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Telling the War from a New Perspective: Books and Speeches of Carlo Delcroix, Disabled ex- Serviceman

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Introduction

The figure of Carlo Delcroix surely fit perfectly with the narrative of peace and war. In fact the life and the works of this Italian veteran contributed to a construction of a common memory of the war in Italy; to re-elaborate an experience of suffering; to reinterpretation of the war as a moment of the “making of the Nation”. The idea of this paper was born some months ago, when I was reflecting on the role of the disabled ex-servicemen in the process of making sense to a tragical experience, like World War I, but also to a destroyed body. The main questions were: how was it possible to accept that events? And how did they tell their feeling to the Nation?

My own area of expertise and research interest focuses on the history of Italian Disabled Ex-Servicemen from the Great War, and it covers both the medical and the social history. In this paper I'd like to speak about a particular way of telling the war. This is a topic that I have been researching over the last three years, and one which I hope to be able to develop further in the future². The figure of Carlo Delcroix is important in order to understand the history of the Italian veterans, in particular the history of the disabled ex-serviceman, to understand if they had a their own vision of the war; if and how they use this vision for public actions. The Italian history of the Great War and of the first post war period is very important because it allow us to understand a great number of topics and themes, including the history of the First World War and the Italian experience of the war; the medical history of that war, the history of the Italian veterans (with their various myths and the linguistic varieties that they used), the history of the social services which were specifically aimed towards disabled ex-servicemen (these services include both the public and the private sectors), and the history of orthopaedics and prostheses.

It became clear that several of these themes have not been pursued to any great extent at all in Italy, and they certainly deserve further study³. For instance, I think it needs to be

2 I would like to thank Mrs Rita Delcroix, daughter of Carlo Delcroix, for her courteousness and for her help. She make me known the “non public” Carlo Delcroix, and it was a very important experience for my researches.

3 Abroad these themes has been studied and deepened. In France, thanks to the Institute of Peronne and thanks to A. Prost, J.J. and A. Becker and of several other researchers, the cultural history of the Great War became an important field of studies. Here only two examples: A. Prost, *Les anciens combattants dans la société française 1914-1939*, 3 voll., Paris, Fondation Nationale des Sciences politiques, 1977; S. Audoin-Rouzeau- A. Becker, *14-18, retrouver la Guerre*, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 2000. Also in UK these themes had been studied earlier than in Italy, thanks to the work of P. Fussel and E.J. Leed. P. Fussel, *The Great War and the Modern Memory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975; E. J. Leed, *No Man's*

pointed out that in Italy we still don't have a precise or dedicated history of the Italian Agency for the Health Care of Disabled Ex-Servicemen (in Italian the Opera Nazionale per l'Assistenza degli Invalidi di Guerra – it is commonly referred to by the acronym ONIG). So, it seems evident that there is a gap in our historical knowledge of these themes, and, indeed, of the history of Italian social and health care and assistance both during and after the Great War.

At any rate, let's move on now to the core area of my contribution. Carlo Delcroix was, beyond doubt, one of the most significant of the Italian veterans during the period which followed the First World War⁴. Not only did he occupy an important place in the Italian political panorama; he also had an important role in the context of the veterans' associations between the two World Wars. Furthermore, he was politically active even after the Second World War had ended. Despite all this, however, the life of Carlo Delcroix, together with his political activities and his publications, has yet to be studied in any great detail. There are some old biographies, now outdated⁵, and there is the entry which Albertina Vittoria wrote for the *Biographical Dictionary of the Italian People*, published in 1988⁶. But apart from that, there is nothing.

Today, one hundred years after Italy's entry into the First World War, there has been a revival of interest in Delcroix, and the more interesting aspects of his life and career are now being brought to light once again. This rediscovery, along with that of Aurelio

Land, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1979. Useful for a comparison with the Italian case J.J. Sheenan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe*, Boston-New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008.

4 About Italian history during and after World War I it would be useful to read G. Rochat, *L'esercito italiano da Vittorio Veneto a Mussolini*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2006 [1967] in particular the first chapter; R. Vivarelli, *Storia delle origini del fascismo*, 3 voll., Bologna, il Mulino, 2012; R. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, Torino, Einaudi, 1965. About history of Italian Veterans there are several important books: G. Sabbatucci, *I combattenti nel primo dopoguerra*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1974; F. Zavatti, *I mutilati di guerra. Una storia politica*, Milano, Unicopli, 2006; U. Pavan Dalla Torre, *Le origini dell'ANMIG*, in V. Del Lucchese (ed), *Passato, presente e futuro. Compendio di storia dell'ANMIG*, Roma, Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra e Fondazione, 2012; B. Bracco, *La patria ferita*, Milano, Giunti, 2013. The works of Martina Salvante are also useful for this topic.

5 F. Virgili, *Carlo Delcroix*, Roma, 1925; Perondino, *Messe di vita. Carlo Delcroix*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1929.

6 A. Vittoria, *Carlo Delcroix*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 36, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1988, pp. 471-477.

Nicolodi⁷, Gino Neri⁸, and various other blinds and wounded ex-servicemen, is part of a wider interest in Italian veterans, and also in the social and medical consequences of the First World War⁹. These are topics which, up until now, have not received much specific attention from Italian historians.

As we have said, Carlo Delcroix was certainly important. He became the symbol of a new way of looking at the War, as it is possible to see in the pictures of the Italian war loan. But besides that, he became the symbol of all the young soldiers whose bodies were mutilated as a result of the War. He was, in fact, the living proof that it was possible to pick oneself up again after a situation in which one has been left prostrate. My paper is going to focus on only a few episodes from his life together with a few of the works which, better than all the others, will enable us to see how Delcroix put together a memorial of the Great War, and how this became a collective memorial to Italian disabled ex-servicemen. We shall also look at how the wounded soldiers made use of this memorial.

Delcroix talked about the war, he narrated the war, but he also personified the war. He had a rather unusual way of doing this because he was blind and his body was mutilated – his perspective was therefore that of someone who had lost a part of himself in the War, and he diffused an image of pain and suffering. But he also conveyed the image of a person who refused to surrender to his new circumstances, and who, from this new condition, wished to live life as fully as possible once again. In other words, Delcroix gave a voice to the collective memory which the disabled ex-servicemen relied upon in order to gain a public role for themselves in the Italy which emerged from the First World War.

We therefore find that in Delcroix there is an undeniable celebration of the War; a celebration of the heroism of many of the Italian soldiers; a war whose tremendous destructive force is recognised and accepted, but also a war whose generative and foundational power for the whole nation, when peace is restored, can also be seen; a war which brings numerous political consequences that can scarcely be avoided; and, finally a

7 Aurelio Nicolodi (1894-1950) was a blind ex-serviceman. He was one of the charter members of a civilian association of blind people, the Unione Italiana Ciechi (U.C.I. - Italian Union of Blind People), established in 1920. M. Salvante, *Aurelio Nicolodi*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 79, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2013. This entry is available on line at the site www.treccani.it

8 Gino Neri, blind ex-servicemen, was President of ANMIG between 1920 and 1921. He died in his house, because he did not see that the elevator was not at the right floor.

9 About the new studies in this field in Italy, useful A. Gibelli, *La guerra grande*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2014.

war which, in itself, becomes the memory of an entire lifetime and which directs public actions and private lives. These are the areas I want to concentrate my paper.

Biographical notes

Carlo Delcroix was born in Florence on August 22nd, 1896. His family originated from Belgium and maintained their Belgian citizenship. At the outbreak of the war Delcroix was a university student. In 1915 he opted for Italian citizenship and enlisted as a volunteer. He was promoted to the rank of lieutenant in 1916, but in February of the following year he suffered the horrific accident which left its marks on the remainder of his life. Whilst Delcroix was at dinner, someone announced to him that a soldier had entered into the firing line and had been killed by an exploding shell. He decided to go personally to try to recover the dead body and to clear the ground of any unexploded ammunition. Whilst he was carrying out this task, a shell exploded and he lost his hands and his eyes¹⁰. Later, in hospital, he learned what had happened at Caporetto¹¹, and he tried to restore the morale of his wounded companions by talking to them. It was here that he discovered his skills as an orator. After the war, in 1921, he got married and he had three sons and eight grandsons¹².

He enrolled as a member of ANMIG – the Italian National Association of Disabled ex-Servicemen, which was founded on 29th April 1917¹³. He was active in the Florentine section and in the regional organisation of the Association. Then, in 1920, he was elected

10 For the biographical notes important. A. Vittoria, *Carlo Delcroix*, cit. Also useful G. Accame, *Carlo Delcroix. Conference spoken on January 31st 1988*, now in C. Delcroix, *D'Annunzio e Mussolini*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2010, pp. 75-93. Giano Accame (1928-2009) a famous Italian journalist, was also the son-in-law of Carlo Delcroix.

11 Caporetto was the most important defeat suffered by Italian's Army during WWI. In October 1917, some Austro-Hungarian and German units broke down the Italian front line near Caporetto, currently Kobarid, Slovenia. Italian Army had to recede for several hundreds kilometres. The new front line was fixed among Piave river, inside national territory. Hundreds of thousands citizens had to be moved from their houses to the internal regions. Even now in Italy the word "Caporetto" is synonymous of a great defeat or of a great disaster. The historians are still now working to understand how a similar defeat was possible. About this moment of the Italian war, there are hundreds books. Among them useful G. Rochat, *La prima guerra mondiale: problemi interpretativi e prospettive di ricerca*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1976; M. Isnenghi-G. Rochat, *La Grande Guerra 1914-1918*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2006.

12 G. Accame, *Carlo Delcroix*, cit., p. 92.

13 ANMIG was established by some veterans which wanted to create a new association to claim assistance and pensions for the disabled ex-servicemen. G. Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, cit; U. Pavan Dalla Torre, *Le origini dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra (ANMIG) 1917-1923*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Turin, 2012.

to the Association's central committee and fulfilled several roles, including propaganda. He obtained this task because of his ability as orator and as organiser of cultural events. In 1924 he became president of the Association – an office which he held, save for one or two brief interruptions, until 1943. After 8th September 1943¹⁴ he did not associate himself with the Social Republic, and he was confined with his family in a small village in the mountains. In the period immediately following the Second World War he became a member of the Monarchist party and was elected to the Chamber of Deputies. He died in Rome in 1977.

Delcroix's life could be divided up in various different ways. We can do it by periods: 1917-1923 (from his wounding to his election as President of ANMIG); 1924-1945 (his work as President); 1945-1977 (his life in the second postwar period); or by phases of his life: Delcroix the War casualty; the Fascist Delcroix (but, and we will see it, it is not sure that Delcroix has been a real fascist); Delcroix the monarchist. Or, again: Delcroix the propagandist; Delcroix the organiser; Delcroix the nostalgist. Although all these subdivisions are valid and can be quite useful, I think it is more appropriate, here and now, to offer a few comments which might help one to understand his character somewhat better, rather than seek to put sequences of his life into pigeon-holes.

Public life during and after the war: speeches and works of Carlo Delcroix

I believe we can understand Delcroix's public work purely by setting it into the context of Italian history during the years which followed the First World War, and, in particular, alongside the history of the ANMIG (the Italian Association of Disabled ex-Servicemen).

14 On July 25th Mussolini was deposed and he had been arrested on orders of the king Vittorio Emanuele III. Pietro Badoglio, who succeeded Mussolini, took some contacts with the Allied. On September 8th Italy announced the armistice with the Anglo-american allied. Immediately the king, Badoglio and several Army's generals left Rome, without giving instructions to the Army. Germans, who had several units in the north of the Country, took the control of the Capital and of the northern Italy. 8th September is one of the worst episodes of the Italian modern history: several historians talk about the death of the Homeland. E. Aga Rossi, *Una nazione allo sbando*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1993. About the history of the resistance S. Peli, *Storia della Resistenza in Italia*, Torino, Einaudi, 2005; C. Pavone, *Una guerra civile*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 1991. About the history of the two Italian states R. De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato. II: la guerra civile*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997; F. W. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship. Mussolini, Hitler and the fall of Italian Fascism*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962; R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life Under the Fascist Dictatorship, 1915-1945*, London, Penguin, 2005.

Whilst his war injuries had a very profound effect on Delcroix's life, they also provided an impetus for his public activities.

The years 1920 and 1921, taken together, represent one of the most delicate of all the various phases in Italian political life¹⁵. There was open war between socialism and fascism. Both political parties had their opportunities to attract the majority of the Italian electorate. However, the contest was not just political; it had also become verbal and physical. During these two years episodes of violence occurred with alarming frequency. ANMIG, which had been founded as an organisation quite separate from party politics, decided to try and mediate between the two sides. The political solution put forward by the ANMIG was to seek to establish a government of war veterans, which, they maintained, was the only one that would be capable of governing the nation and enabling the two political forces to converge. In 1921 the Association convened a meeting at the Teatro Augusteo in Rome, with the view of helping both sides to come to an agreement for the sake of the whole country. Delcroix was the key speaker.

The memory of the War was seen here as an opportunity for unity, as a common reference point in the life of the nation, and as a chance to educate people in a new concept of citizenship. The memory of the War would, it was thought, unite the Italians in a spirit of brotherhood, with everyone pulling together in the quest for the common good. If these ideas were not taken up as part of the common heritage and as a departure point for the work of the country's political forces, the subsequent damage could prove to be very substantial, as Delcroix noted with great concern:

“È questa l'Italia che consegnammo ai cittadini tra le canzoni di Vittorio Veneto, è questa l'umanità che salutammo con la bocca piena di sangue e il corpo coperto di bende, questo il sogno di giustizia nutrito col pianto, l'ideale di bellezza servito con la morte?... Ahi! Come, come la vostra pace è stata indegna della nostra guerra”¹⁶.

15 F. Fabbri, *Le origini della guerra civile: l'Italia dalla Grande Guerra al fascismo*, Torino, UTET, 2008; R. Vivarelli, *Storia delle origini del fascismo*, cit.; R. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, Torino, Einaudi, 1965.

16 “Is this the Italy which we consigned to its citizens with the echoes of the songs that were sung at Vittorio Veneto? Is this the humanity we greeted, our mouths filled with blood and our bodies covered in bandages? Is this the justice, nourished by tears, of which we dreamed? The ideal of beauty that was served by death? Alas! how clear, how evident it is that your peace was unworthy of our war!” The complete text of the oration is reported in “Il Bollettino”, the journal of the Association. *La parola di pace agli uomini di buona volontà. La nostra iniziativa per la pacificazione degli animi*, Il Bollettino, year IV, number 9, september 1921.

Peace, therefore, had to be worthy of the war which had preceded it, otherwise things could not function properly in Italy. War and peace were intrinsically linked, because peace had been won through the sacrifice of an enormous number of soldiers who had given up their lives in the War. Besides reaffirming the sanctity of the dead and the war-wounded, Delcroix also drew attention to the unworthiness of those who wished to take possession of Italy with no regard to the suffering and the aspirations of the War veterans. In doing this, he used a quasi-religious language in order to symbolise the actions of the veterans. This is not the place in which to examine this language in detail, but it is nevertheless worth our while to draw attention to aspects such as these, as part of the art of “telling the war”.

During this same period Delcroix drew upon the memories of war and suffering to promote solidarity with those who had been wounded or incapacitated during the War. Many of these people had been reduced to a state of extreme poverty. He organised a chain of conferences for the Italian communities in South America. He visited Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, and made dozens of speeches. The money raised was used to finance the work of the ANMIG¹⁷.

His first books, *Dialoghi con la folla* (“Dialogues with the crowd”, 1921) and *Il sacrificio della parola* (“The Sacrifice of the Word”, published in 1924) both date from this period, and the series of speeches is completed with *La parola come azione* (“The Word as Action”) of 1936¹⁸. In these volumes Delcroix assembled dozens of his speeches, along with articles he had written for Italian newspapers. It needs to be stressed that this was only a selection chosen from the many speeches he had made over the years. In these books it is possible to read pages and pages of words that he told in several Italian cities, in front of the king and the queen, of Mussolini and so on: we could understand the importance of his figure. He always remembered the war, the death and the soldiers that never returned to their home. But he looked also at the idea that Italy had to return to a pacific life.

17 For a report of those conference it is possible to read the Acts of the Central Committee of the Association, held in Rome. U. Pavan Dalla Torre, *Le origini*, cit.; G. Accame, *Carlo Delcroix*, cit.

18 C. Delcroix, *Dialoghi con la folla*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1921; C. Delcroix, *Il sacrificio della parola*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1924; C. Delcroix, *La parola come azione*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1936.

Delcroix was also a prose writer and an essayist. In his *Sette santi senza candele* (“Seven Saints without Candles”) of 1925¹⁹ he became a novelist, telling the story – which was not a completely true one, although it definitely had strong links with reality – of seven young soldiers who suffered severe war wounds and mutilation. It is in the preface of this book that we read about the circumstances that led to Delcroix’s own injuries, that Delcroix told the reader about the turning point of his life. Here Carlo Delcroix told surely Carlo Delcroix, but he told also hundreds of thousands of destroyed life. And we come to understand how he lived his life under the shadow of death, especially since the last image he ever saw was that of the dead soldier whose body lay torn apart amongst the shells. He remembered those moments also in a poem, and here it is possible to understand how his last sensations- sensations of death and sufferance – became the thread of his existence:

Sotto la neve che celava un volto
vidi me stesso, quale sarei stato,
e da quel gelo non mi son più tolto:
non so da quale voce fui chiamato

o chi dentro di me fosse in ascolto
e come se mi avessero portato
corsi alla riva dove fui raccolto
dove vicino a te fui ritrovato:

La morte non temuta in campo aperto
da solo avvicinai senza sospetto
e con lo stesso telo fui coperto:

da allora invano la mia pace affretto,
poichè in audacia la pietà converto
ogni volta che interrogo il tuo aspetto²⁰.

19 C. Delcroix, *Sette santi senza candele*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1925.

20 Under the snow that hide a face/ I saw myself, as I would have been/ and from that frost I never take out myself: I don't know by what voice I was called/ or who inside me was listening/ and as someone brought me/ I ran to the river where I was picked up/ where near you I was recovered:/ The death, not

In *Il nostro contributo alla vittoria degli alleati* (“Our Contribution to the Allied Victory”)²¹ Delcroix traces the events of the Great War year by year, aiming to show how Italy played an absolutely crucial role in the victory of the Allies. This book was written because “sulla guerra bisogna informare tutto il popolo”²². And, again, to “denunciare e combattere una tendenza assurda e dannosa, che tuttavia si manifesta fra noi: quella di rompere l'unità della nostra guerra, rappresentando gli avvenimenti fino al Piave come una serie di errori funesti e di inutili stragi”²³. I think that it is one of Delcroix's most important book, because it shows the ideas of the veterans about the war: the main idea was that Italy had been underestimate. But the book is important also because it shows that veterans had a vision of the war, and that they decided to become educators of the nation.

The events of the War are also at the centre of another book, *Guerra di popolo* (“The Italians’ War”)²⁴. Besides these volumes, Delcroix also wrote a biography of Mussolini with the title *Un uomo e un popolo* (“A man and his people”)²⁵. This book is surely important to understand the relationship between Delcroix and Mussolini. But it is also important to understand the relationship between a part of the Italian veterans and the fascism.

Following on from our mention of Mussolini, we now need to consider the relationship of Delcroix – and also of the ANMIG – with fascism. In this case, too, we have to talk about memories, or, more precisely, about conflicting memories. However, we might also talk about the construction of parallel memories. Because fascism took possession of the memory of the War, it then sought to become the sole guardian of that memory, using it as a means of legitimising its own rise to power. Nevertheless, fascism had to contend with resistance from the Veterans’ associations, and especially the resistance of the ANMIG. Mussolini therefore came up against several authoritative figures, including Carlo

feared in open field/ I approached without any suspect/ and with the same cloth I was covered/ From that moment, in vain, my peace I hasten/because compassion I change in courage/ everytime I interrogate your appearance.

21 C. Delcroix, *Il nostro contributo alla vittoria degli alleati*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1931.

22 “About the war it is necessary to inform all the crowd”. C. Delcroix, *Il nostro contributo*, cit., p. 10.

23 “to denounce and to fight an absurd and a damaging inclination that nevertheless appears to us: to break the unit of our war, representing the events till the Piave as a sequence of baleful errors or useless massacres”. C. Delcroix, *Il nostro contributo*, cit., p. 11.

24 C. Delcroix, *Guerra di popolo*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1923.

25 C. Delcroix, *Un uomo e un popolo*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1928.

Delcroix, who had a massive reputation in 1922, despite his young age. Delcroix was above all a monarchist and a nationalist, although it has to be said that he found himself closer to the ideals of fascism than to those of socialism, and we need to point out that he did not adopt the fascist creed straight away. It is true that after the congress of 1924 he moved to align the association of which he was president to the regime, but it is also true that in 1922 he had tried to bring in D'Annunzio²⁶ to govern the nation²⁷. That action was unsuccessful, but it lent an impression of ambiguity to his rapport with Mussolini. Mussolini knew all about the actions of the ANMIG and he also knew about those of Delcroix, yet he could not do without the ANMIG's support, and neither could he allow himself to entertain the idea of casting Delcroix into the shadows. During the Fascist regime's years in power, the ANMIG became a large and well-respected organisation: we can see this from the large number of "houses for mutilated soldiers" which sprang up in that period (the *Casa Madre dei mutilati*, or the Mother House, was inaugurated in 1928). However, it is also true to say that Mussolini did not always make use of the moral force which the mutilated soldiers were able to generate. He did not do so, for example, in 1940, after he had decided to enter the War alongside Germany. ANMIG offered to organise and equip a "legion of mutilated soldiers", but Mussolini declined. This legion was an idea born during the days of Caporetto's defeat. Several disabled ex-servicemen decided to return in the front line to fight again against enemies. Mussolini was sure that the new war would be won in a very short time, thanks to the German Army. We know it was only a tragic illusion²⁸.

The years 1943-1945 mirrored the divisions that existed between Italians – divisions which had originated precisely in 1922, when the Italians were divided between socialism

26 Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938) was an Italian poet. Interventionist, in 1915 he decided to enlist as a volunteer in the Italian Army. He was protagonist of some war-actions that remained famous in Italy, like the raid on Vienna in 1918. In 1920 he decided to After the war he was seen as the only real alternative choice to Mussolini, because of his prestige and his role during the war. In 1922 Mussolini took the power and relegated D'Annunzio in his house in Gardone, near the Garda lake.

27 About this history, we have two documents. The first are the Acts of the Central Committee of ANMIG. During a reunion in november 1922, Carlo Delcroix discussed about the political initiative, about the role of D'Annunzio and about the relationship between D'Annunzio, Mussolini and ANMIG. The second is the book *D'Annunzio e Mussolini*, written by Carlo Delcroix several years after the end of the fascist regime. About the comparison of the two documents I have written an article. U. Pavan Dalla Torre, *Ottobre 1922: l'Associazione nazionale fra mutilati ed invalidi di guerra fra D'Annunzio e Mussolini. Note e prospettive di ricerca*, in *Italia Contemporanea* (forthcoming).

28 For the history of the Italian war see G. Rochat, *Le guerre italiane 1935-1943*, Torino, Einaudi, 2006.

and fascism and they had to suffer Mussolini's dictatorship. The Association was divided between the supporter of the fascist and of the alliance with Germans and the supporter of the Allied. In this case, too, there were conflicting memories. Delcroix kept faith with his own ideas about war and his own ideas about peace: in other words, he was faithful to his own memory. He wanted nothing to do with the Social Republic, and for this reason he was confined at Cernobbio.

After World War II, Carlo Delcroix became a member of the Italian parliament. Amongst other things, he fought for the award of War Pensions to the veterans of Salò. A file marked "Carlo Delcroix" can be found in the ANMIG archives in Rome: Delcroix was expelled from the Association as part of its post-Fascist purge. Yet he was never able to erase his First World War experiences from his mind. He wrote other books: one, *D'Annunzio e Mussolini* ("D'Annunzio and Mussolini")²⁹, discussed those events of 1922 to which we have just referred; another, *Quando c'era il re*, ("When there was the King") was a collection of speeches he had made during his militant years in the Monarchist party.

Looking at these works and at this life, once again, we can appreciate how narrative of war and peace played a significant part in the works of Carlo Delcroix; what was the role of Great War in his life; how he became a living memory of the war and of the sufferance. But it is also possible to understand how the experience of the Great War became a distinguishing feature in the life of several young men: Delcroix became a symbol of the disabled ex-servicemen, and a symbol of a generation, the "generation of the trenches".

29 C. Delcroix, *D'Annunzio e Mussolini*, cit.