crimea, adding, in truth, a few glosses of their own, but these were innocent annotations that harmed no-one, least of all His Majesty the King, whose lips had first uttered the words.⁴

Mishearing is the name of the game in Ricci’s account of Crimea, especially in this passage. Note, too, how the king’s words create a curious pivot between physical spaces: from their utterance on the Piedmontese shores of Alessandria, to the soldiers’ misremembering the words as they settle into the Italian camp at Mount Hasford, near Balaklava. Ricci’s apologetic downplaying of the modifications wrought on the hallowed royal voice has the predictable effect of drawing attention to them. And yet, the mishearing and distortion in the camp points to a more fundamental distortion: one effected by Ricci himself in recounting the king’s words. The sentence, annotated in historical documents of the time, had been “you will see distant lands where the cross of Savoy is not unknown” (“Vedrete lontane terre, dove la croce di Savoia non è ignota”)—a much more

⁴ “In quella occasione [. . .] S. M. Il Re diede alle truppe pazienti quell’ordine del giorno che poi è rimasto così famoso, in cui fra le altre cose si diceva: ‘Vedrete lontane terre ove il nome d’Italia non è ignoto.’ Ho detto che l’ordine rimase famoso, e difatti si udivano spesso i soldati a ripetere le parole che ho poc’anzi riportate. E le ripetevano specialmente nelle dolorose circostanze per le quali dovettero passare appena giunti in Crimea, aggiungendovi veramente qualche chiosa del proprio, ma erano chiose innocenti che non facevano torto ad alcuno e tantomeno a S. M. il Re, dalle cui labbra quelle parole erano state pronunziate. [. . .] Una volta [il generale La Marmora] udì un soldato, il quale con voce stentorea chiosava l’ordine reale in questo modo: vedrete lontane pietre, colle parole che vengono appresso. [. . .] Il soldato che era in buona fede, spiegò senza esitazione ciò che voleva dire, ed aggiunse come complemento queste parole: ‘Le terre le potranno vedere i battaglioni che sono in basso, ma noi che siamo in alto presso l’osservatorio non vediamo proprio che delle pietre, e che pietre!’” Antonio Ricci, *In Crimea* (Turin: Roux Frassati e Compagnia, Editori, [1885] 1896), 12–13.

likely coinage at a time when national unification was some way off, and on the occasion (as Ricci had previously signaled) of the King's handing of Savoyard flags to the departing troops at Alessandria.⁵

Ricci's own mishearing adapts the sentence for the purposes of post-unification Italy. He does so by switching the anticipated moment of national recognition by outsiders from a visual to an auditory mode, from visual recognition of the Savoy Cross to auditory recognition of the name of "Italy." He then compounds this turn from the visual to the aural by recounting the soldiers' verbal repetition of the sentence, driving toward a key moment of mishearing: a soldier who, "with a stentorian tone," delivers the line, "you will see distant rocks, with the words that followed" ("vedrete lontane pietre, colle parole che vengono appresso").⁶ The modification, which in Italian is effected through aural substitution—"terre" (lands) become "pietre" (rocks)—is picked up by General La Marmora, who demands that the soldier explain himself. The soldier good-humoredly tells him that his comrades on the observatory see nothing but rocks all day, and are thus a long way away from the populated lands imagined by the King. La Marmora, amused, presses a coin into the soldier's hand—"so that the rocks of Crimea won't be too tough on you"—and walks away.⁷

The attention that Ricci's recounting lavishes on the circulation of a phrase is loaded with meanings that are entangled in the politics of speech: a high literary pronouncement from a king is distorted by a foot soldier whose indifference toward the bombast is a mixture of political and linguistic alienation from a literary language that has no place in his speech. The senselessness of the expedition translates into the obscurity of the mangled edict. Ricci orientates the reader's senses toward listening and voice only to stage a linguistic malfunction, all the while ostensibly reassuring us that this is in good fun. The odd monetary

⁵ The phrase "Vedrete lontane terre, dove la croce di Savoia non è ignota" is reported along with Vittorio Emanuele's transcribed address to the troops at Alessandria in *Ricordo pittorico militare della spedizione sarda in Oriente, Pubblicato d'ordine del ministero di guerra per conto dello stato maggiore* (Turin, Italy: Ministero di guerra 1857), and was engraved on memorial medals coined by the Savoy monarchy for distribution to Crimea veterans in 1855. See <<http://numismatica-italiana.lamoneta.it/moneta/W-ME51M7/4>>, accessed 5 Jan. 2016. It is also featured in a book on the history of Crimea published in Italy during the Crimean War; see Michele Giuseppe Canale, *Della Crimea, del suo commercio, e dei suoi dominatori, dalle origini fino ai dì nostri* (Genoa, Tipografia del Regio Istituto dei Sordomuti, 1855), 215.

⁶ See n2 for the full Italian text of the anecdote.

⁷ "Il generale Lamarmora che era rispettoso della disciplina, ma al tempo stesso aveva il cuore più buono del mondo, fece osservare al soldato che non era bene la traduzione libera da lui fatta delle parole reali, ma al tempo stesso, non vedendoci nulla di cattivo intenzionalmente, estratto un pezzo da cinque franchi lo regalò al soldato, dicendogli: Prendi questo onde le pietre non ti paiano tanto dure." Ricci, *In Crimea*, 13–14.

resolution of the incident, meanwhile, bespeaks condescension of a high-ranking officer toward his inferior—swiftly silencing an act of harmless insubordination.

Voices, and particularly “Italian” voices, frequently occasion strange actions in the stories told about the Italian Crimean War. In Ricci’s memoirs, these range from oddly humble brags about being requested—by his French or English superiors, although crucially, never by the Turkish ones—to provide entertainment by singing an operatic aria; to overblown tales of the “Orphic power” of the Italian *bersaglieri*’s military band, whose arrangement of operatic arias predictably bewitched the armies of other nations; to moments of hearing and (more frequently) mishearing snippets of foreign language conversations, and also spoken Savoyard edicts (as we have seen).⁸ These kinds of anecdotes are in and of themselves unsurprising: by the mid-nineteenth century, thanks to the successful export of *bel canto* and to the long-established philosophical discourse around Italian vocality, the aural recognition of gorgeous excess was routinely invoked as a key cultural asset—almost a natural resource—of the emergent nation state. Yet rarely are the voices recorded by Italian historiographers of the war straightforwardly presented; they are more often laced with doubt and undercurrents of violence, and are in constant peril of being misheard, or of falling on the wrong ears.

The theme of *bella voce* in the Crimean War conjures darker aspects of the geopolitics of Italy and the construction of Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century. Thanks to the unusual perspective provided by the journey south, and then east, from Piemonte to Crimea, Italian vocality becomes transformed. As well as being the familiar cultural asset ripe for international (usually operatic) export, it is now also the sound of a lack: a debt toward Central Europe’s enlightened republican nation states, which Italy strived to emulate. I am here evoking what Roberto Esposito calls the *munus*, a gift that is also an inextinguishable debt.⁹ From the perspective of European Enlightenment, Italy’s blessed vocality may be just such a *munus*. If we imagine a broad spectrum of discourse around the political value of Italy’s voice, we would have to begin beyond the Alps, with Rousseau’s enthusiasms for Italy as the portal to the operatic land

⁸ For more on Italian opera singers and bands performing operatic hits within the international wartime soundscape, see Flora Willson, this volume, 175–95.

⁹ The concept of the *munus* as the “giving [of] something that one can *not* keep for oneself and over which, therefore, one is not completely master” lies at the heart of Roberto Esposito’s idiosyncratic etymology for the word and concept of “community,” which is the departure point for his *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* (1998) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009). The key passage with regard to “munus” is the discussion on pp. 4–5, and the passage just quoted is from p. 5.

before *logos*.¹⁰ Only then might we witness this discourse move into Italian-speaking lands, and observe as vocality comes to be incorporated into Italian intellectual production. Take, for example, Giuseppe Mazzini's *Filosofia della musica* (1836), a study of the inadequacies of Italian opera composers as composers, quite literally, of the sound of a functional republican Italian state. In other words, discourse on the voice in Italian political thought was alive and well by the second half of the nineteenth century, but it simultaneously aped and challenged earlier, toxic perceptions of Italy as heard from the outside: thus Mazzini's (and his successors') appropriation of a tone that is, essentially, both dismissive of Italy's ability to partake of Enlightenment reason and suspiciously celebratory of her power to surpass it.¹¹

Monarchic Italy will organize this same discourse around an ideology of opera as a symbol of unequivocal national belonging—an ideology that will be further compounded during Fascism. The Italian gift for voice has to function—in the lead-up to unification and all the more in its aftermath—as a marker of a national belonging within a territory divided into competing monarchies, and into different languages, for centuries. It is easy for us now to discern the catch-22 at play in such an ideology: how can a nation state, whose primary asset is a common language, be united (or recognized by others) in a voice that both transcends and fails to be language? This is the critique heralded by Antonio Gramsci, whose *Prison Diaries* became something of a textbook for the intelligentsia of Italy's first republic. Selections from Gramsci's *Diaries* have long been known among musicologists for their damning thoughts about opera as a “pestiferous” disabler of language, and thus of democratic politics.¹² Gramsci decried the poverty of *logos*

¹⁰ The text referenced here is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (1781). To date, the most exhaustive critique of Rousseau's romantic approach to prelinguistic vocality—and an important text for the critique of Italian vocality presented here—is Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967).

¹¹ Similar themes regarding music's relationship to reason and language in Romanticism have been treated in John Hamilton's excellent *Music, Madness, and the Unworking of Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). Hamilton works on a Germanic tradition of thought in which, I would argue, the discourse about the limits of language as revealed by music (a discourse that both explores and performs various kinds of mental disturbance) is part of the ebullient and self-assured literary culture of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Germany. My work here could be seen as relating to Hamilton's work within a more geopolitical perspective. To my mind, only a literary culture highly confident of its worth and of the historical relevance of its language could dwell with such sensuousness upon the limits of language. An emergent nation-state peripheral to the core of European political affairs—such as Italy was—could not have developed such a highly aestheticized literary take on the failures of language. Thus my literary examples are unquestionably of a much lower aesthetic and philosophical rank than anything in Hamilton's book, but they are also riddled with a more palpable undercurrent of concrete political anxiety.

¹² Gramsci's reflections on music are rare, and embedded into his much more frequent but less than systematic reflections on language. Musicology has not taken up Gramsci in any systematic way,

in Italy, and was intensely suspicious of the bourgeoisie's appropriation of the literature and tastes of Central Europe. But ultimately his *Diaries* fall within the constitutive contradiction of the Italian *bella voce*, whose riches necessarily stem from, and reproduce, a poverty of *logos* tantamount to faulty internal politics and—thus—a lowly rank within the European geopolitical hierarchy.

With the historiography of Crimea we are dealing with a novel facet, or perhaps even a modification, of the traditional post-unification musical tropes of the Risorgimento—the rousing choruses picked up by supposedly riot-prone audiences during operatic performances in Milan and elsewhere. In the materials I am about to discuss we are at once mired in Risorgimento history and geographically displaced from it: we have moved both outside prospective national boundaries, and beyond the domain of the cosmopolitan Europe north that Italy wished to be recognized by. As mentioned a moment ago, the trajectory to Crimea from Italy moves south, and then east. Shiploads of soldiers set sail from Genoa down the Tirrenian Sea, past the Strait of Messina, across the Ionian and then the Aegean Sea and toward the Bosphorus. The southeastern trajectory by water—recounted at a time in which both Italy's role in Europe and its very existence as a nation state—will make audible Italy's own accursed southernness, bringing out the politically charged *lack* sounding in the *bella voce* that, even if it overcomes *logos*, must always fall short.

Masking the Uncommon Tongue

And so to Crimea. The earliest travelogue I consider here is *I Piemontesi in Crimea*, published three years before unification by Mariano D'Ayala (1808–1877), an erudite statesman working for the House of Savoy. Unlike many accounts that came in the wake of unification, D'Ayala's is not a personal memoir but rather an attempt at narrative history, probably based on the military accounts to which D'Ayala had access in Turin, as well as official “ricordi pittorici

with the exception of Mary Ann Smart's “Liberty on (and off) the Barricades: Verdi's Risorgimento Fantasies,” *Making and Remaking Italy: The Formation of Cultural Identity around the Risorgimento*, ed. Albert Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 103–118. Smart's essay is in many ways a musicological response to Gramsci's suspicions on opera. Yet to dwell excessively on Gramsci's ideas about the linguistic failures on opera is to overlook his broader reflections on mishearings and respellings of hegemonic languages on behalf of the subaltern; language, and listening to language, is always as much a site of resistance as it is of oppression. Among musicological takes on Gramsci, perhaps the most striking to date is Aaron Fox's *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), which uses Gramscian thought to analyze the modes in which the working-class community of Lockhart, Texas constructs speaking patterns and modes of subjectivity, thanks to the practice of country music.

militari”—oversized illustrated albums released on behalf of the Ministro di Guerra to document the war.¹³ The history is a predictable glorification of the King of Sardinia and his prime minister, Cavour, as the noble minds behind the territorial unification of a spiritually bonded nation.

Sound comes into D’Ayala’s narration mostly through the question of language and linguistic identity. In what was later identified—at least since Gramsci—as a trope of Risorgimento cultural production, D’Ayala pushed the idea of a nation united by a common tongue:

[One cannot] say that some of the people of Italy are more or less, or even not at all Italian, just because there are differences between them. A different accent in speaking the same tongue, cool rather than ardent courage, that is the full extent of the differences between soldiers of the Italian fatherland.¹⁴

In the intensely fragmented peninsula of 1858, there was little more than a literary Italian whose use mitigated regional linguistic differences among the higher classes. D’Ayala’s idea of a common spoken tongue among the majority of the population was, in short, blatantly an ideological construct. We could put this even more strongly: D’Ayala—born in Messina (Sicily) and educated in Naples, going on pointedly to avoid republican riots in 1848 in Naples, Florence, and Turin—probably experienced this linguistic disunity more vividly than many less well-traveled functionaries of the monarchy. His dismissal of linguistic differences may have gained urgency through the friction it produced with his own experience. D’Ayala wrote with the strained authority of a southerner acting as proxy for—speaking on behalf of—the Savoy kingdom. As mentioned earlier, the ideology of a common tongue was dismantled, perhaps for the first time by Gramsci—who, not by coincidence, also hailed from the Italian south,

¹³ The book, referenced in n4 but worth bringing up again, is the *Ricordo pittorico militare della spedizione sarda in Oriente*. Parts of this publication were cribbed and reworked into a subsequent *Ricordo pittorico militare della spedizione sarda in Oriente* published in 1884 by the *Consiglio direttivo della Società dei Reduci dalla Crimea* on the occasion of the Esposizione generale Italiana of 1884 in Turin.

¹⁴ “Né perché i popoli d’Italia abbiano fra loro alcune differenze, potranno dirsi alcuni più ed altri meno, anzi nulla Italiani. [. . .] Un accento diverso nel parlare la lingua comune, un coraggio più freddo o più ardente, ecco tutta la varietà che corre fra i soldati della medesima patria Italiana.” Mariano D’Ayala, *I Piemontesi in Crimea: Narrazione storica* (Florence: Tipografia Barbera, 1858), 13. It’s important to note that D’Ayala’s text was published by a private press as part of a series entitled “biblioteca civile dell’Italiano” (civic library of the Italian language), devised and financed by a group of noblemen who later became high-ranking statesmen in unified Italy. With regard to the question of language, note how D’Ayala had previously described Austria in exactly opposite terms, as “an unnatural and violent aggregate of twenty peoples different in race, culture and language,” *ibid.*, xiii.

Sardinia. Yet even without invoking Gramsci, we might detect uncertainty behind D’Ayala’s protestations over language in some of his subsequent statements about the uses and abuses of national “voices.” A common tongue was not enough once in Crimea:

It is not enough that the fatherland’s armed forces be commanded by voices from the fatherland, nor that orders and regulations be formulated in an appropriate and solemn language; it is also necessary that Italian soldiers be of one mind and one heart, and that, shedding all forms from the outside, they take on pure national form.¹⁵

D’Ayala is here referring to the edicts of Vittorio Emanuele II, King of Sardinia, to his troops in Crimea, which he quotes in full and comments on positively, but is clearly unconvinced by. The bombast of the edicts—no matter how apt and elevated the content—was simply not sufficient to assert radical nationhood. Neither were military commands delivered in Italian on site. It is almost as if D’Ayala were warning against the precise incident Ricci was to describe some forty years later—the distortion of the King’s speech. D’Ayala’s solution to this insufficiency of the national language is little more than a surge of rhetoric urging primal tuning among bodies in which *logos* plays no part. Voice is transformed into a form of physical collective fusion—the primal formation of the body politic as visceral national identity. One mind, one heart, pure form. Voice—the sound that issues from the body that utters it—is no longer even in the picture, so violently inward is the wiring of nationhood into flesh.

The condition for this overcoming of language is the exportation of the nation outside its boundaries, but also—and this is important—outside the Western scheme of powers into which it wishes to enter. It is the journey southeast that peels away regional differences and uncovers the idea of voice as collective tuning. The journey to Constantinople on the way to Crimea is thus endowed with mythical markers. It is a journey by sea, and one that involves traversing that most Greek of mythical passages: for D’Ayala—and, as we shall see, for others after him—the Strait of Messina was a particularly charged site. It is here that,

¹⁵ “Non basta che le armi patrie sieno con voci patrie comandate, né che le provvisioni e i regolamenti abbian lingua propria e solenne; è necessario altresì che i soldati italiani abbiano una mente e un cuore: e che, deposte tutte le forme altrui, rivestano le pure forme nazionali.” D’Ayala, *I Piemontesi in Crimea*, 2–3.

on the way east, the southern lands can be contemplated as part of a prospective whole. Voice is, again, of critical importance:

[The ships] greeted the islands of Capraia and Gorgona, no longer invoked as the “hedgerow of the Arno’s mouth,” and the Aeolian islands with Stromboli and its smoke, and then Ponza and Capri, then Messina and Reggio; and on the shores of the Strait, passionate youths and an unhappy people greeted the passing of those glorious flags with their gaze and by waving little white cloths, barely stifling in their heart the cry forming on their lips: “Viva L’Italia!”¹⁶

The journey along the western coast of Italy and then through the Strait of Messina is full of Homeric reminders: the Sirens near the Aeolian islands, Scylla and Charybdis at the Strait. D’Ayala added to these a Tuscan boundary—the islands at the mouth of the Arno in Tuscany, which Dante had dubbed the hedgerow separating the Arno from the sea. Again, this seemingly innocent quotation was politically astute. D’Ayala probably knew that Florentine dialect—which Dante had, as was well known, consecrated into high literature in the thirteenth century—was in these very years being proposed by Alessandro Manzoni as the future national language of united Italy.¹⁷ By the time the Strait had been reached, the linguistic impulse toward nationhood had been engendered; at the edges of the peninsula, it was already a potential voice, a common impulse in the minds and hearts of the people. But this potentiality never translated into voice. No sound came from the lips of the forlorn onlookers at the Strait. The desired common tongue must exist only as a spasm, well away from the vagaries of inter-subjectivity. It is as if D’Ayala had placed this extreme pressure on the voice so as to thrust it back into the depths of a flesh where it could neither be heard, nor—crucially—misheard.

¹⁶ “[Le navi] salutavan la Capraia e la Gorgona, non più invocate a far ‘siepe all’Arno in su la foce,’ e l’Elba e le Isole Eolie con la Stromboli fumante, e Ponza e Capri, poi Messina e Reggio; sulle cui rive i giovani ardenti del Faro e il popolo infelice salutavan col guardo e con lo sventolare di bianchi lini il passaggio di quelle gloriose bandiere, appena soffogando nel cuore il grido che correva sulle labbra di ‘Viva l’Italia.’” D’Ayala, *I Piemontesi in Crimea*, 56.

¹⁷ Manzoni revised his novel *I promessi sposi* (1827) so that its language conformed to Florentine literary dialect, and republished it in 1840. D’Ayala might even have been familiar with the phrase widely used to describe Manzoni’s linguistic retooling of his novel: the “risciacquatura in Arno,” the rinsing [of language] in the Arno river. After the unification, Manzoni became part of the unified monarchy’s committee on linguistic unification, and in 1868 published a celebrated brief essay specifically on the subject of linguistic reform: “Dell’unità della lingua e dei mezzi di diffonderla.”

Hearing the Italian Voice

In order to understand the shriveled physicality, the engendering and yet willful retention of voice in D'Ayala—the extent to which voice existed under a pressure too great to be released into the realm of the audible—we might look at Marx's treatment of Italy in his journalism for the *New York Herald Tribune*. Marx's work of this period includes, notoriously, a formidably cosmopolitan account of the war. Within his account Italy is, as one might expect, a footnote—but a telling one. To Marx, the failures of 1848 were to be examined carefully in light of the subsequent revolutionary insurgence. In this context he offered a withering commentary on the last embers of the failed 1848 riots against Austrian occupation. He singled out 6 February 1853 in Milan, an uprising organized *in absentia* by an exiled leader of 1848, Giuseppe Mazzini. The uprising—which has an odd, posthumous literary relationship to Crimea—consisted of a series of spectacular miscalculations and miscommunications: firearms meant to be sent from Genoa and Switzerland were never delivered; the plan to storm the Austrian headquarters and persuade Hungarian soldiers to defect in favor of the rioters was also unsuccessful; street protests failed to gain traction; and eventually the uprising was swiftly and bloodily quelled by Austrian troops. Marx concludes,

Let us hope that henceforth there will be an end of *révolutions improvisées*, as the French call them. Has one ever heard of great improvisators being also great poets? They are the same in politics as in poetry. Revolutions are never made to order. After the terrible experience of '48 and '49, it needs something more than paper summonses from distant leaders to evoke national revolutions.¹⁸

The play on the figure of the improvisator here is an odd, tantalizing detail to a reader suspicious of vocal metaphors in relation to Risorgimento politics. Marx offers a complex simile by way of path between the aesthetic and the political (“they are the same in politics as in poetry”). The anatomy of the simile goes something like this: “improvisation” is to “poetry” what “(ineffectual) paper summonses” are to “revolution.” This is a rather sophisticated diagnosis. Marx did not write—as he easily could have—that, in politics as in poetry, Italians are mere improvisators, stuck in a primitive oral phase that has not yet blossomed into literacy. Rather, he seemed to imply that as politicians, Italians have literacy (Mazzini issues paper summonses) but not *good* literacy. Their being stuck in an

¹⁸ Karl Marx, article in the *New York Daily Tribune* (7 Mar. 1853).

undeveloped orality is manifested through the fact that they use the written letter badly, as a flimsy substitute for, rather than a fulfillment of, voice.

Thus the leader who conceives of a revolution spontaneously and without adequate planning is an improviser whose prowess, while impressive, is tied to the time and place of performance; the leader who plans everything away from the site of political revolt is like a letter that, however well intentioned, may be misdelivered, misread, and then badly acted on, if at all. In order to produce lasting political change, revolution has to be like a voice that not only is powerful and masterful, but that also *carries*. The balance between orality and literacy is key to politics as it is to literature: the best revolutionary is the poet, whose command of the rhythms of spoken utterance translates into literature that retains the resonance and immediacy of voice, but transcends the limits of the *hic et nunc*.

This is not to say that Marx was a kind of political theorist of the Italian voice—far from it. I am, however, suggesting that Marx’s seemingly inconsequential choice of metaphors to describe the Italian political condition reflects a broadly hegemonic discourse on the Italian voice in the nineteenth century. Whether or not Marx is a witting participant in this discourse is hard to discern. Could Marx, for instance, have known that his political target in this excerpt—Mazzini—had published a *Filosofia della musica* in 1836 in which the genre of opera—and the writing for voice in opera—was taken to be allegorical of Italy’s potential as a democratic republic?¹⁹ Perhaps not. He may, however, have been aware of the appraisal of Italian culture delivered by Central European writers earlier in the century, in particular the famously incendiary essay published by Madame de Staël on the subject of translation in 1816.²⁰ De Staël’s basic argument was that Italy did not have a literature fit to compete or even converse with that of Central Europe, because it was based on classical, outdated models whose subjects were no longer contemporary. One of the causes of this problem was the sheer beauty of Italian as a language: when spoken or sung, it could cover up even the dullest literary material, thus facilitating the country’s cultural conservatism.²¹ Not much could be done about this: the phonetic riches of Italian amounted to a vessel that could not aspire to adequate intellectual content. It might, however, serve to carry and appropriate literary advances of the Central European countries.

¹⁹ Giuseppe Mazzini, “Filosofia della musica” (1836), *Scritti letterari* (Milan: Bietti, 1933), vol. 2, 36–73.

²⁰ The essay was first published in Italian as “Sulla maniera e l’utilità delle traduzioni” in *Biblioteca italiana* 1/1 (1816), 9–18. The translator of the essay and editor of the journal was Pietro Giordani.

²¹ I am borrowing the insights on Madame de Staël’s commentary on Italian literature and theater from Gary Tomlinson’s article on the affinities of Italian Romantic Opera and Romantic Literature; see his “Italian Romanticism and Italian Opera: An Essay in Their Affinities,” *19th-Century Music*, 10/1 (Summer 1986), 43–60.

And perhaps Marx might have heard of de Staël's novelistic accounts of her travels in Italy, one of which—*Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807)—amply predated the essay on translation and focused exclusively on a female vocal improviser (the titular Corinne) whose performances she notated in her novel, effectively carrying out a work of translation complementary to the one she exhorted Italians to take on in 1816.²² Whether Marx was conscious of this or not, improvisers, or “improvisators”—in Marx's nomenclature—were not a vague, neutral term in nineteenth-century literary discourse, but one of the ciphers of the encounter between Central European literary erudition and the sensuous riches of the European South. Through the literary account of the *improvisatrici*, de Staël performed the act of capturing Italian vocal performances: she notated improvisations into French language poetry that could thus be carried, quite literally, across the Alps. As it was for Marx, for de Staël the voice was a powerful technology for both art and politics, but one whose ideally literary use escaped Italians themselves. Italians are improvisers, not poets. Only by appropriating Central European styles could they achieve an optimal, cosmopolitan literature. Only then would their voice truly carry.

The rarefied sensibilities of a de Staël have ostensibly little to do with Marx's wry musings on the political causes of the failure of 1848. Yet Marx is a participant—a fleeting and perhaps unwitting one, but a participant nonetheless—in a discourse that de Staël actively shaped in the early nineteenth century. And it is in Marx's very high-profile account of the months leading up to the beginning of one of the nineteenth century's deadliest international conflicts that the aestheticizing rhetoric of de Staël begins to display its full political weight. Italians cannot make lasting, internationally acclaimed use of either speech or literature in the same way that they cannot work revolutions. Again, they are improvisers, not poets. By the same token they are, in Marx's view, agitators, not political leaders.

Italian vocalicity thus expands into something of a geopolitical economy. As Italian literary scholar Roberto Dainotto has boldly argued, the fashioning of the southern corner of Enlightened Europe was the result of decades of work stemming, initially, from the pinnacles of French and German literature. From Montesquieu to Rousseau, from Hegel to Madame de Staël, Southern Europe—and Italy especially—served as a means of maintaining symbolic ties, and yet also substantially warding off, the southeastern Mediterranean, at once understood as a point of origin, and as an embarrassing premodernity to be overcome. For Dainotto, Montesquieu crystallized the thought that “as colonies of the Oriental

²² A twenty-first-century reflection on the practice of female improvisation in early nineteenth-century Italy and its representation in both literature and opera is Melina Esse's “Encountering the *improvisatrice* in Italian Opera,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 66/3 (Fall 2013), 709–70.

world of Islam, the civilizations of Spain and Italy did not constitute an integral part of Europe but were its negative south.²³ Yet it was crucial that they were included—as the aestheticizing flair for voice that runs from Rousseau to de Staël shows—precisely because they served to render Europe *immune* to the Orient, by folding elements of it within itself.

The political economy of voice lies with the geopolitics of the European South, as an excess which bears an inextinguishable debt toward an enlightened Europe that begrudgingly, but necessarily, includes it. Rousseau and de Staël are thinkers whose names haunt opera scholars' bibliographies to this day. Often overlooked is that the supposed beautiful orality of Italians, as heard from France and Germany, amounts to their eschewal of, but also subjugation to, the *lettres*: the literate thought that defines the Republic of European states. As Dainotto argues, literature—the very idea of belles lettres—comes to embody not simply the act of writing, but the very form of (French) Enlightenment *logos* as well.²⁴ Taking Dainotto's thought one step toward the aural—and with a side-long glance toward Derrida—we might argue that the Italian voice is primarily the by-product, the lack/excess produced by this notion of the literate.²⁵ It is the gift of the Italian peninsula, its contribution to the Republic of letters—but only insofar as it is also the sonic embodiment of that which Italy does not have, its *debt* to the superior literature, ability for revolution, and democracy of its core-European siblings.

Inhuman Voice, Inscribed Ground

An anti-monarchic counter-narrative to accounts like that of D'Ayala was produced almost simultaneously in the literary movement known as Scapigliatura. A mix of French bohemianism and watered-down socialism and anarchism, the Scapigliati were young members, mostly of the haute bourgeoisie, who opposed monarchic unity and upheld radical republican values—Mazzini's lost cause. Their style involved a plethora of images of physical decay and festering wounds,

²³ Roberto M. Dainotto, *Europe (in Theory)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 6.

²⁴ Dainotto works through Voltaire and Diderot to come up with a definition of letters as “not literature as erudition, but literature as a key to practical knowledge; not literature as a cult of the past, but as praxis on the present and creation of a progressive future; not literature as knowledge for knowledge's sake, in the end, but literature as the formation of citizens—of a society of polished spirits, perfect taste, and graceful sciences. This is literature, in sum, understood as the basis for the transnational Republic of Letters of poets, doctors, and mathematicians already praised in le siècle de Louis XIV.” *Europe (in Theory)*, 90.

²⁵ The deconstruction of the binary of writing and an imagined original orality is the subject of Derrida's reflections on Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (1781) in *De la grammatologie*.

as well as sensory malfunctions of various kinds, all of which could be broadly conceived as allegorical of the corrupt moral and political order (Catholicism, the Savoy Monarchy, capitalist expansion in the northern cities).²⁶ Crimea would not, by any stretch of the imagination, become a key theme for this group, but it did play some part. Few note that it appeared in the Scapigliatura's literary manifesto, the novel *La Scapigliatura e il 6 febbraio (un dramma in famiglia)* (1862) by Milanese writer Cletto Arrighi, whose subject was the uprising of 6 February 1853 that had spurred Marx's aversion to Mazzini. The Crimean War is referenced in the epilogue; the context is, again, a journey by water. Two years after the Milanese uprising, two of the novel's minor characters meet on a ship sailing across Lake Maggiore, in Piedmont. Both of them are now *émigrés*, but are traveling back to Italy from their homes abroad in Switzerland and Paris. One of them, a young rioter in 1853, is on his way to fight in the Crimean War; the other, an elderly doctor, is on his way back to Milan, where an outbreak of cholera is decimating the population. "Cholera is my Sevastopol" says the old doctor, thus linking in one sinister sweep the sick Italian body politic and the exportation of Italian nationalist grievances.²⁷

Years later, Crimea became the high-profile subject of a novel by one of the Scapigliatura's most eccentric writers. Iginio Ugo Tarchetti's *Una nobile follia* was published in Milan in 1866, five years after national unification. Tarchetti's account is neither—like D'Ayala's book—a history nor a personal memoir; it is, however, written *as though* it were a memoir, from the perspective of a first-person narrator. It charts the Crimean War through the eyes and ears of Vincenzo D., a fictional conscript. In response to the horrors of the war, Vincenzo suffers

²⁶ The Italian scholarship on Scapigliatura (taken as a movement involving literature, visual arts, music, and theater) is predictably vast. A good recent general survey is Giuseppe Farinelli's *La Scapigliatura: Profilo storico, protagonisti, documenti* (Rome: Carrocci, 2003), and on the literary Milanese/Lombard Scapigliatura it is important to mention Enrico Ghidetti, *Tarchetti e la Scapigliatura lombarda* (Naples, Italy: Libreria scientifica editrice, 1968) and Massimo Arcangeli's *La Scapigliatura poetica milanese e la poesia italiana fra Otto e Novecento: Capitoli di lingua e di stile* (Rome: Aracne, 2003). English language work on Scapigliatura is rarer; a key text is David Del Principe's *Rebellion, Death and Aesthetics in Italy: The Demons of Scapigliatura* (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996). It is also worth noting that Tarchetti's most renowned novel, *Fosca* (1869), was adapted into the musical *Passion* by Stephen Sondheim in 1994, although Sondheim approached Tarchetti's subject through a film adaptation by Ettore Scola, *Passione d'amore* (1981).

²⁷ Cletto Arrighi, *La Scapigliatura e il 6 febbraio (un dramma in famiglia)* (Milan: Francesco Sanvito, 1862), esp. 304–15. The passage just quoted is found at 312: "Io sono un soldato della salute pubblica né più né meno di questo giovanotto che lo è della civiltà e dell'indipendenza. Il cholera è la mia Sebastopoli. Che diresti di un soldato che il giorno dell'assalto non corresse sotto la bandiera? Il mio posto è dove si muore. È a Milano." [I am a warrior for public health no more and no less than this youth who defends civilization and independence. Cholera is my Sebastopol. What would you think of a soldier who doesn't fight for his flag on the day of the attack? My place is where people are dying. It is in Milan.]

a mental breakdown that eventually results in his deserting the front, smuggling himself back to Milan, and isolating himself in a small apartment entirely populated (like a modern day's Noah's Ark) by animals and insects.

The cultural and political networks within which Tarchetti operated could be described as a blow-by-blow inversion of D'Ayala's background. If D'Ayala was a nationalist and a monarchist, Tarchetti was both anti-unification and anti-military. Born some forty-five miles east of Turin—the seat of the House of Savoy's power—Tarchetti moved to Milan and became part of Scapigliatura; D'Ayala, on the other hand, was a southerner who had trained in a military academy in Naples and then integrated himself into Piedmont as a statesman and scholar of the military arts. Tarchetti had volunteered to join unified Italy's new army in 1862, and his first—and, it turns out, last—assignment was in the southern region of Puglia, where troops were engaged in the bloody suppression of anti-unification rioters (a phenomenon broadly known as *brigantaggio*). Horrified, he began to conceive of the monarchy as a colonial project of annexation of the peninsula's South and abandoned the army in 1863.²⁸

Tarchetti's anti-militarism permeates his Crimean novel—so much so that its second edition, which came out in 1869, was publicly burned in Milan's military barracks. It takes a radically anti-identitarian stance, avoiding all mention of Italy or indeed of the reason that Italian soldiers were sent to Crimea. This undoing of identity is one of the novel's most innovative formal features: it is written in the first person, but there are in fact three narrators, two of whom are homonymous. The lead character—who is the last “I” to speak in the novel—defects from the battlefield of Crimea by taking the uniform of a dead Polish soldier on the battlefield; he changes his name to Vincenzo D. after arriving safely back in Genoa, and eventually ends his life so that his homonym dear friend—Vincenzo D.—may take on his identity, escape his creditors, and live as a free man. This overwrought splintering of authorial voice produces a semiotic surcharge, making the “I” into a taunting, opaque recurring sign, and the novel into a litany of personal pronouns whose referent is always elusive.²⁹ The multiplication is, strikingly, matched by an almost complete obliteration of human voices within the diegesis. Not only is there little dialogue, but a studied absence of hearing and speaking as well. The battlefield is devoid of human sound, whether musical

²⁸ Tarchetti's background, political convictions, and literary ambitions with regard to *Una nobile follia* are explored in Roberto Carnero's preface to the 2004 edition by Mondadori. See Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, *Una nobile follia: Drammi della vita militare* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004), i–xxv.

²⁹ On the themes both of material decay and of the doubling/splitting of the self, both very prominent in the novel, it is important to mention Alberto Carli's *Anatomie scapigliate: L'estetica della morte tra letteratura, arte e scienza* (Novara, Italy: Interlinea, 2004), and especially Tommaso Pomilio's *Asimmetrie del due: Di alcuni motivi scapigliati* (Lecce, Italy: Manni, 2002).

or linguistic—despite being thickly populated with soldiers. What does emerge, though, almost incessantly, is the landscape of the battlefield, a landscape that seems—far more than the warfare waged upon it—responsible for thousands of deaths. Bodies fall in clusters from precipices, are swallowed by floods, or buffeted by wind or land configuration into the thrall of the enemy, regardless of nationality or allegiance.³⁰

The figure of the ground, the bare earth, becomes for Tarchetti not only the material substratum that warring armies trample, but also a metaphor for a natural order of peaceful coexistence among living things that is breached by war. Retribution issues from it as if from an angry deity. The glorified body politic of nationalism is thus unsettled by then common ground, which gives the lie to war as a nefarious artifice, an artifice that creates a violating inscription, a gash in the earth. On the day of the battle of the Tchernaja, Vincenzo D. notes,

It is but seven in the morning, and everything writhes and lives [. . .] blue flies buzz over maple leaves, dragonflies hover in clusters over the river, clouds of gnats dance in the sunlight [. . .] and cuckoos make the whole plain resound with their drawn-out, monotonous song. Upon this natural idyll, men are about to inscribe an epic poem drenched in blood.³¹

Mocking heroic epic poetry, Tarchetti equates war with writing. Paradoxically, the only vocal sound in Tarchetti's battlefield is an inhuman scream produced precisely by the wounded earth. As the earth gathers up the fallen in battle, Vincenzo recalls,

³⁰ We might wonder where, if at all, Tarchetti drew his account of the Crimean battlefield. In my research, I have found his descriptions to be remarkably similar in style and tone to those of a French lieutenant whose memoir of his brief sojourn in Crimea was translated into Italian in 1855. See Barone de Bazancourt, *Cinque mesi al campo di Sebastopoli*, trans. Giuliano Landucci (Florence: Tipografia Giacomo Terni, 1855). De Bazancourt's account is striking because it relies heavily on the notion of natural "spectacle," using inflated literary language to describe a battlefield that de Bazancourt clearly observed from a position of mastery—the safety of the French observatory—as a horrific but thrilling visual performance. In linguistic terms, Tarchetti's account could be understood as an appropriation of a Central European account into the Italian language, a cosmopolitan counterattack on nationalist narratives brought forth within the boundaries and language of the united monarchy.

³¹ Tarchetti, *Una nobile follia*, 138: "Non sono in fatto che le sette ore del mattino, e tutto si agita o vive: le melonte saltellano a migliaia sui prati, le mosche azzurro si posano ronzando sopra le foglie degli aceri, le libellule aleggiano a stuoli sul fiume, nubi di moncherini volteggiano nei raggi del sole, le lucertole verdi si affacciano alle screpolature dei massi e s'inseguono, e i cuculi fanno risuonare tutta la valle dei loro canti monotoni e prolungati. Dinanzi a questo idillio della natura, gli uomini si apparecchiavano a scrivere un'epopea di sangue."

We could hear neither the cries of the victors, nor the wails of the wounded and dying; but there was something in the air, something that seemed to weep, that seemed to ache; there was that great voice, that great emanation of grief that matter lets out as it dies.³²

It is as if the violent inscription of war carved a screaming mouth into the earth, opening a space for voice as the remainder—rather than the premise—of the written trace.

South by Southeast

Personal memoirs of Crimea flourished some twenty-three years into Unification, partly as a commemorative tribute to Vittorio Emanuele II. Indeed, Crimea-related activities and documentation enjoyed an upswing in the wake of his death in 1878. The Società dei Reduci della Crimea (Society of the Veterans of Crimea) was founded in Turin that year, with branches opening simultaneously in Milan and Genoa. The Society was active in maintaining living memory of the war, by collecting funds for war veterans, celebrating yearly the battle of the Tchernaja, and even organizing pilgrimages to Cavour's grave in Santena. It also successfully promoted the building of an ossuary in Crimea for the collection of the remains of Piedmontese fighters, holding a ceremony there on its inauguration in August 1882. At the national exhibition (Esposizione Generale Italiana) of 1884, which took place in Turin, personal memoirs by participants in the war were encouraged, and war correspondence was further gathered. The reason for this surge in activity was not, of course, just a matter of commemoration, but had a broader political purpose: in the early 1880s Italy was gearing up for colonial occupation of Eritrea, which it partially accomplished in 1885.³³ The export of the nation, the aural prestige of Italy's voice, began to be couched in more aggressive terms. Portraits of Crimean military leaders enjoyed a surge in demand, and were matched by a fresh stream of commemorative literature.

It is at this time, it seems, that memories of the musical prowess of the Italian military band in Crimea began to circulate. One such memoir was penned by Carlo Osvaldo Pagani in 1880. Offered as a heroic memoir of Alfonso La Marmora, the leader of the Crimean expedition, the memoir dwells on the

³² Tarchetti, *Una nobile follia*, 145: "Non udivamo le grida dei vincitori nè i gemiti dei feriti e dei morenti, ma vi era nell'aria qualche cosa che sembrava piangere, che sembrava soffrire; vi era quella gran voce, quella grande emanazione di dolore che la materia emette morendo."

³³ This information is given in the preface to Ettore Bertolè Viale, *Lettere dalla Crimea, 1855–56*, ed. Umberto Levrà. (Turin: Comitato dell'Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano; Carrocci, 2006).

band's sonic assertion of nationhood. But this time the ideal audience is both the powerful allied troops and the Turkish contingent, the latter often treated with palpable colonial disdain:

The music of the first regiment of grenadiers band—the only one to accompany the Sardinian expedition—had become famous. The band played well, and it played good Italian stuff that went right to the heart even of the English and the Turks, the most unmusical men on earth. Our local melodies were enjoyed best by the French, already taught by Rossini to appreciate *bel canto*. By the others it was absorbed mysteriously, with intense pleasure. It produced in them the inebriation of opium, opened up new patches of sky to their eyes. Sometimes as many as thirty- or even forty-thousand allies gathered around the music, and that strange mixture of types, of languages, of cultures, lent something strange and fantastical to the echoes of the sound waves resounding in the farthest corners of the camp.³⁴

As it hovers over the camp's disparate nationalities, the grenadiers' music—which is repeatedly indicated to be operatic in provenance—enfolds sounding nation and cosmopolitan *passerpartout*. It is worth noting that Pagani also recalls the language used by the allied troops to communicate with one another: Sabir, a pidgin used by mercantile communities in the Mediterranean basin between the eleventh and nineteenth centuries.³⁵ It is doubtful whether the strange mixture described by Pagani amounts to any certified language, but his decision to

³⁴ “La musica del primo reggimento granatieri—la sola che accompagnasse il corpo sardo di spedizione—era diventata celebre addirittura. Suonava bene, eppoi roba Italiana che andava dritto al cuore perfino degli Inglesi e dei Turchi, gli uomini più antimusicali della terra. La melodia nostra, paesana, gustata meglio dai Francesi abituati già da Rossini al bel canto, veniva dagli altri come assorbita, misteriosamente, voluttuosamente; produceva in essi un'ebbrezza come di oppio, apriva ai loro occhi lembi di cielo; In alcuni giorni trenta e perfino quarantamila alleati facevano circolo intorno alla musica, e quella strana mescolanza di tipi, di linguaggio, di costumi, aggiungeva qualcosa di strano, di fantastico, al ripercuotersi delle onde sonore negli echi più lontani dell'accampamento.” Carlo Osvaldo Pagani, *Alfonso La Marmora: Pagine nuove; Ricordi storici della campagna di Crimea* (Rome: Carlo Voghera, 1880), 413.

³⁵ Pagani, *Alfonso La Marmora*, 409: “Ma come faceva tutta questa gente ad intendersi? La cosa, infatti, era difficile, e si può dire che non ci sarebbero riusciti se non fosse stato per quello strano idioma (il sabir), nato sulle coste del Mediterraneo, miscuglio d'italiano, di spagnuolo, d'arabo, di turco, ridotto d'altronde a pochissimi vocaboli ed aiutato energicamente dall'eloquenza del gesto.” [But how did all these people manage to understand one another? It was, indeed, a difficult thing, and one might say they wouldn't have managed it without that strange language (sabir), born on the coast of the Mediterranean, a mix of Italian, Spanish, Arabic, Turkish, ultimately reduced to very few words and energetically enhanced by the eloquence of gesture.]

record it as Sabir is striking, evoking as it does the centuries of Genoese and Venetian mercantile glory, indeed the very period in which Genoa and Venice had set up coastal colonies in Crimea. On Crimean ground, pidgin mercantile tongues and band arrangements of bel canto arias now share the same symbolic purpose: to bind a variety of bodies through a cosmopolitanism laced with colonial ambition.

Such optimism was not to last. By the turn of the century memoirs of Crimea were taking on a darker tinge as Italy renewed its attempts at colonial expansion. The result was their devastating, bloody defeat in the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1896, which caused a backlash of anti-colonial sentiment: one that spilled into the imagery of travel away from home and onto the battlefield.³⁶ One of the most startling musical episodes recounted in later narratives of the Crimean campaign is found in an account by the previously mentioned Agostino Ricci, staff officer in the Crimean expedition who published his memoir in 1896, more than forty years after the war and shortly before his death. It concerns his journey by sea via the Strait of Messina. Ricci stages the passage dramatically. Having sailed all night from Genoa, the Italian troops' ship reaches the Strait in the morning. Those aboard wake up as they glide past the lighthouses at either side of the Strait. But the episode has an odd musical soundtrack: a dissonant, badly performed fanfare. Ricci rushes over to the first trumpeter of the military band aboard to inquire as to the origin of the sound; the trumpeter promptly informs him that he is hearing the royal fanfare, which

is to be played on solemn occasions, and I wanted to let it be heard by those on either side of the Strait [. . .] at the moment we are leaving Italy and may never see it again. After all, both those in Messina and in Reggio Calabria are Italian, and should listen with joy to the fanfare of their gentleman King.³⁷

But there is a dislocation between the trumpeter's pompous aim and its aural result. It would have been unlikely for lands that were under a monarchy separate from (and rival to) that of Sardinia to have known the royal fanfare—or have recognized it as a national hymn of any kind. Indeed, Ricci muses that

someone would have had to explain to the people on the mainland that they were hearing the royal fanfare; this is, assuming that they would

³⁶ See, for example, Luigi Guarnieri, *La battaglia di Adua e il popolo italiano* (Turin: Roux Frassati, 1897).

³⁷ Ricci, *In Crimea*, 17.

have been able to hear it at all, which, given the distance, was very unlikely.³⁸

It is unclear whether Ricci takes the unintelligibility of the fanfare to be a matter of political alienation or a consequence of the poor performance. The Strait—the passage between the inside and outside of the nation—engenders a warp in which sounds lose their intelligibility, in which one reaches a disagreeable state of hovering at the threshold. Called upon to signify unity beyond political and linguistic boundaries, music falls into the same vagaries as language. It too fails to be recognized, to signify, to unite. Instead of serving as valediction to the imagined national territory, it illustrates the nation's undoing as the ship passes by the last stretch of known land. The journey south, past the recalcitrant regions of Sicily and Calabria, brings the ship closer to Africa than to Piedmont. As it continues eastward toward Constantinople, Italy's perilous belonging to Europe is in turn uncovered, awakening the memory of the territory's historical ties with the Ottoman Empire. The Italian South's inability to hear itself as part of the unified nation-state thus overlaps with the Enlightened European's wary listening to Italian voices. Sensuous southernness morphs into incoherence.

The misheard fanfare echoes the Savoyard foot soldier's distortion of the royal edict, Ricci's other aural anecdote, recounted at the beginning of this chapter. The fanfare, in turn, is echoed by the incipit to one of the most important recent philosophical accounts of voice, Mladen Dolar's *A Voice and Nothing More*:

There is a story which goes like this: in the middle of a battle there is a company of Italian soldiers in the trenches, and an Italian commander who issues the command "Soldiers, attack!" He cries out in a loud and clear voice to make himself heard in the midst of the tumult, but nothing happens, nobody moves. So the commander gets angry and shouts louder: "Soldiers, attack!" Still nobody moves. [. . .] He yells even louder "Soldiers, attack!" At which point there is a response, a tiny voice rising from the trenches, saying appreciatively "che bella voce!," what a beautiful voice!³⁹

Dolar memorably invokes the commander's failed interpellation, along with the soldier's aestheticizing impulse, and leads us a third way, toward a voice object that "does not go up in smoke in the conveyance of meaning, and does not solidify

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 6–7.

in an object of fetish reverence, but [is] an object which functions as a blind spot in the call and as a disturbance of aesthetic appreciation.”⁴⁰ I, too, have pursued this third way, this voice object. Yet, unlike Dolar, I have tried not to hurry past the specific implications for Italian nationhood with regard to the voice. For geopolitics run all the way down in the constitution of the voice object. The *bella voce* is produced by a celebratory discourse that constitutes it as the object, and never the speaking subject, of literary theory as well as of European-scale political shifts. Probing unloved archives, such as that of the Italian Crimean War, can thus bring out the disquiet and rupture that emerges as Italian vocality is squared, in post-unification historiography, with a Eurocentric aural vantage point. Such archives allow us to observe a voice object taking shape in distorted sentences whose falling short of sense provides the occasion (and the potential) for infinite linguistic renewal: a game of “telephone” in which phone and *logos* are each other’s constant remainders.

⁴⁰ Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 4.



PART III

WARTIME AS HEARD

