

Ennio Valentinelli – a forgotten Futurist

Abstract

This article engages in an analysis of the Futurist Ennio Valentinelli, revealing him to be the free-word poet, Acciaio, who was an important figure in the movement during World War 1. After linking the names of Valentinelli and Acciaio for the first time, the article reconstructs the biography of this forgotten Futurist and analyses his pseudonymous Futurist free-word works, composed while serving with the Italian Army. This account of Valentinelli points to a broader need to reconsider Futurist combat experiences of World War 1, aiming to reveal the multiplicity of Futurist combat experiences beyond the well-known exploits of its most famous members.

Introduction

The name Ennio Valentinelli, a Futurist free-word poet born in 1894 in Trentino (at the time an Italian-speaking province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), will be unfamiliar to most readers, even those well-versed in the history of Futurism. This Futurist has never been the subject of a single journal article, let alone a full-length study or exhibition. The details about Valentinelli that have been recorded to date in Futurist scholarship are scant, to say the least. In contrast to this present-day oblivion, during the years of 'heroic' Futurism, and particularly during the years of World War 1, Valentinelli was a well-known Futurist and he was closely connected to many of the movement's protagonists, particularly Carlo Carrà, Umberto Boccioni and Fortunato Depero. The primary reason for this scholarly neglect is the fact that until now, the pseudonym that Valentinelli used in his Futurist works from 1914-1919 has never been identified. Valentinelli was in fact the Futurist free-word poet Acciaio (later Acciai), one of the most frequent contributors to *L'Italia Futurista*, the movement's

main periodical during the war years. Not only did his compositions appear in the pages of *L'Italia Futurista*, but his work also featured in the Grande Esposizione Nazionale del Futurismo, a large-scale touring exhibition held in Milan and Genoa in spring/summer 1919, with the aim of re-launching Futurism after the war. Nine of Acciaio's works featured in the 'Tavole parolibere' section of the exhibition, making him the best-represented artist of this category.ⁱ

To date, the only piece of scholarly documentation on the figure of Valentinelli comes in the brief biographical entry by Maurizio Scudiero in Ezio Godoli's authoritative *Dizionario del futurismo* of 2001, in which no mention of the pseudonym Acciaio is made. Scudiero states: "si hanno pochissime notizie [di Valentinelli], nella maggior parte indirette,"ⁱⁱ and records only the briefest of information: his date of birth and death;ⁱⁱⁱ his early proximity to the Futurists of Rovereto in 1913 including Depero; and his distancing from Futurism in the early 1920s. Scudiero also states that there exist only two "testimonianze del suo impegno in questo settore [Futurism]";^{iv} namely a 'tavola parolibera' on a war subject which was found in Giacomo Balla's studio, dating from July 1914 which has since been lost, and secondly, an unpublished manifesto entitled "L'arte degli odori", which theorized about a "nuovo lirismo olfattivo".^v Scudiero provides no information whatsoever about Valentinelli's Futurist activities during World War 1, as it was during this period that he published exclusively under the name of Acciaio.

It will be my task in this article to rehabilitate the memory of this Futurist poet by linking the names of Valentinelli and Acciaio for the first time, engaging in both a reconstruction of his Futurist biography, and in an analysis of his pseudonymous Futurist free-word works, composed while serving with the Italian Army during the war. This analysis of Valentinelli points to a broader need to reconsider Futurist combat experiences of World War 1 and the

ways in which they related to subsequent artistic and literary production. In the few existing studies of Futurist combat experiences during the Great War, the focus is invariably placed on the exploits of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni, Luigi Russolo, Antonio Sant'Elia, Ugo Piatti and Mario Sironi in the Battaglione Lombardo di Volontari Ciclisti e Automobilisti between June and November 1915.^{vi} The fact that so many Futurists fought together in a single battalion has provided scholars with an attractive collective experience to observe, using it as a shorthand for Futurist experiences of combat, with events occurring after this point being relegated to a mere footnote in Futurist history. Enrico Crispolti concluded his account of this Battalion and its disbandment by writing "L'avventura bellica di gruppo dei futuristi è finita. Gli impegni militari si rinnoveranno singoli e disparati, e per alcuni con esito fatale",^{vii} thus denying any subsequent events of playing a role in accounts of Futurism in World War 1. By shedding light on the figure of Valentinelli/Acciaio, one of the aims of this article is to reveal the multiplicity of Futurist combat experiences in the Great War beyond the well-known exploits of the group's most famous members.

First encounters with Futurism

Valentinelli was born in 1894 in Villa Lagarina, just outside Rovereto in Trentino, and was one of the thousands of 'italiani d'Austria', Italian-speaking citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Trentino, along with Trieste and Friuli, was part of the 'terra irredenta', or the lands that were 'unredeemed' from the Austrians after the Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy in 1861. The irredentist movement in Italy greatly increased in importance at the start of the twentieth century and Valentinelli grew up steeped in just such a milieu in Rovereto.

Although we do not have any direct evidence of Valentinelli's irredentist beliefs, given the cultural context in which he grew up and his later decision to enroll as a volunteer in the

Italian Army, his political sympathies in this direction cannot be in any doubt. Until 1912, Valentinelli was a student at the Scuole Reale Regina Elisabetta, which was a hotbed of young irredentists.^{viii} One of his classmates was Damiano Chiesa, the future irredentist martyr who would be executed by the Austrians in 1916 for high treason after volunteering to fight in the Italian Army.^{ix} Another boy who attended the school at the same time described how the students were forced to attend target practice under the tutelage of the Austrian army, but expressed their disapproval by singing the “Inno a Garibaldi” under their breath.^x On 2 November 1912, all secondary school students in Rovereto were requested to go on strike in solidarity with the Triestine and Trentino students in Innsbruck, who were campaigning for an Italian law faculty at the university,^{xi} and it is highly likely that Valentinelli participated in this action.

Scudiero noted that Valentinelli’s was “una presenza in ambito futurista essenzialmente vicina a Depero”, beginning with his membership of the Futurist circle of Rovereto around 1913.^{xii} In actual fact, Depero did not meet Valentinelli until May 1914, as testified to in a letter Depero wrote to his fiancée Rosetta Amadori. After a few months in Rome early in 1914 establishing contacts with the key figures of Futurism, Depero had returned to Rovereto where he was preparing two exhibitions, which would take place in summer of the same year. He was also doing his utmost “a far propaganda del futurismo” and to convert as many as possible to the cause.^{xiii} In the May 1914, he told Rosetta that he had found “un giovane molto intelligente – Valentenelli [sic] – è futurista – scrittore”.^{xiv} His words suggest that Valentinelli was already a convert to Futurism, and we know that he was also one of the few in Rovereto to subscribe to *Lacerba*, the Futurist magazine based in Florence.^{xv} The likely reason for which Depero and Valentinelli’s paths had not crossed before summer 1914 was that Valetinelli had been a student of Italian and French at the University of Vienna since March of the previous year.^{xvi}

The 'Circolo futurista trentino', which Valentinelli joined in 1914, had been established by Depero the previous year in Rovereto. It was an informal association, consisting of meetings between like-minded friends based in the town. Valentinelli's participation in the group is attested to by a fellow Trentino Futurist, Luciano Baldessari. Baldessari remembered that the group "contava una decina di studenti delle scuole della città, taluni dal ginnasio, talaltri degli istituti tecnico, magistrale, musicale [... c'era] Remo Costa (...); il fratello di questi, Diego Costa ed il più anziano di noi, Ennio Valentinelli, (...) che allora (...) stimavamo brillante dicitore di parole in libertà e di poesie pubblicate nella 'Voce' e nella 'Acerba'".^{xvii} In his 1914 book *Pittura e scultura futurista*, Boccioni noted that "Ricevo lettere di angoscia da giovani nel cui cervello ormai è entrato il dubbio ed è nata la speranza di un glorioso avvenire artistico italiano. [...] Ricevo fotografie da Roma, da Bologna, da Torino, da Venezia, *dal Trentino*, dalla Germania, da Londra, dal Giappone."^{xviii} Boccioni, rather than Marinetti, was the primary point of reference for the young Trentino Futurists. In a letter to Marinetti after Boccioni's death in August 1916, Valentinelli wrote that: "Boccioni era uno dei futuristi più studiati e ammirati dalla gioventù futurista irredenta, e abbiamo sentito un baratro aprirsi accanto a noi alle notizie della sua morte."^{xix} It is likely that Marinetti's rejection of Dante rankled with these young Futurists in Rovereto, for whom Dante functioned as a symbol of their hoped-for unification with Italy.^{xx}

When Austria went to war in July 1914, Valentinelli was called up for military service for the Austrian Army and attended a medical examination. Like his friend Depero, Valentinelli was declared unfit for military duty. As an Italian-speaking irredentist, Valentinelli would no doubt have been appalled at the prospect of fighting for the enemy. Approximately 55,000 Trentini were called up to fight with the Austrian Army and most of them served on the Russian front.^{xxi} Unlike Depero who travelled over the border to Italy in August 1914,

Valentinelli did not leave Austria until spring 1915. In April 1915 he was about to enter his third year of studies at the University of Vienna, and it is probable that he delayed his departure from Austria in order to complete his second-year exams. He managed to leave Rovereto on 8 April 1915 using a false passport, which he had obtained from the Circolo Trentini in Verona.^{xxii}

Even before he moved to Milan in April 1915, Valentinelli was present in Marinetti's orbit and had already adopted the pseudonym Acciaio. The name first appears in a list of the members of the 'Movimento futurista', printed in Marinetti's work *L'aeroplano del Papa*, published between September and December 1914, during the period of Italian neutrality. A few months later, after he had enlisted with the Italian Army, Valentinelli adopted a 'nome di guerra', which was common practice for the Trentino volunteers as a way of concealing their true identities if they were to be captured by the Austrian Army. Valentinelli chose the name Guido Acciai.^{xxiii} Valentinelli first published using the pseudonym Acciaio in January 1916. On 15 January 1916, on the front page of *Vela Latina* (a journal in which two 'Futurist pages' featured, edited by Francesco Cangiullo), there appeared a free-word composition entitled 'Bar x alberi in fiore x chanteuse'.^{xxiv} It was signed "Acciaio (Valentinelli, futurista, ora alpino al fronte)". This is the first, and only, time that the names Acciaio and Valentinelli were associated with each other. The later contributions to *L'Italia Futurista*, signed only Acciaio and later Acciai, have never before been identified as the work of Valentinelli.

Valentinelli was well known to all of the movement's major protagonists. In September 1915, Balla wrote to a postcard to Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni and Luigi Russolo who were all serving together as part of the Lombard Battalion of Volunteer Cyclists, in which he mentioned that "Valentinelli è sempre a 3000 metri in pieno fuoco".^{xxv} Valentinelli was also in contact with Carrà, to whom he wrote a postcard in December 1915, following the

disbandment of the Battalion and the return of Marinetti, Boccioni and several other Futurists to Milan. Valentinelli pleaded with Carrà to

persuadere Marinetti Boccioni e li altri giù che ne àno una giustificata occasione di starsene a casa a combattere contro i passatisti li austriacanti i neutralisti l'imbellici che formicalano dopo la morte dei più saldi campioni dell'intelligenza. È una campagna per la quale ci vogliono l'intelligenti mentre in trincee bastano anche i fessi, purchè abbiano dei buoni muscoli. Per flagellare in nemici interni ci vogliono uomini di tempra futurista. Non lasciate l'Italia in balia dei ferabutti mentre noi combattiamo al fronte.^{xxvi}

Valentinelli, the volunteer soldier

Valentinelli's first destination upon arrival in Italy in April 1915 was the headquarters of the Commissione dell'Emigrazione Trentina in Milan, where he also received lodging. He remained there until 31 May.^{xxvii} The next day, he enrolled as a volunteer soldier in the Italian Army and began active service. In total, 687 men from Trentino volunteered and served in the Italian forces. The bravery of this decision should not be underestimated. By volunteering to fight for a foreign army, these men left behind their families, any goods or property they owned in Austria would be confiscated and if captured by the Austrian forces, they would be executed for treason.^{xxviii} As Alessio Quercioli, who has carried out extensive research on the Trentino volunteers, commented, this was "una scelta estrema, non di comodo che deve necessariamente poggiare su motivazioni salde e radicate".^{xxix} Quercioli explained their decision as stemming partially from their belief in the necessity of liberating the unredeemed territories, and partially from a "ribellione giovanile" – he noted that 54% of those who volunteered in 1915 were aged between 20 and 29.^{xxx} When Valentinelli enrolled in the Italian Army, he was 21 years old.

Two other Trentino Futurists served in the Italian Army – Depero and Umberto Maganzini, also known as Trilluci. However, while neither of these men served for more than a few months, Valentinelli served for the entire duration of the war, achieving the grade of lieutenant by May 1917. Valentinelli enrolled in the 5o Reggimento Alpini, Battaglione Edolo, 50a Compagnia in June 1915 and immediately applied to become an officer “della Milizia Territoriale nell’arma di fanteria (Alpini)”.^{xxx} Like many of the other Trentino volunteers, the elite corps of Alpine soldiers was a natural home for Valentinelli who had grown up in the foothills of the mountains. He then became a second lieutenant in the 6o Alpini based in Verona and later served at the Valle del Vansi.

His decision to enlist was certainly motivated by his irredentist and patriotic sympathies. Indeed, in a document from the Commissione Centrale – Patronato dei Fuorusciti Adriatici e trentini, necessary for his appointment as a second lieutenant in September 1915, it was necessary for Valentinelli to be declared “incensurato” and “di ineccepibile moralità e di provata fede politica”.^{xxxi} Later that same year, the Commissione dell’Emigrazione Trentina in Milan vouched for him as a “persona di ottima fama e condotta e di buonissimi sentimenti nazionali”.^{xxxii} However, Valentinelli’s service was motivated by practical, as well as ideological, concerns. In April 1915, he was a 21-year-old university student, a refugee from an enemy nation, without documents, and with no source of income or employment. While Depero was based in Rome with his fiancée Rosetta, and Maganzini’s whole family had relocated to Italy, Valentinelli was “assolutamente solo”^{xxxiii} in Italy. He pointed out in a letter of December 1915 to the Commissione Centrale – Patronato dei fuorusciti adriatici e trentini that “Non ò nessun parente in Italia, essendo stata internata la mia famiglia in Austria; dove non l’ò mai potuto sapere.”^{xxxiv} Volunteering for the Italian army was surely as much an economic decision (he received 300 lira a month) as a patriotic one. His salary

notwithstanding, early in 1916, he had to reach out to the Commissione Centrale in Rome for a loan of 100 lira for “oggetti di prima necessità, indispensabili nella mia qualità di sottotenente”.^{xxxvi}

Acciaio, ‘futurista al fronte’

What follows is an analysis of Valentinelli’s free-word compositions, published in Futurist periodicals between January 1916 and June 1917, which offer an insight into his war experiences and his relationship with Futurism, and into Futurist experiences of combat more broadly.

Valentinelli’s first “tavola parolibera” signed as Acciaio, “Bar x alberi in fiore x chanteuse”, which appeared in *Vela Latina* on 15 January 1916, at first glance does not seem particularly significant in terms of form or content. It is the simple retelling of Valentinelli’s experiences of a town at nighttime, where he drinks in the smells of the “giardini pubblici in fiore” and sees “automobili lumaconi ranocchie che asciugano la bava dall’asfalto bagnato”. He wanders around aimlessly before coming to a bar-*café chantant*. Inside he encounters the “danza ubbriaca” and the “etere cosmico nella luce elettrica” and states that “il mio mondo grigio di pensieri resta fuori della porta”.

The real importance of this composition, however, lies in the decision to publish it on the front page of the periodical and alongside the manifesto “L’orgoglio italiano”, signed by Marinetti, Boccioni, Russolo, Sant’Elia, Sironi and Piatti. These were the six Futurists who had returned from service with the Lombard Battalion of Volunteer Cyclists and the manifesto represents the first comprehensive discussion of their combat experience. At that time, *Vela Latina* was Futurism’s only editorial outlet, and so the prominence of

Valentinelli's composition cannot be understated. In addition, on page 2 of the edition there appeared *parole in libertà* offerings from much better-known members of the movement, namely Cangiullo, Paolo Buzzi, and Guglielmo Jannelli. The decision to privilege Valentinelli's work and to place it alongside the manifesto was as a result of his dual status both as a 'futurista al fronte' and as an 'alpino'.

The manifesto 'L'orgoglio italiano' recounts some aspects of the Futurists' activity while with the Volunteer Cyclists and highlights how they were transformed into "audaci, rudi, instancabili alpini" while fighting on the mountain slopes of Trentino.^{xxxvii} The bravery of the Battalion and the *alpini* is praised, especially considering that, in their summer uniforms, they were ill-equipped to deal with combat at 3000 metres. The final message of the manifesto is that anybody who, while physically able, decides to close himself off "nell'arte come in un sanatorio o in un lazaretto di colerosi e non offre la sua vita per ingigantire l'orgoglio italiano" deserves punches, kicks and shots in the back.^{xxxviii} Marinetti also states at the end of the manifesto that now that the Battalion has been disbanded, they are waiting "ansiosamente il piacere di ritornare al fuoco". Thus, the placement of Valentinelli's work directly under this manifesto presents him as a supreme example of the Futurist spirit at work: he is an *alpino*, the most highly praised corps of the army, with whom Marinetti was keen to align himself; he was currently in combat, unlike Marinetti, Boccioni and the others who were safe on the home front at that time; and he was producing artwork while at the front, thus proving himself to be the epitome of the 'Italian pride' Marinetti had described by joining together his desire to fight for Italy and his creative impulses.

The remainder of Valentinelli's works, signed Acciaio/Acciai, were published in *L'Italia Futurista*, with the first appearing in the magazine's first issue on 1 June 1916. The mission of *L'Italia Futurista* was to re-engage with the artistic side of life, which had initially been

neglected when the war broke out. As the editor Emilio Settimelli explained in the first issue's editorial, they had initially intended to re-start their "idolatrare esplorazioni liriche, le nostre innovatrici idee sulla vita" only after the war had finished. However, they had realised that "il genio artistico è una leva di conquista più formidabile talvolta di una flotta e di un esercito. È sempre l'anima che fa e vince la guerra".^{xxxix} Settimelli also announced that the collaboration of soldiers at the front lines would be a central component of the new magazine. The importance of featuring Futurists at the front lay in the ability therefore to parade the Futurists as being fully engaged with the realities of the war so that they could also stave off any criticisms of being "imboscati" by producing a newspaper instead of fighting. The principal form of soldier collaboration with the newspaper was the contribution of free-word compositions, signed "futurista al fronte" or on occasion "futurista ferito al fronte". Over the newspaper's lifetime of 20 months, there were 27 such contributions, including works by Marinetti, and other well-known Futurists such as Guglielmo Jannelli, and Mario Carli, but principally consisting of lesser-known Futurists, such as Jamar 14 (Piero Gigli), Luca Labozzetta and Acciaio/ Valentinelli.^{xi} All of Valentinelli's free-word compositions were signed "futurista al fronte", and his five contributions over the lifetime of *L'Italia Futurista* made him one of the most prolific of this sub-set of Futurist poets.^{xii}

Valentinelli's first contribution to *L'Italia Futurista*, "Vedetta + Alba" (fig. 1), was written at the front (at 2700m) in August 1915 and published in the first issue on 1 June 1916. Although ostensibly a straightforward description of a night spent on lookout duty and the arrival of the dawn, upon closer inspection it can be interpreted as an evocation of his state of mind at the beginning of the war, and as a reflection on his own sense of identity. The reader's eye is immediately drawn to 'Notte', circled in the bottom left-hand corner and the diagonal lines and arrows lead the eye upwards to the top-right of the image and to the outline of the mountain and the words "carezzare le rosee mammelle di monti lontane". As

a refugee from Austria-Hungary, the ‘faraway mountains’ are clearly those of his native Trentino, and the tone of these words reveals his sense of longing and yearning for his lost homeland. The composition’s movement from night to day is also an indication of Valentinelli’s optimistic attitude towards the war and what it might bring for him personally but also for the irredentist cause. Almost exactly at the centre of the image is the word “purificarsi”, which leads up to “bagnarsi di freschezza / snodarsi di muscoli / sciogliersi torpore noia sonno”. These images of purification suggest that Valentinelli imagines himself experiencing a kind of rebirth through his war experience, perhaps linked to a desire to divest himself of his Austrian identity and to fully assume an Italian one, which can only be achieved through Italy’s victory in the war.

Fig. 1, Acciaio (Valentinelli), ‘Vedetta + Alba’, *L’Italia Futurista*, 1 June 1916.

Valentinelli’s second *tavola parolibera* for *L’Italia Futurista*, “Artigliera in azione” (fig. 2), was also written in August 1915 but only published on 1 November 1916. This is the only one of Valentinelli’s compositions that employs the Futurist typographical layout and onomatopoeia that Marinetti had pioneered in his 1914 free-word novel *Zang Tumb Tumb*. “Artigliera in azione” is an extended reflection on the noises of the trenches, written in pure Marinettian style, which reconstructs the overwhelming sounds of rifles, machine-guns, grenades and shrapnel. Indeed Valentinelli dedicated this piece “al torace e alla laringa di FuTuris Marinetti” [sic]. Valentinelli begins by describing the dawn and the “lunghe trincee dormienti vedette allerte intirizzate lento snodarsi di fumo dalle cucine da campo odore di caffè”. The silence and peace of this scene is then suddenly shattered by a bombardement:

rrr ombo (sordo) uuluuulato gambe fucili silenzio

TAN NNN 305 scoppio boato metallico

Enorme macignifischi sviscerati scoppietto di pietre di strillanti polvere ghiaia
zampillare di zolle umide di rugiada gavette lucide
[...] TAN TAN TAN 4km di distanza ALLEGRO AGITATO scatenarsi 149
scrrrrrrscscscscscAre di pallottolo di shrrrRRAppnells”.

Fig. 2, Acciaio (Valentinelli), ‘Artigliera in azione’, *L’Italia Futurista*, 1 November 1916.

In representing the bombardment in this way, Valentinelli was following the guidelines that Marinetti had laid out in 1913 about the appropriate manner for a Futurist to convey any overwhelming experience, including war. Marinetti stated that a Futurist should begin the communication of an intense experience “col distruggere brutalmente la sintassi nel parlare.” He continued: “Non perderà tempo a costruire i periodi. S’infischierà della punteggiatura e dell’aggettivazione. Disprezzerà cesellature e sfumature di linguaggio, e in fretta vi getterà affannosamente nei nervi le sue sensazioni visive, *auditive*, olfattive.”^{xlii} This insistence on employing *parole in libertà* techniques in order to convey their war experiences was continued by other Futurists during the years of the Great War. Russolo wrote in 1916,

La guerra moderna non può essere espressa liricamente, se non con
l’istrumentazione rumoristica delle ‘parole in libertà’ futuriste e musicalmente con
gli Intonarumori.^{xliii}

Similarly, in December 1916, Buzzi commented that war, particularly the sounds of war, should be communicated through *parole in libertà*.^{xliv}

Although primarily concerned with recording the experience of aural bombardment, in the last lines of this composition, Valentinelli does offer some insight into the effect the experience had on him. He describes the “tonnellate di urli occhi chiusi timpani

indolenziti tirannia del rumore” before concluding, in a rather matter-of-fact way that it was 10.30 and “ora del rancio”. It is a banal ending to such a violent episode. The neglect of introspective reflection on the emotional effects of the bombardment, in favor of recording the sounds of battle is very much in keeping with the dominant trends in Futurist wartime compositions. For example, the absence of reference to the sounds of men dying in work by Marinetti, Boccioni and Russolo is part of their coping strategies for psychological survival in the trenches.^{xlv} In the pre-war manifesto “Lo splendore geometrico e meccanico e la sensibilità numerica”, (published in *Lacerba* on 15 March 1914), Marinetti wrote that standing on the bridge of a dreadnought was “centomila volte più interessante della psicologia dell’uomo, con le sue combinazioni limitate”.^{xlvi} Marinetti went on to confirm the Futurist lack of interest in human suffering during war, writing:

Vengono naturalmente abolite le antiche proporzioni [...] del racconto, secondo le quali per esempio i lamenti e i dolori di un ferito in battaglia avevano una importanza esageratissima in confronto degli strumenti di distruzione, delle posizioni strategiche e delle condizioni atmosferiche.^{xlvii}

It would appear that this artistic expression of combat by Valentinelli was in line with Marinetti’s vision for an appropriate response to combat.

Prior to the war, Marinetti had declared that the Futurists would approach any future conflict “danzando e cantando”.^{xlviii} That the Futurists considered war as celebratory and to be enjoyed is a well-worn trope in Futurist scholarship. In 1968 in his introduction to Marinetti’s writings, Luciano De Maria wrote that “Per Marinetti la guerra, se da una parte è legge profonda della vita, dall’altra nella sua manifestazione concreta, è festa”^{xlix} and two years later, Mario Isnenghi used the phrase “guerra-festa” to describe Marinetti’s war experience, as portrayed in his 1921 semi-fictional memoir *L’alcova d’acciaio*.¹ Günter Berghaus and Marja Härmänmaa have both focused on Marinetti’s representation of war in

his writings “as a ludic, festive occasion, a gymnastic exercise required to increase the vigour and health of a population”ⁱⁱ and “as a hilarious yet somehow absurd game”.ⁱⁱⁱ There is a need, however, to clearly distinguish between post-war representations of the First World War (such as those in *L’Alcova d’acciaio*), which did often conform to a concept of “guerra-festa” and contemporary portrayals of the unfolding war, both by Marinetti and by other Futurists in the pages of journals such as *L’Italia Futurista* (1916-1918), which revealed views of the conflict that were realistic, brutal and often lacking in any kind of celebratory tone. As the First World War historian, John Horne, has also emphasized, it is crucial to “disentangl[e] the soldiers’ experience from its retrospective mythologization”.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

In the first issue of *L’Italia Futurista*, Settimelli himself admitted the initial Futurist naivety about the war: they had imagined a war made up of $\frac{1}{4}$ trenches and $\frac{3}{4}$ bayonets, while in reality the opposite had proven to be true.^{liv} Similarly, Mario Carli wrote in 1917 that at the start of the war it was easier “quando non si conoscevano i mezzi di difesa del nemico si navigava fra illusioni e nozioni di seconda mano”.^{lv} Now, he argued that there could not any more be the “illusione, la montatura, il contagio del brivido”.^{lvi} The remaining three compositions by Valentinelli that appeared in *L’Italia Futurista* differ markedly from the bellicose sentiments of “Artiglieria in azione” and conform to the attitude outlined by Settimelli and Carli above. Valentinelli’s compositions provide some of the most honest Futurist insights into the mundanity of aspects of trench combat, and the difficulties that Italian soldiers faced.

In “La terra sta male” (published in *L’Italia Futurista* on 10 February 1917), the enthusiasm of “Artiglieria in azione”, written in August 1915, has largely disappeared. Valentinelli’s state of mind appears depressed and bored. He writes that “la mia giubba è una casacca da palombaro” and continues that “le nuvole s’appoggiano pesantemente sulle mie spalle”. The

reality of life in the trenches has sunk in and he is struck by the “vastità di noia” and overwhelmed by “inerzia capogiro stanchezza malessere noia stupidità”. Similarly, the nighttime sentry-duty described in “Sentinella” (published 11 March 1917) is very far removed from the hopeful tone of “Vedetta + Alba”, his first composition for *L'Italia Futurista*. In “Sentinella”, written in July 1916, Valentinelli describes the moonlit mountain landscape at 3000m, where “l’atmosfera si è messa una maschera di velluto e à infilato i guanti della paura”. The images he recounts are typical of the experiences of Italian soldiers: the sentry who must “picchiare dei tacchi ferrati sui ciottoli freddi avvolti nella vasta mantellina”, another sentry scratching lice, their greasy clothes and broken equipment. The free-word poem concludes with Valentinelli yearning for a return to civilian life. After five days of no sleep, a piece of newspaper transports him back “nel deserto della fantasia abbacinante l’alito caldo e luminoso delle grandi città lontane dormienti nella pianura lombarda”. Valentinelli’s final contribution to *L'Italia Futurista*, “Piazza Bra” published on 3 June 1917, recalled an evening at the Porta Nuova train station in Verona before he returned to the front. Plagued by thoughts of food, he imagined drops of violet light as “albicocche paonozze”, turned-off headlamps as “grossi grani di ribes”, and shadows as “grappoli di piccoli chicchi”.

Valentinelli revealed some of these same frustrations in a letter to Boccioni written in November of 1915. He complained about his superiors, which reminded him of those “imbecilli di professori austriaci” that he had had at school.^{lvii} He was recovering from a bout of dysentery and was pleased to be in hospital in order to escape from the oppressive military discipline and hierarchy. He railed against

certi stupidi ufficiali che non sono mai stato al fronte vengono qui a rimproverare perchè manca un bottone perchè si va in cucina prima dell’ora del rancio, perchè non si è presenti all’appello, perchè si pischia su per le porte delle case borghesi ecc.

“Io non posso assolutamente adattarmi e subire i comandi di tanti borghesacci in uniforme”, he continued.^{lviii} A few months later, Valentinelli was distraught by news of Boccioni’s untimely death in August 1916, and sent his condolences from the front in a letter to Marinetti.

Although a frequent contributor to *L’Italia Futurista*, during the war, Valentinelli felt restricted by his war service in his ability to participate fully in the Futurist movement. He told Marinetti, speaking on behalf of all irredentist Futurists, that “Soldati, non possiamo noi ora esplicare nel Futurismo tutta la nostra attività, ma dopo la guerra tutte le nostre forze le daremo al meraviglioso movimento, il faro del XX secolo”.^{lix} Despite this intention to commit himself fully to the movement after the war’s end, Valentinelli’s post-war Futurist activity was limited to the exhibition of his free-word compositions at the Grande Esposizione Nazionale Futurista in spring/summer 1919. Thereafter, he returned to his native Trentino and definitively withdrew from the Futurist movement.

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ⁱ Unfortunately, none of these works appear to have survived, although their titles reveal a sustained interest in interventionism and war themes. The titles of all nine works, as listed in the original exhibition catalogue are "Dimostrazione interventista 1", "Cinema Palace", "Treno Express", "Linea del fuoco", "Galleria", "Sciopero generale", "Interventismo", "Dimostrazione Interventista 2", and "Finestre e ringhiere". See Enrico Crispolti, *Cataloghi di esposizioni* (Rome: De Luca, 2010) 146.

ⁱⁱ Maurizio Scudiero, "Ennio Valentinelli". *Il Dizionario del futurismo*, 2 vols., ed. Ezio Godoli (Florence: Vallecchi, 2001) vol. 1, 1202.

ⁱⁱⁱ Scudiero records Valentinelli's date of birth as 7 January 1894. In fact, according to all of Valentinelli's personal handwritten testimonies housed in the Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino, he was born the previous day on 6 January.

^{iv} Scudiero, 1202.

^v Scudiero, 1202.

^{vi} On the Lombard Battalion of Volunteer Cyclists and Motorists, see Luigi Sansone, *Futuristi a Dosso Casina*, exhibition catalogue Museo di Riva del Garda, 12 July – 2 November 2008 (Milan: Mazzotta, 2008) and Dario Bellini, ed., *Con Boccioni a Dosso Casina: I testi e le immagini dei futuristi in battaglia* (Rovereto: Nicolodi, 2006).

^{vii} Crispolti, "Futuristi in Guerra", *Bolaffiarte*, n. 79, May 1978, 10-15, here 11.

^{viii} See Fabrizio Rasera, "Giovani ribelli. Movimenti studenteschi, sperimentazioni culturali, vocazioni artistiche a Rovereto tra primo '900 e Grande Guerra", *La Scuola Reale Elisabetтина di Rovereto: Documenti e allievi nel contesto del primo Novecento*, ed. Lia De Finis (Rovereto: Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Trento e Rovereto, 2009), 153-173.

^{ix} In total, 193 ex-students of the school, all Austrian citizens, including Chiesa and Valentinelli, would volunteer for the Italian Army. See Alessio Quercioli, "<Italiani fuori d'Italia>: Volontari trentini nell'esercito italiano 1915-1918", *Volontari italiani nella grande guerra*, eds. Fabrizio Rasera and Camillo Zadra (Rovereto: Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, 2008), 201-214.

^x Riccardo Maroni and M. Rivosecchi, eds., *Umberto Maganzini, pittore e poeta* (Trento: Collana Artisti Trentini, 1966), 15.

^{xi} Quinto Antonelli, "Vita scolastica e formazione nazionale degli italiani d'Austria", *Volontari italiani nella grande guerra*, eds. Fabrizio Rasera and Camillo Zadra (Rovereto: Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, 2008), 121-134, here 130.

^{xii} Scudiero, 1202.

- ^{xiii} Letter from Fortunato Depero to Rosetta Amadori, undated but c. 16 May 1914, Fondo Depero, Dep. 3.3.1.3.31, Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto (henceforth MART).
- ^{xiv} Letter from Depero to Amadori, undated but c. 16 May 1914, Fondo Depero, Dep 3.3.1.3.31, MART.
- ^{xv} Bruno Passamani, *Fortunato Depero* (Rovereto: Galleria Museo Depero, 1981) 24.
- ^{xvi} See letter from Valentinelli to Ministero della Guerra (Direzione generale personale ufficiali, Roma), 3 September 1915, Fondo Commissione dei Fuorusciti, B. 5, f. 6, folder Valentinelli, doc. 4, Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino (henceforth FMST), and letter from Valentinelli to Commissione Centrale – Patronato dei Fuorusciti Adriatici e trentini, 17 December 1915, Fondo Commissione dei Fuorusciti, B. 5, f. 6, folder Valentinelli, doc. 5, FMST.
- ^{xvii} Rasera, 167.
- ^{xviii} Umberto Boccioni, *Pittura e scultura futurista*, ed. Zeno Birolli (Milan: Abscondita, 2006 [1914]), 132. Emphasis added.
- ^{xix} Valentinelli [signed Acciaio] to Marinetti, 22 August 1916, Boccioni Papers, Box 1, Folder 15, Getty Research Institute.
- ^{xx} The statue of Dante in Piazza Dante in Trento (1896) was an important symbol of Italian nationalism in the region. See Stefano Jossa, "Politics vs Literature: The Myth of Dante and the Italian National Identity", *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century: Nationalism, Identity, and Appropriation*, eds. Aida Audeh and Nick Havely (Oxford: Oxford UP, 20112), 30-49.
- ^{xxi} Their experiences are recounted in Quinto Antonelli, *I dimenticati della Grande Guerra: La memoria dei combattenti trentini 1914-1920* (Trento: Il Margine, 2008).
- ^{xxii} Letter from Valentinelli to Commissione Centrale – Patronato dei Fuorusciti Adriatici e trentini, 3 February 1916, Fondo Commissione dei Fuorusciti, B. 5, f. 6, folder Valentinelli, doc. 10, FMST.
- ^{xxiii} Document of Commissione Centrale – Patronato dei Fuorusciti Adriatici e trentini, undated, Fondo Commissione dei Fuorusciti, B. 5, f. 6, folder Valentinelli, doc. 1, FMST.
- ^{xxiv} Valentinelli, 'Bar x alberi in fiore x chanteuse', *Vela Latina*, 15 January 1916.
- ^{xxv} Postcard from Balla to Marinetti, Boccioni and Russolo, 8 September 1915, in Claudia Salaris, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1988), 138.
- ^{xxvi} Postcard from Valentinelli to Carrà, 21 December 1915, Fondo Carlo Carrà, Car. I. 146. 1, MART.
- ^{xxvii} See letter from Valentinelli to Ministero della Guerra (Direzione generale personale ufficiali, Roma), 3 September 1915, Fondo Commissione dei Fuorusciti, B. 5, f. 6, folder Valentinelli, doc. 4, FMST and letter from Valentinelli to Commissione Centrale – Patronato dei Fuorusciti Adriatici e trentini, 3 February 1916, Fondo Commissione dei Fuorusciti, B. 5, f. 6, folder Valentinelli, doc. 10, FMST.
- ^{xxviii} This was the fate of Cesare Battisti, Fabio Filzi and Damiano Chiesa who were all captured, tried for high treason against the Austrian Empire and hanged (Battisti and Filzi on 12 July 1916, Chiesa on 19 May 1916). After these high-profile executions, the Italian authorities were more cautious about accepting Austrian citizens from the 'unredeemed territories' into the army.
- ^{xxix} Quercioli, 204.
- ^{xxx} Quercioli, 208.
- ^{xxxi} See letter from Valentinelli to Commissione Centrale – Patronato dei Fuorusciti Adriatici e trentini, 3 September 1916, Fondo Commissione dei Fuorusciti, B. 5, f. 6, folder Valentinelli, doc. 4, FMST.
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- ^{xxxiii} Letter from Commissione dell'Emigrazione Trentina to Commissione Centrale – Patronato dei Fuorusciti Adriatici e trentini, 26 December 1915, Fondo Commissione dei Fuorusciti, B. 5, f. 6, folder Valentinelli, doc. 16, FMST.

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- ^{xxxv} Letter from Valentinelli to Commissione Centrale – Patronato dei Fuorusciti Adriatici e trentini, 17 December 1915, Fondo Commissione dei Fuorusciti, B. 5, f. 6, folder Valentinelli, doc. 5, FMST.
- ^{xxxvi} Letter from Valentinelli to Commissione Centrale – Patronato dei Fuorusciti Adriatici e trentini, 7 February 1915, Fondo Commissione dei Fuorusciti, B. 5, f. 6, folder Valentinelli, doc. 9, FMST.
- ^{xxxvii} For a further discussion of this manifesto, see [details removed for author anonymity].
- ^{xxxviii} Marinetti et al, 'L'Orgoglio italiano', *Vela Latina*, 15 January 1916.
- ^{xxxix} Emilio Settimelli, 'L'Italia Futurista', *L'Italia Futurista*, 1 June 1916.
- ^{xi} Of these, two compositions by Marinetti were simply signed 'futurista' but had been drawn during his time with the Lombard Battalion of Volunteer Cyclists in 1915.
- ^{xii} Only Vieri Nannetti (who contributed six compositions signed 'futurista al fronte') contributed more than Valentinelli. Most other 'futuristi al fronte' contributed between one and three drawings each over the course of the war (including Jamar 14, Luca Labozzetta, Guglielmo Jannelli, and Mario Carli).
- ^{xiii} Marinetti, 'Distruzione della sintassi, Immaginazione senza fili, Parole in libertà' [1913], *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, ed. Luciano De Maria (Milan: Mondadori, 2005, 6th edn.) 65-80, here 70. [Emphasis added.]
- ^{xiii} Luigi Russolo, *L'arte dei rumori* (Milan: Edizioni futuriste di Poesia, 1916), 44.
- ^{xiv} Paolo Buzzi, 'I giovani poeti e la guerra', *L'Italia Futurista*, 1 December 1916.
- ^{xv} For more on this topic, see [removed for author anonymity].
- ^{xvi} Marinetti, 'Lo splendore geometrico e meccanico e la sensibilità numerica', *Lacerba*, 15 March 1914.
- ^{xvii} Marinetti, 'Lo splendore geometrico e meccanico'.
- ^{xviii} Marinetti, 'Battaglie di Trieste' [1910], in Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 245-253, here 246.
- ^{xlix} Luciano De Maria, "Introduzione", in *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, xxix-c, here lxxv.
- ⁱ Mario Isnenghi, *Il mito della grande guerra da Marinetti a Malaparte* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007, 6th edn.) 179. *Guerra Festa* was also the title of a 1925 tapestry by Fortunato Depero.
- ⁱⁱ Günter Berghaus, "Violence, war, revolution: Marinetti's concept of a futurist cleanser for the world", *Annali d'italianistica, A Century of Futurism, 1909-2009*, eds. Federico Luisetti and Luca Somigli, 27 (2009), 23-43.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Marja Härmänmaa, "The dark side of Futurism: Marinetti and war", in *Back to the Futurists: The avant-garde and its legacy*, eds. Elza Adamowicz and Simona Storchi (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2013), 255-271, here 268. Salaris used "guerra festa" as the subtitle for her section on Marinetti's combat experiences in *Marinetti: arte e vita futurista* (Rome: Editore Riuniti, 1997), 160.
- ⁱⁱⁱⁱ John Horne, "Soldiers, Civilians, and the Warfare of Attrition: Representations of Combat in France, 1914-18", *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War*, eds. Frans Coetzee and Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee (New York/ Oxford: Berghahn, 1995), 223-249, here 224.
- ^{liv} Settimelli, "L'Italia Futurista", *L'Italia Futurista*, 1 June 1916.
- ^{lv} Mario Carli, "L'ultima mobilitazione degli entusiasmi", *L'Italia Futurista*, 17 June 1917.
- ^{lvi} Carli, "L'ultima mobilitazione degli entusiasmi".
- ^{lvii} Valentinelli [signed Acciaio] to Boccioni, 16 November 1915, in Boccioni Papers, Box 1 Folder 15, Getty Research Institute.

^{lviii} Valentinelli [signed Acciaio] to Boccioni, 16 November 1915, in Boccioni Papers, Box 1 Folder 15, Getty Research Institute.

^{lix} Valentinelli [signed Acciaio] to Marinetti, 22 August 1916, in Boccioni Papers, Box 1 Folder 15, Getty Research Institute.