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# Eradicating Illiteracy in the Rural Masses during the Great War: The Newspaper *Il Piccolissimo*

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This study analyses a unique Italian publication linked to a wider project aimed at eradicating the illiteracy of the rural masses. *Il Piccolissimo* (1917–1919), a magazine written for children in the agricultural area around Rome, informed them about the Great War and educated them about better values and the importance of making savings. This cultural project, conceived and edited by Giovanni Cena and other intellectuals of the time, also envisaged the establishment and management of rural schools and infirmaries to provide children with a better and healthier life. In Italy, during those years, the magazine *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* was published to entertain and educate children of the middle and upper classes, while *Il Piccolissimo* sought to develop an awareness of social responsibility in the poor and hardworking children of the countryside. By examining its contents, graphic layout, iconic language, and educational aims we intend to highlight how the type of childhood it targeted acquired unprecedented social visibility in Italy.

**Keywords:** Giovanni Cena, *Il Piccolissimo*, Italian children's literature, illiteracy, Great War.

The main objective of this investigation consists of an evaluation of the educational aims of the editorial project of the unique children's newspaper, *Il Piccolissimo* (1917–1919), published in Italy during the First World War; it was an example of an individual approach to education by its creator Giovanni Cena. With this initiative, Cena intended to take care of children's education and eradicate illiteracy in a limited area in Latium.

In this paper, I first summarise the Italian historical context during the world conflict, stressing the role of propaganda which pervaded the whole nation. My concern is the target group of the propaganda, i.e. the audience, especially child readers, and the political messages addressed to them by many means of communication, including books

and newspapers. The consequences of such a development on Italian social life and the education of children, on the appearance of new themes in literature and on the inherent new forms of paraliterature (cards, posters, newspapers, ABC books) are the focus of the central part of the paper. The so-called “pedagogy of war” was an educational approach aiming at transforming children into future citizens conscious of the values, ideals, and responsibilities instilled in them during the dramatic years marked by the world conflict. In order to better comprehend this phenomenon, I analyse, from a pedagogical perspective, a selection of children’s books and newspapers with respect to their features and purposes. Before turning to the newspaper *Il Piccolissimo*, some space is given to its initiator, Giovanni Cena: a sensitive educator who, thanks to his pedagogical concerns, gave life to this newspaper. During its short span of publication, the main contribution of *Il Piccolissimo* was that it helped children living in the countryside near Rome, in a specifically deprived territory in the Latium region, to overcome illiteracy; moreover, it inspired principles of good health and civil and social values. Finally, the aesthetic aspects of this publication are considered, and also the contribution of the eclectic artist Duilio Cambellotti, who created its visual identity. These different views confirm the important role of *Il Piccolissimo* in several fundamental and relevant areas, including educational, pedagogical, historical, civil and literary ones.

Europe threw itself courageously into the erratic adventure of World War I: a conflict of enormous proportions, never seen before, defined as “worldwide” due to the countries involved and to the scenarios in which the armies had to fight, living a new collective experience which sanctioned national identity. For four never-ending years, this war caused grief, suffering, ruin and bloodshed. The consequences can be summarised in the birth of the masses and the consequent need to comprehend psychological mechanisms, the shift of production from agriculture to industry, a more relevant role for women, the essentiality of the politics of memory reacting to suffering and to loss, and new links between politics and modern media (radio and cinema) to affirm the strategic centrality of communication. Italy, too, took part in the conflict and suffered its effects.

In Italy, at least according to the Interventionists, the Great War was considered the fourth War of Independence, whose goal was to complete the process of national unification in order to achieve Giuseppe Mazzini’s<sup>1</sup> dream: a homeland united by language, shared memory and heroes. The war was fought drawing on all human and financial resources, with fury against a century-old enemy, the same enemy that had scared the Italian people during the Risorgimento: the Austro-Hungarian Empire which still kept the lands of Trieste, Trento and Dalmatia, so deeply linked to Italian sentiments at the time. Even if national unity had been reached decades before (1870), the population was still not a united whole and most people did not grasp the concept of

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<sup>1</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872), politician, patriot, philosopher, contributed deeply to the foundation of the Italian nation; his theories were essential for the definition of modern republican states.

“nation” (Gibelli 2005). Besides, social and cultural differences between Northern and Southern regions still ran deep. Nevertheless, this conflict exerted its destructive impact on the entire Italian population because it was a total war, meaning that, for the first time, every social rank was involved, creating the need to raise awareness among the youngest to join the army (cf. Campagnaro and Filograsso 2018). The war consequences, first of all for those who were fighting in the field,<sup>2</sup> were evident in the phenomenology of new myths, of which we give a few brief hints.

Eric Hobsbawm (1995: 139) overturns the previous theories of the most eminent thinkers and affirms that wars are not driven by the actions of important men but by peoples. He coins the phrase “democratisation of war” which means that the conflict was in defence of the proletariat’s working conditions. The memory of the war was counteracted by a process of “banalisation”, that is, reducing the war to something common to many, not a solemn and terrifying occurrence; the process of banalisation served to mask the most tragic aspects of the war experience and to turn it into something familiar, removing its exaltation and glorification. The war was banalised by means of its association with everyday objects (some reused in everyday life, keeping an “inapposite memory”), by means of popular theatre and battlefield tourism.

Alongside the myth of the war, another phenomenon was gaining ground, aptly dubbed by George Mosse (1990: 139)<sup>3</sup> as the “trivialisation of war”; it was well represented by many authors who chose to publish their own memoirs and verses related to the conflict.

Mosse also theorised about the “brutalisation of politics” in two branches according to new forms of the political fight: on the one hand, the growing indifference to the life of each person and, on the other, violence as a means of eliminating the enemy (Mosse 1990: 230). By examining the contents, the graphic layout, the iconic language, and the pedagogical perspective of some newspapers for children, our research will also highlight how childhood acquired unprecedented social visibility in Italy and contributed significantly to the “nationalisation of the masses”.<sup>4</sup>

This socio-political analysis, concerning the examined period, outlines important changes that reverberate in literary production which was accompanied by another, not negligible element: propaganda.

<sup>2</sup> The conflict showed the importance of the organisational principle applied to the masses, thus accentuating the trend towards massification with the direct participation of citizens, enrolment in the Parties and Trade Unions. The Government promised a pension for the disabled, jobs for the soldiers, land to the peasants. Even so, the veterans’ disquiet did not subside because they felt deceived.

<sup>3</sup> The object of George Mosse’s analysis was the cultural history of political movements. His interest was in the collective mindset, convictions and popular feelings, myths, symbolism and irrationalism. Mosse and Hobsbawm (who held more radical communist ideas) were fascinated by emotions derived by political mass events and demonstrations.

<sup>4</sup> Mosse coined the phrase “nationalisation of the mass” which meant an educational process addressed to the masses developed in schools, the army, national festivities. This nationalisation aimed at building a political conscience in the masses so that people could consider the war to be an event charged with positive and sacred meanings (Mosse 1990: 175).

## Propaganda: its artistic expressions and moral consequences

In 1914, political propaganda assumed an essential role in mass society, as the authorities used such methods and techniques to make the causes of the Great War popular. The diktat of this delicate historical moment meant that one should be optimistic both to raise the morale of the troops and to convince the population that the duration of the conflict would be short, assuming that, in the end, success over the enemy would compensate everyone for the tragic suffering. Propaganda had to be persistently and effectively pervasive.

At that time, children represented an important target for the publishing industry, in which both conservative and new, modern aspects could coexist; they became a favourite audience also for political propaganda and a means to extend it to adults, at least to illiterate ones, since parents and grandparents were involved in reading with their children. Everything (print media journalism, postcards, posters, jokes) was useful to catalyse people's opinion, even that of the young and very young, in the same way that today's crossover literature does (Ciavola 2015: 22).

Therefore, during the years of the conflict, the pages of children's books were also densely populated with phrases lauding love of the country, inspiring patriotic creeds, idealising oblation sacrifice, and justifying the need to take up arms against the hated enemy (Beduschi 2015: 4). A "pedagogy of war" started spreading, as well as a kind of education ready to raise children to become young national heroes; the child's concern consisted of becoming a young citizen prepared to take on a role of responsibility. The imagination of a whole generation was nurtured, that same generation that would have to fight another world war, once reaching adulthood.

We agree, then, with Lamberto Pignotti's opinion: "Rhetoric tends to prevail over good taste, demagogy to overpower aesthetics"<sup>5</sup> (1985: 23); while the images hid the psychological tricks studied by the artists, they, as did the persuasive arts, would achieve the desired effect, so that the artists appealed to dramatisations and glorifications to facilitate understanding, even for the illiterate. This approach is also manifest in children's newspapers: in the 1800s, their intention was to aid school study and to educate and entertain at the same time. Their pedagogical-didactic aim was evident in the themes they covered: serious and suitable ones for ethical-political formation leading towards the nationalisation of the bourgeois youth.

In contrast, from the 1900s, the children's press had offered less didactic subjects to help develop an autonomous point of view. Young people were more aware of national and family ideals and shared a strong national identity. In fact, the themes were anchored in the triad Homeland, God, Family<sup>6</sup> during the years of the First World War. We should also mention the socialist newspapers which devoted themselves to teaching people (also very young workers) their rights, trying to instil in them the concepts of freedom, justice and peace. The socialist press for children (*Figli del Popolo* [Sons of the People],

<sup>5</sup> "La retorica tende a prevaricare il buon gusto, la demagogia a sopraffare l'estetica".

<sup>6</sup> This subject is analysed under many historical and editorial aspects in Raina (2019: 31–73).

*Numeri unici per il Primo Maggio* [Single Issues for Labour Day], *Cuore* [Heart]]<sup>7</sup> engaged against social injustice and promoted the formation of class consciousness.

An evaluation of some of the mentioned newspapers and various books can be found below.

## Literature and paraliterature in the time of war

To demonstrate the diachronic presence of the tragic event of the war in children's books, we need to remember that, over the centuries, printed media have often been employed as an instrument of indoctrination to help make the young generations conform to political power and political institutions. From 1914 the theme of a victorious war, with the exaltation of the heroic virtues of the Italian people, was particularly suitable for the ideology of the Italian Regime both in children's books and magazines. This review has no exhaustive claims, of course, but it intends to highlight how these visions of the Great War were expressed by common people, often even the humblest, and how their aim was to demythicise all wars. They appeared to be illusory solutions which turned into open wounds.

Italian children's literature focused on the use of fiction (novels and patriotic tales) to present new characters capable of inducing readers to support the war or to take a distance.<sup>8</sup> This excursus will evaluate the most important ones.

### *Children's books...*

As indolent as Pinocchio, Ciuffettino was the protagonist of two important books by Yambo<sup>9</sup> (Novelli 1902, 1916): Ciuffettino appeared for the first time in 1902 in *Le avventure di Ciuffettino* [The Adventures of Ciuffettino], in which Yambo conceived him as a mischievous and lazy boy who, owing to these human defects, attracted the sympathy and love of young readers. Thanks to this positive response, the novel was reissued many times and a few years later Yambo decided to add another story in his *Ciuffettino va alla guerra* [Ciuffettino Goes to War] (1916)<sup>10</sup> whose young protagonist becomes a hero in the service of his country. In the text there is a clear contrast between Good and Evil in which the former is represented by Italy and the latter by the Austro-

<sup>7</sup> For an historical and critical analysis of these newspapers, see Meda (2013).

<sup>8</sup> Publishers, writers, journalists, and illustrators were already practising their literary production with the Libyan War (1911–1912) and then continued by describing the slaughter taking place in Europe: they used rivers of ink and few colours, fulfilling the role of those who sought consensus for war and wanted to mobilise intellectuals and young readers.

<sup>9</sup> Yambo was the pen name of Enrico de' Conti Novelli da Bertinoro (1874–1943), an Italian journalist, children's writer and author of comics.

<sup>10</sup> In her recent book *Making the Italians*, Lindsay Myers (2012: 107) classifies Yambo's book in the subgenre "Quest fantasy". To this genre belongs any piece of literature in which an author narrates a journey, usually symbolic and allegorical, to reach a goal. The reader assists in the quest of the main character, or hero, who must overcome many obstacles to obtain his reward. As examples, Myers quotes, among the Italian literary production of the beginning of the century, *La regina degli usignuoli* [The Queen of Nightingales] (1900) by Corinna Teresa Uberty Gray (her pseudonym was Térésah), *L'aeroplano di Girandolino* [Girandolino's Airplane] (1924) by Arturo Rossato, and *Pentolino e la Grande Guerra* [Little Pan and the Great War] (1915) by Vittorio Emanuele Bravetta.

Hungarian Empire. Here, the author is an effective storyteller, representing the war as something that brings hunger and comes without glory. The author underlines the destructive power of any conflict, explaining it by images: he portrays the Emperor Francesco Giuseppe as an innocuous old man who loves to play with small toy soldiers; this enemy does not scare him!

Another exemplary story is *Pentolino e la Grrrande Guerra* [Little Pan and the Grrreat War] (1915) by Vittorio Emanuele Bravetta, illustrated by Golia (Eugenio Colmo).<sup>11</sup> Pentolino wears clogs because the book was addressed at the humblest classes whose children did not wear proper shoes. If middle-class children read its adventures, they would have felt deep *pietas*, a reaction due to their privileged social and cultural position.

In these books, authors choose some abstract concepts and allegories to describe the war, but they show more interest in a magical rather than realistic setting, with a significant inclination towards the fairy-tale world. These stories do not refer to social engagement because the intended readers are very young (less than 10 years old) and are supposed not to be able to grasp the meaning of the real conflict.



**Fig. 1.** The front cover of *Piccolo Alpino* (Gotta 1926)  
**Sl. 1.** Prednja strana korica knjige *Piccolo Alpino* (Gotta 1926)

<sup>11</sup> See also the paper by Marnie Campagnaro and Ilaria Filograsso on children, soldiers and heroes in the Great War in Italian children's literature (2018: 230–235).

Even fairy tales can wear a new “dress”: the authors interpret them in an interventionist manner and attribute a new identity and new responsibility to their characters. For example, *Cinderella* was renamed *Cenerella*<sup>12</sup> by Maria Messina in 1918. Even Pinocchio turns into *Pinocchietto contro l’Austria* [Little Pinocchio against Austria] (1915), a narrative with patriotic and anti-German tones adapted by Bruno Bruni.

More exemplary is the revisiting of *Pinocchio* by Paolo Lorenzini, the nephew of Carlo Collodi, the original puppet’s father. In this adaptation entitled *Il Cuore di Pinocchio: Nuove avventure del celebre burattino* [Pinocchio’s Heart: New Adventures of the Famous Puppet], the old piece of wood turns into a child but without the characteristic nose that extends as a reaction to every lie. The whole story seems to exalt and honour the mutilated and wounded soldiers’ sacrifice. In fact, Pinocchio loses one leg and the other is amputated. Therefore, the blue-haired fairy turns into a loving Red-Cross nurse.

Another emblematic text that narrates the experience of war is entitled *Il piccolo alpino* [The Little Alpinist] by Salvator Gotta (1926)<sup>13</sup> (Fig. 1). Somehow it was a dramatic story of remembrance, told as a memento and helped construct the collective imaginary of Italians relating to the Great War.<sup>14</sup>

From the stylistic point of view, we can say that plain truth is stronger than rhetoric and that the stories and events of humble people can become as interesting as those of military heroes.

### ... and newspapers

During the war years, propaganda tools such as postcards, posters and stickers proved to be an effective means to reach the young ones and encourage them to become active citizens. Even more effective and widespread were children’s magazines. They included pictures, cartoons, stories, nursery rhymes and fairy tales, all attempting to convey messages such as sacrifice for the country, the need to intervene, and the duty to behave like little heroes. Fabiana Loparco identifies a key image of all these “patriotic” magazines, which is the image of a brave child eager to take part in the war instead of a child victim of the war (Loparco 2011: 28).

<sup>12</sup> Its novelty, compared to the classic text, lies in her brother, a prisoner at the front, and in her mother who is disheartened and worried. In addition, an uncle turns up. He had emigrated to America and subsequently invited the girl and the rest of the family to join him to make a positive change in their lives. However, Cenerella chose to stay home and wait for her brother’s return.

<sup>13</sup> It describes the life of a very young boy, Giacomino, and his efforts to survive at the front. The story is set in 1914 during the War and the author emphasises the hard situation of this orphan, adopted by a group of soldiers of the Alps (Alpini), who fights with them in the trenches on Mount Carso. His behaviour is characterised by patriotism, abnegation, and self-sacrifice for the Italian political cause. At the same time, the author manages to make some characters shine through their spirit of endurance and solidarity that comes from fear and shared hopes. Gotta wrote this novel for children, in the series “Biblioteca per la Gioventù” by the Milan publisher Mondadori, to remind them of the value of Italian soldiers and the harshness of the war period.

<sup>14</sup> In this story, the rhetorical language supports the theme of individual grief against a background of mass death in the trenches of Mount Carso. The propagandistic inflection of the published works was very pronounced, and its features were exacerbated.

Before presenting and studying the periodical *Il Piccolissimo* in more detail, it is important to set the context of some magazines of the time: *Il Giornalino della Domenica* [The Little Sunday Newspaper] and *Lamico dei fanciulli* [Children's Friend]. The former was edited by Luigi Bertelli, otherwise known as Vamba, from 1906; one of its aims was to train young people to dislike Austria and to encourage the young to take part in political life. The newspaper was ready to push for the ideological involvement of children.<sup>15</sup>

The latter was edited in 1870 in Florence, at that time the capital city of Italy, as an evangelical periodical of the Protestant church. From its very appearance, *Lamico dei fanciulli* denoted a patriotic spirit both in the stories and in the illustrations, using the typical themes of every magazine for the young: the family, religious inspiration, evangelism and prayer.

In both magazines, emotional engagement was key to ideological interpellation.

Among periodicals for children in Italy, we should also remember the memorable and long-lasting *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* [The Courier for Little Ones], nicknamed *Il Corrierino*, [The Little Courier], born as a supplement to *Corriere della Sera* [Evening Courier];<sup>16</sup> it was intended to entertain middle-class children. First published in 1908, it accompanied children throughout the Great War and its position varied during the conflict in tune with that declared by *Corriere della Sera* in addressing its adult readers. Its hallmark feature derived from its cartoons which did not have speech bubbles but captions in verse (rhyming octosyllables) sharing a formula with literary, classical and aristocratic literary traditions. In 1914 the *Corriere* was in favour of intervention to solve the intricate question of Italian lands subject to Austria. *Corrierino* shared the same ideology and explained it to children through the creation of new characters, such as: Schizzo, a child who has always dreamed of peace and now imagines his adventures in war; Luca Takko and Gianni, friends since childhood, who now become enemies because of the conflict. Two more characters were introduced in this regard: Abetino, portraying a wooden soldier who fights an imaginary war, and Italino, whose battle unfolds in stories coloured in red, green and white, the colours of the Italian flag, to represent "chromatic patriotism".<sup>17</sup>

### ***ABC books, too***

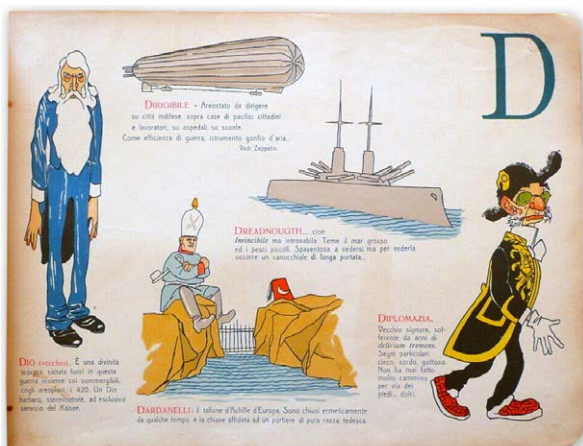
In addition to stories and novels, journals and postcards, we must acknowledge school texts that fulfilled the task of promoting the Great War and its inherent values.

<sup>15</sup> For more historical details, see Sabrina Fava's paper on readers of two Italian newspapers for children from the same period (2018).

<sup>16</sup> It devoted extensive journalistic coverage to the conflict for the entire four-year period. Attilio Mussino and Antonio Rubino, two of the main and most creative illustrators/authors of the time, published their stories and drawings to wide acclaim.

<sup>17</sup> Every individual, of any age, could and had to support the soldiers at the front and the economic and political effort that Italy had undertaken. The propaganda emphasised that even girls had to feel engaged in this historical moment. In fact, some female characters, suitable for the purpose, began to appear in *The Courier for Little Ones* within sagas and stories, for example, from 1916, in the stories of the little Didi, created by Mario Mossa de Murtas.





Figs. 2a, b, c. The front cover and two examples of pages from *ABCARIO di Guerra* (Golia 1916)

Sl. 2a, b, c. Prednja strana korica i primjeri stranica iz slikovnice *ABCARIO di Guerra* (Golia 1916)

ABC books had all kinds of initials and acronyms associated with war images, places, objects, and characters.<sup>18</sup> We name only one, just to give an example of a school text: *ABCDario di guerra* [The ABC of War], written and illustrated by Golia (Eugenio Colmo) and published by Lattes & C. in 1916 (Figs. 2a, b, c). It denotes a non-educational approach because the captions do not offer information but are ironic and therefore the text contravenes the learning function. Furthermore, the illustrations are not easy to copy and, as a result, the child probably does not learn to draw or memorise the word.

But we must not forget the supplementary books that offered stories and lessons with epic and glorious backgrounds to create an official and popular image of the war (Ciavola 2015: 24).<sup>19</sup>

After briefly illustrating the main aspects that make up the panorama of literature and paraliterature for children and young people in the period that extends throughout the first world war, we can now outline some general considerations about readers.

## Readers

When authors address children, they manifest the intention to send messages also to adults. In fact, parents often decide what children should read or what should be read to them. The childhood model was not univocal: readers were distinguished into ideal readers, whom the publishers address, and real readers, belonging to the lower and middle classes, having economic resources and also not being illiterate. In order to bring potential readers of the humblest social class closer to an understanding of social and political problems, the publishers chose to use very elementary vocabulary, usually appropriate for children. We can describe this policy as the “infantilisation” of the popular masses and we trace it also in socialist newspapers for children.

With the aim of forming a good child, an active citizen, educated in civic responsibilities, the fiction of the early twentieth century still appeared to be linked to the same model developed immediately before, at the end of the nineteenth century. Family and religion were values that were still defended, love for the country was emphasised, and the newspapers exalted national heroes who, through their spirit of sacrifice, had offered their lives for the freedom of their country. These values were flanked by Italian heroism in the Turkish – Italian war (1911–1912), beyond colonial achievements and the discovery of the need for a serene childhood. These publications elicited an effective response in readers.

Young readers were highly malleable, they wanted to emulate their paper model, to feel like their fathers who went to the front, to look like their brothers in the cold trenches.

Illiteracy in children was widespread: at that moment, the number of children enrolled in primary and secondary school was growing greatly owing to compulsory school attendance, but expectations were not met. The many failures, the absences and

<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed description of ABC books, see Farné (2019).

<sup>19</sup> We can remember *I ragazzi e la guerra* [Boys and War] by Margherita Fazzini, with illustrations by Carlo Chiostrì (1917). The author describes the civil participation of the boy scouts; a young girl visits a wounded soldier at the hospital. These examples can pervade children's imagination.

drop-out rates because children had to work in the fields or were enlisted in the army, showed that students were fewer than expected. Even the publishers, although equipped with new printing technologies, realised that, despite the effort of editing some popular series at affordable prices, the newly literate still lived on the margins of the main publishing industry.

The titles of children's books refer to the image of a happy childhood, with models taken from the middle-class environment which the young belonging to more modest social classes could only dream of. The tendency of the illustrators was initially to epitomise the enemy with caricatural, ridiculous traits, while they depict Italian fighters as courageous heroes, even ready for martyrdom.

We will now dwell on the emotional context of the young reader or listener: his father is at the front, the brothers live in the trenches, the tired and worried mother works at home. Mothers perform the highest sacrifice by giving their children to the homeland, where the offering of their lives is reflected in the feelings of the family and remains a tangible sign of respect and dedication. The responsibility to be useful at home and in the fields, in addition to the absence of parents, leaves the children free to perform sometimes even dangerous actions or to spontaneously join the battalions in the desire to emulate their fathers. Emotion, anger, bravado, pride are all feelings that ruled their decisions. We can label this phenomenon the "adultisation" of children.

This was the socio-cultural background to the scenario where *Il Piccolissimo* appeared for nearly three years, conceived by the educator Giovanni Cena, beginning in 1917.

### **Giovanni Cena: soul of the editorial project**

This brilliant, spearheading editorial project was intended for a specific territory, in the Latium region. Near Rome, in the late 1800s, peasant life in the Agro Pontino, an unhealthy area due to the marshes, was made up of work, fatigue and malaria. The precarious health and hygiene conditions, as well as the economic and social backwardness, hindered the fight against illiteracy (Chiosso 2011). Literacy struggled to become a reality despite the enactment of the Coppino law in 1877 which established that primary education was compulsory from six to nine years of age; neither was the Orlando law, enacted in 1904, which extended the obligation to 12 years, more effective; there were approximately six million men fighting at the front, most of them farmers (De Fort 1995: 239), so children substituted them in the fields. Although the number of children under 14 amounted to about 12 million, they could not attend school despite the law. This meant that poverty and the duty to meet the needs of the family prevented children from overcoming illiteracy. On this basis, Giovanni Cena<sup>20</sup> planned and

<sup>20</sup> Born in Montanaro Canavese in 1870, a poet, novelist and educator, Cena was a competent editor of a number of magazines. He collaborated with *Nuova Antologia*, the most prestigious "review of science, literature and arts" at the beginning of the twentieth century, through which he also dealt with the problems of Agro Pontino (the Pontine Marshes). In 1883 the Office of the Drainage of the Pontine Marshes responded to the directions of law no. 1489, requiring it to be in the general interest of socialist reformers and republicans for popular education. It also fitted into the philanthropic trend expressed by the middle and upper classes from the beginning of the century until the end of the war (Lacaita 1981).

promoted the project of “farmers’ schools” with the help of a group of intellectuals and educators; they dedicated themselves to organising a new cultural proposal for private school education that met the needs of the workers and the peasants’ commitments. The aim was to overcome illiteracy in order to raise people (nearly 50,000) from the most miserable and particularly difficult contexts, to affirm their rights, and to lift up their souls. This project represented a way of manifesting Cena’s feelings of solidarity and altruism, as a sort of “social apostolate”; he totally promoted this initiative with his human, civil and cultural qualities, affirming a kind of socialism from a humanitarian perspective. He was convinced that any artistic form could contribute to rising each individual’s moral and spiritual condition (Alatri 2018: 11).

This popular primary school represented a new philanthropic educational trend that gained considerable success through the support of important men of culture. The project – and its implementation proves it further – was rooted in the belief that law is not enough to change a deeply embedded socio-cultural situation.

To overcome this atavistic condition and to make the educational-didactic action effective, the contribution of passionate and aware volunteers is necessary. One of the most outstanding Italian pedagogists, Luigi Volpicelli (1969), called these volunteers “apostles”. He appreciated the ability of this project to sink into the social fabric, since he stated that school must affect daily life and reach everyone, above all the excluded. He defined Cena’s theory as the “pedagogy of the shock” because it had to defeat, in the peasants’ daily life, acquiescence and ancestral obedience, and the condition of enslavement that had become almost their second nature. “Farmers’ schools” were above all a service that induced many peasants to become aware of their social condition, and their knowledge of the alphabet represented a concrete possibility for human redemption. Even the pedagogist Giuseppe Lombardo Radice<sup>21</sup> reinforced this active school because it managed to survive in the worst conditions of discomfort.<sup>22</sup>

In this context of fine pedagogical sensitivity and deep cultural motivation, the editorial magazine *Il Piccolissimo*, a children’s newspaper, was founded.

### ***Il Piccolissimo***

The choice of the newspaper’s name comes from the supplement of *Il Giornale d’Italia* [Newspaper of Italy], called in fact *Il Piccolo* [The Little One]. The diminutive *Il Piccolissimo* [The Smallest One] seemed more suitable for young readers and was thought to make it more popular. This school magazine was published from February

<sup>21</sup> The pedagogist and philosopher Giuseppe Lombardo Radice (1879–1838) was a fervent admirer of G. Cena’s educational project. He affirmed: “C’è quindi una dottrina educativa di G. Cena. C’è. Non è formulata e ordinata in trattato, ma è nella sua poesia di ogni epoca nella sua vita, è nelle sue prose mirabili che sono il preludio della sua azione, già l’azione stessa. È nelle sue scuole” [“There is therefore an educational doctrine by G. Cena. There is. It is not formulated in a tractate, but is in each poem of his, throughout his life span, it is in his wonderful prose which represents the prelude to his action, the action itself. It is in his schools’] (Radice 1936: 200–201).

<sup>22</sup> In 1914–1915 the number of schools was about 70, including 12 kindergartens, for a total of about 2,500 pupils.

1917 until April 1919. At first, it was released each fortnight but then it came out less regularly, generally each month (Zizioli 2014: 421). It was edited by Giovanni Cena, flanked by Alessandro Marcucci, and counted among its most illustrious collaborators Francesco Acerbi, Eloisa Battisti, Giuseppe Zucca, Angelo Silvio Novaro, Romualdo Pàntini, Carla Cadorna, Luigi Pietrobono and, as its illustrator and designer, Duilio Cambellotti.

It was published by the Propaganda Section of the Latial Committee of the Italian Union of Teachers, whose managing director was Ernesto Fratoni, and whose representative for administration and subscriptions was Pietro Fedele, belonging to the Juridical Library of Rome.

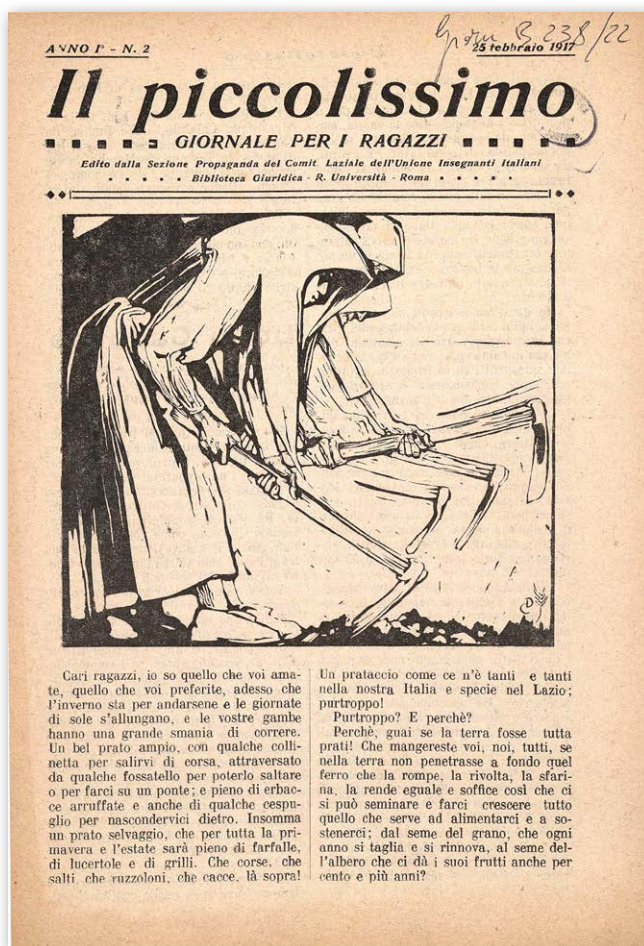


Fig. 3. The cover page of *Il Piccolissimo* 2/1917  
Sl. 3. Naslovnica 2. broja časopisa *Il Piccolissimo* iz 1917. godine

*Il Piccolissimo* was distributed free of charge and the first issue, with a print run of 36,000 copies, was sent to all classes (IV, V, VI) of all the primary schools in Latium; later it was published using the revenues of a public subscription and collected the considerable amount of 10,389 lire and 70 cents during its lifespan. The issues were published throughout the year, even in the summer months, to support the farmers' schools in teaching with the new methods, not only academically, but also to touch and nurture the students' heart. The teachers made a careful assessment of the educational tools in use: the textbook had become arid reading, far from peasant reality. It was therefore considered that it would be more effective to offer new readings every month, to propose short stories close to the children's real life, and to summarise the biographies of heroic and high moral standards.

We can consider this editorial experiment as a practical tool aiming at the ideal and moral formation of young peasants and the proletariat.

Each issue was published on light weight plain paper and the text in two columns occupied the whole of a 20 x 16 cm page, which meant that its readers could easily hold the 8-page booklet in their small hands. Its iconography was gaunt and monochrome. The cover was strictly black and white, like the rare illustrations inside, whose purpose was to visually represent the described situations of poverty, affliction, and suffering due to the conflict or the harsh reality of the countryside. An analysis of one cover (*Il Piccolissimo* 2: 1917) (Fig. 3) evidently shows the intent of the magazine: the illustrator paints a lawn where a child would usually be expected to run cheerfully and freely; that same lawn is transformed, because of the economic needs of the nation, into a field ploughed by women and children, replacing the men called to serve the Fatherland at the front. The field will grow wheat to produce bread for everyone, a wide social topic.

We quote the editorial of the first issue (*Il Piccolissimo* 1: 1917), which set out the intention of the publication, specified the role of children in the war context, and indicated solutions to help adults, and therefore their homeland, to improve the difficult political-economic situation (*Il Piccolissimo* 1: 1917):

Dear Boys, Here is your war magazine. Are you at war, as well? Yes. But your war does not consist of firing a wooden rifle or a tin pistol, let alone playing Italian and German soldiers and disturbing people in the street. The children's war is against gluttony and asking for expensive sweets; it is against the desire for costly toys; it is against the excessive craving for fun, which leads to spoiling clothes, household and school items that all now cost an arm and a leg! Obey your mothers, dear children, show everybody that you are strong and affectionate when she appears worried and sad, give her your serenity and your smile, this means fighting your war. In this way, the rascal loses the war! Fathers, older brothers and uncles who are in the trenches in constant danger and always ready to sacrifice their lives to defend their families, our Homeland, against the cruel enemy, they need to know that their children, brothers and nephews are good and strong and take the place of grown-ups alongside their mothers and sisters. So, when you too are grown up and become serious men, you will remember that you were the children of the war, you will be proud of it and you will have the strength to do this great and good work for the Homeland begun by your fathers.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Where not otherwise stated, the translations are by the author of this paper.

As we can infer from this excerpt, its stories, based on social themes, pervaded by deep feelings, appealed to readers' principles and beliefs. Its narrative style interpreted the concrete needs of the population, it turned towards realism, and despised fairy tales. The authors made use of pervasive messages, borrowing them from everyday episodes, connotated with a strong emotional impact. The vocabulary was clear, simple, and sound.

The swell of interest in *Il Piccolissimo's* approach was also key to amplifying themes, biographies and episodes concerning Italy in order to boost its merit and to describe Italian people who increased its fame, inevitably achieving its explicit patriotic goal. We list some biographies: "Cadorna as a child" (*Il Piccolissimo* 2: 2017), "Cesare Battisti's life" (*Il Piccolissimo* 6: 2017) and "Enrico Toti's heroism" (*Il Piccolissimo* 9: 2017). Moreover children's patriotism is nourished with the edifying examples of common people like peasants ("Peasants' chant in the Agro Pontino", *Il Piccolissimo* 17: 1918), volunteers ("The volunteer's farewell to his mother", *Il Piccolissimo* 16: 1918) and women ("Voices of Italian women", *Il Piccolissimo* 16: 1918 and "Home again", *Il Piccolissimo* 2: 1919).

The editors proposed conclusive stories with a moral ending to raise children's awareness of the war, to explain the events and solicit an empathetic response. During the first year, the topics focus on the implications of the war and the enemies: "What is Germany asking for?"; "The situation in France"; "The United Kingdom and Italy in the European War". During 1918, instead, the concern is about Russia abandoning Italy as an ally, the Battle of Piave River, the German attack and the end of the conflict. We should also underline that these short articles intended to interweave the children's tiny world with the adults' wide world, thus linking the individual microcosm to the national macrocosm. These articles aimed at sharing news usually meant for adults, in a magazine conceived for children. The recurrent themes we came across include the exaltation of heroism, the value of sacrifice, the hero's apology, fighting defeatism, loan applications, the denigration of the enemy with emphatic caricatures and sarcasm, the exaltation of women at home, love for the family, and peace.

In addition, the authors reworked some classic fairy tales, created articles with peasant children as protagonists and also stories set in rural landscapes with typical situations of country life so that young readers could recognise familiar settings. Readers were often reassured by the author's voice which promised a new, better world of peace and stability. Another frequent leitmotif was the denigration of the enemy: the authors pushed children towards a negative judgment of the adversary, with mockery or with cynicism, to deprecate their nation and their government (Fig. 5). The tone, exalted and triumphant after victory (*Il Piccolissimo* 17: 1918), looks with confidence to an ideal period of reconstruction after the war, envisages the new conditions of the peasantry, their return to the fields, and the work that redeems them and ensures their civil dignity.

In one issue (*Il Piccolissimo* 4: 1917) Lev Tolstoy's teaching of Russian peasants is featured to emphasise how important education can be to improve social status. Tolstoy also stated how to awaken the desire to gain better knowledge and how to distinguish the true values of life. The depicted Italian reality recalls the social realism pursued by the communist regimes, first in the Soviet Union, then in the European countries of the Eastern Block.



**Fig. 4.** The cover page of *Il Piccolissimo* 17/1918  
**Sl. 4.** Naslovnica 17. broja časopisa *Il Piccolissimo* iz 1918. godine

This magazine is an example *ante litteram* of a publication which stresses the following points, claimed as distinctive features: environmental protection, responsibility for habitats, healthy nutrition, love for the surroundings and raw materials.

The editors wanted to grasp the various aspects of the war experience and disclose them to young readers; being careful to save was among these subjects. This was duly expressed in several articles: "La cassetta miracolosa" [Miraculous box] (*Il Piccolissimo* 3: 1917) described the new device of a quilted box which could keep a meal hot; it was also useful for cooking – "put the pot inside and leave it for half an hour, and in the meanwhile the woman can attend to other tasks"; in the article a list of different kinds of food (beans, chestnut, broad beans, cotechino, etc.) and the cooking time for each is given.



The editor lays down the rules for saving coal, as England no longer sends supplies due to the German bombardments (*Il Piccolissimo* 4: 1917), or invites readers to report those peasants stocking up on cereals and legumes so that the Government will buy those extra quantities and distribute them to poor families (*Il Piccolissimo* 6: 1917). Later on, it argues for food economy and preventing waste, presenting evidence to the young (*Il Piccolissimo* 3: 1919). Saving, economic sanctions, measures to cultivate the land (“Contadini, rompete la terra e seminate quanto più potete!” [Peasants, till the soil and sow as many seeds as you can!] *Il Piccolissimo* 11: 1917) are leitmotifs even during 1918. The magazine proclaimed a socialist ideal and witnessed it through its frequent reflections towards child labour, the quality of work, workers’ health, as these excerpts reveal (“Conversando con gli alunni” [Conversing with the students] *Il Piccolissimo* 17: 1918):

How much I would like to see the pupils of every elementary and secondary school, obedient and diligent, going into the fields and vegetable gardens – like young peasants of colonial families – working and helping. Their parents would see them come back home [...] full of joy and health for the good work done.

The following extract allows us to map the social contradictions that animate the young workers’ life during the conflict (“Denaro maledetto” [Damned money], *Il Piccolissimo* 4: 1919):

Certainly that boy didn’t earn less than 6 lire a day. And for 6 lire who would care about his premature ruin? [...] A poor human being whose ignorant and greedy parents shorten his life! That young man, when 18 or 20 years old, already with some wrinkles on his face, will feel like an elderly person. So much money, easily earned and wasted, besides the relationship with older men, will make him believe he is old. This is his downfall.

And another one: “Nuova vita di pace e di lavoro libero e dignitoso” [New life of peace and a free and dignified job] (*Il Piccolissimo* 3: 1919):

Not only will his muscles act: a new will enlivens him. That of working in a world inhabited by men feeling like brothers, where everybody, also peasants, can work supported by a new conscience coming from a better education.

Again, we retrace sentences containing a certain touch of humanitarian socialism<sup>24</sup> and we use them here to stress the close link between *Il Piccolissimo* and socialist ideals, even though with some divergences. We quote this passage comforting the peasant-soldiers returning home: “On your jacket, of an insignificant and unknown infantryman, ignorant and simple, no medal shines but you have fully accomplished your important task”; another assuring the people of the right to receive an area of land “take it, but not for your egoistic intention, do not possess it as an absolute master because it belongs to God, but take it and make it produce so that all the Italians can

<sup>24</sup> “Humanitarian socialism was characterised by the quest of a progressive, substantial expansion of citizens’ fundamental rights as a means to overcome by degrees the social mistaken idea of the capitalist system” (Meda 2013: 34).

obtain joy and nourishment from your work” (“Il ritorno al focolare” [Home again], *Il Piccolissimo* 2: 1919). These were the messages published during *Il Piccolissimo*’s third season, making a significant contribution to its profile.

Italy had to overcome serious economic problems to support the war. In this regard, campaigns of internal loans were launched also on the pages of children’s magazines; they relied on the sacrifices of all Italians, by collecting their money to get their relatives back home soon:<sup>25</sup> “For loans and insurance underwritten by committing the small savings obtained by avoiding leisure” (*Il Piccolissimo* 17: 1918), but even other interesting themes for children’s education were added from April 1917. The authors explained the task of the Blue Cross for injured animals and underlined the important function of mules and other animals useful for the transport of goods and weapons (*Il Piccolissimo* 7: 1917), then they dealt with examples of everyday life and comments on the social theme of retirement for injured soldiers. They addressed the delicate problem of children wandering alone after their parents’ death, explaining the dangers to them, and how these orphans were gathered by a volunteer service devised by Queen Elena (*Il Piccolissimo* 12: 1917) whose goal was to save them from starving, too. In these articles, full of reflections and exemplary models, the readers are led to understand the adults’ reasons, to bear the privations and the hardships caused by the parents’ absence, to look for alternative solutions to economise and to improve cultivation. Some figures are presented to help children understand their role: the priest who, with his prayer, attends to the wounded and the soldiers (*Il Piccolissimo* 2: 1919) or the volunteer who addresses his mother before heading for the front (*Il Piccolissimo* 16: 1918).

The exaltation of traditional female virtues stands out clearly in articles with mainly educational content. Women’s emancipation, together with gender equality, become innovative subjects. Housewives can do chores to raise funds, respond to loan subscriptions, and offer their work for the purposes of the community. Women, both workers and peasants, took on administrative and organisational tasks to make the most of the techniques and practices of cultivation, they also showed they knew how to manage the family wisely, and how to accept sacrifice, and above all how to make savings in many ways (*Il Piccolissimo* 3: 1917).

The editors wrote moving and informative letters with touches of intense nostalgia, of acute irony, with straightforward and sometimes rhetorical narration, and were very effective in emotionally involving children and teenagers (*Il Piccolissimo* 10: 1918).

To conclude this general analysis we now examine the poems, the songs and the hymns: they are few, scattered in the densely written pages, representing a moment of relaxation necessary to lighten the contents of the magazine, even if childish light-heartedness is completely absent.

<sup>25</sup> These war loans were promoted through all kinds of written support useful for social communication. As we stated, war propaganda was a strategic weapon that constituted a sort of internal endurance and solidarity to match the effort on the military front. The Biblioteca di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea in Rome holds prestigious collections of documents inherent to propaganda. See also its website <<http://www.centenario1914-1918.it>>.



Fig. 5. The cover page of *Il Piccolissimo* 4/1919

Sl. 5. Naslovnica 4. broja časopisa *Il Piccolissimo* iz 1919. godine

In the last issue (*Il Piccolissimo* 4: 1919) (Fig. 5), after about two years of publication, *Il Piccolissimo* abandons its readers and, while communicating gratitude for the affection with which the readers shared this traumatic but formative war experience, expresses words of hope for the future of the Italians:

Everything is to be done and redone. And mainly your education! Winning and obtaining Peace is little if we do not know how to maintain Peace, that is, if we are not strong, right and industrious, to impose love and respect on other peoples.

Publication was probably interrupted because its purpose had been fulfilled. Evidence that the newspaper had achieved its task to reach peasants, workers and teachers during the conflict is also reflected in the number of subscriptions that had been registered throughout the two years, despite the serious economic difficulties of any Italian family.

After a few initial issues in which the editors offered free subscriptions,<sup>26</sup> the list of paying subscribers grew constantly. There were also some generous patrons, confirming that the Intelligentsia was in favour of this editorial project, including the President of the Council of Ministers Paolo Boselli, Minister Leonardo Bianchi, Minister Luigi Fera, Minister Comandini.<sup>27</sup> The magazine was promoted by word of mouth and letters addressed to fellow teachers. This was a simple, ancillary method that brought good results and included men of culture like Ernesto Monaci, a well-known philologist and literary critic, and Corrado Barbagallo, an illustrious historian. After our analysis, we ascertained that its distribution was wider than the Latium region, since copies reached subscribers in Toscana, Piemonte, Umbria, and Campania, and it was sent also to all the students in the schools of “those regions redeemed from the hateful Austria”<sup>28</sup> (*Il Piccolissimo* 5: 1917).

*Il Piccolissimo* was also intended to make sense of the sacrifice that Italy was enduring in terms of human lives and resources, to evaluate the sacrifices and to give voice to the gratitude towards the soldiers by all those who had waited for their safe return. The children were involved as an important segment of mass society, a society that was defining itself in economic terms as well as in communication.

Cena hoped, like other intellectuals, that the terrible trial of the war was necessary to ensure a lasting peace and a better European order. However, he was a victim of this illusion. Even teachers were forced to support the reasons for the war and volunteered to assist civilians in many ways: “Cena understood that, in a way, ignorance was like something evil polluting the mind and sin polluting the soul” (Strozza 1992: 214). To obtain the most effective communication for his newspaper, Cena thought it appropriate to insert some images and asked an influential and sensitive artist, Duilio Cambellotti, for collaboration. He was able to add some expressive illustrations to complete the storytelling.

### Duilio Cambellotti, the artist

The artist, bound by a deep friendship with Alessandro Marcucci, embraced the project of the magazine that he promoted together with his friend Giovanni Cena. The territory chosen for this educational publication was very familiar to him. In fact, from

<sup>26</sup> From the editorial of the first issue: “The word, which illustrates the sacrosanct reasons for our war, the need to endure hardships to achieve victory, the heroism of our incomparable soldiers, must reach everywhere. *Il Piccolissimo* will bring the word, and for this reason we have opened the subscriptions” (*Il Piccolissimo* 1: 1917).

<sup>27</sup> Paolo Vincenzo Giovanni Boselli (1838–1932) was a lawyer, Minister of Agriculture and Prime Minister (1916–1917). He was an interventionist and later in favour of Fascism. Leonardo Bianchi (1848–1927) was a surgeon, academician and Ministry of Education. Luigi Fera (1868–1935) was a lawyer and Minister of Justice (1920–1921), against Fascism. Ubaldo Comandini (1869–1925) was a lawyer, deputy and minister of the Republican Party until 1921. He was an interventionist, volunteer at the front in the world war. Since 1918 his role concerned propaganda.

<sup>28</sup> A territory more or less equivalent to two regions: namely Trentino Alto Adige and Friuli Venezia Giulia.

a young age, he desired to stay in the open air, to walk in the fields, to observe nature in all its aspects and he became so acquainted with the Roman countryside to know by heart all its beautiful spots as well as the problematic reality of the inhabitants of the malaria-ridden Pontine Marshes.

All three were committed to the construction of schools in the Roman countryside and to provide farmers and families with an educational system that would allow them to acquire autonomy and increase their own critical perspective. Duilio Cambellotti<sup>29</sup> demonstrated in various contexts that he was a multifaceted artist who could devote himself with equal sensitivity to drawings, sculpture and ceramics – by characterising his works with his extremely personal style, which is linear, trenchant, without smudges – and to illustrations for children’s books.

He believed that art had the function of educating, and therefore he dedicated himself to illustrating children’s books so that he could make a synthesis of artistic, intellectual and craft elements. He underlined in his biography what he meant by illustrating a book: “the collaboration of the artist to the full creative project” (Quesada 1982: 229) and he adopted this logic also for his collaboration with *Il Piccolissimo*. The industrial system, necessary for large distribution, did not compromise the quality of his works. The low cost of the book, thanks to mass production, was affordable also to the lower classes so that it could satisfy Cambellotti’s aim to promote and popularise culture in all social strata. Giulio Carlo Argan affirmed that “with lively intelligence Cambellotti has transposed the educational aim in the ideation of the book decoration” (1978: 9).<sup>30</sup>

The sharing of the ideal and socialist culture was put into effect through his collaboration with Cena’s newspaper through the creation of black and white covers, with an incisive, powerful graphic signature. Unlike postcards, the aim of which was to lighten people’s thoughts and to release the tension of everyday life through grotesque, caricatural, ironic, fantastic images, *Il Piccolissimo* made use only of realism, verging on pure verism. The dramatic vision of war was conveyed in its crudity, without glorification, and often the illustrator intended to demonise the enemy (Fig. 6). His illustration was a sort of narrative *a latere*, in which he autonomously added his personal intention to the subject of the article. His drawing was at times poetic, symbolic, realistic or visionary, offering visual support of a kind to the reader because he attributed an educational value to beauty.

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<sup>29</sup> Duilio Cambellotti (1876–1960) as a boy attended his father Antonio’s workshop where he acquired skills as a carver and decorator, following which he continued his training as a decorator and painter, and also studied to use design in the artistic industry. After graduating in 1897, he began his artistic activity by creating posters, advertising, brands and furnishing items for Italian and German companies. In his career, he collaborated for over thirty years with the Greek Theatre of Syracuse (Sicily).

<sup>30</sup> Alongside this social commitment, there was the commitment of an illustrator of syllabaries and several children’s books. In fact, during his long activity, Cambellotti collaborated with several publishing houses, including the Italian Editorial Institute of Milan – for which he took care of the graphic design of *La Bibliotechina dei Ragazzi* series (Little Illustrated Library: For Children, Soldiers and the People) – published by Bemporad and Mondadori.



Fig. 6. The illustration from the title page of *Il Piccolissimo* 10/1917  
Sl. 6. Slika s naslovne stranice 10. broja časopisa *Il Piccolissimo* iz 1917. godine

## Conclusions

*Il Piccolissimo* played an important role during the Great War. Its analysis reveals some peculiarities: the newspaper managed to create a network among teachers in Latium and other regions, with the common intent of keeping school active, finding efficient teaching methods even in such a difficult social context. In its pages it offered a detailed chronicle of the phases of the combat, sometimes with maps of the war zone with precise references to the geography of the territory and to its fauna, in order to describe the living conditions of soldiers with realism and not to induce exaltation but to make readers perceive the uselessness and inhumanity of any war. According to the war propaganda, in its articles, letters, short stories, the magazine stressed the importance of making savings at home, and suggested how to improve this habit with useful advice for the management and cultivation of fields.

In our research we focused on Cena's pedagogical creed which stimulated the boys in the farmers' schools to enrich their knowledge and try to better the standard of living in their families, too. At home, it promoted the importance of personal and vicarious reading and encouraged the acquiring of basic skills.

*Il Piccolissimo's* content spurred children's everyday heroism and active participation as citizens, led to emotions linked to gestures of solidarity and brotherhood, but most of

all to behaviour essential for keeping an optimistic perspective on the fate of Italy. Both at home and at school, it called on children and young people to form an opinion and develop their critical thinking, exhorting people not to lose hope during the war.

This unique experiment in Italy became a successful case for its volunteering spirit, whose educational aims left a positive sign in the formation of the 1917–1919 generations. In fact, children had to be shaped to enable them to acquire values and ideals to help strengthen the nation. *Il Piccolissimo*'s intention was also to raise children's patriotic spirit and, with its adherence to political propaganda and to inherent ideological issues, it demonstrated that it had a prominent role.

We believe that *Il Piccolissimo* carved out its own position in the periodical press addressed to children and young people in the years immediately following the First World War. It deviated from the contents of the main children's newspapers published for the middle and upper classes, as we have illustrated; instead, it approached, in some aspects, those magazines published in the socialist area. As we have stated, Cena's magazine lived a short, ascendant life connotated by the intention to help the poorest and most disadvantaged people of a specific territory by giving examples, advice and narrating stories relevant to their human formation. Unlike socialist children's newspapers, it justified intervention in the world war.

Despite the humanitarian dramatic circumstances, the socio-political uncertainty, the harsh economic situation, *Il Piccolissimo*, persuaded of its function, bade its readers farewell with these words (1919 (4): 2): "Dear boys, Keep this newspaper. It will represent a welcome memory of the Great War".

This parting message invites them to keep an optimistic perspective of the recent devastating years spent together; it seems that this polyphonic reading experience should not have a *dénouement*. The mutual efforts, both in narrating and reading, undertaken to overcome the complexity of the Great War, will continue to be positively assessed.

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### **Iskorjenjivanje nepismenosti seoskoga stanovništva u Prvom svjetskom ratu: dječji list *Il Piccolissimo***

U radu se analizira jedinstvena talijanska publikacija povezana sa širim projektom iskorjenjivanja nepismenosti ruralnoga stanovništva. List *Il Piccolissimo* (1917. – 1919.) bio je namijenjen djeci u poljoprivrednoj okolici Rima, a prenosio im je vijesti o Velikom ratu i poučavao ih boljim vrijednostima i štedljivosti. Taj kulturni projekt, novine koje je pokrenuo i uređivao Giovanni Cena u suradnji s drugim tadašnjim intelektualcima, također je pratio i poticao osnivanje i rad seoskih škola i ambulanta kako bi se djeci omogućio bolji i zdraviji život. Tih je godina u Italiji izlazio časopis za zabavu i pouku *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* namijenjen djeci srednje i više klase, dok je cilj časopisa *Il Piccolissimo* bio razvijati svijest o društvenoj odgovornosti među siromašnom i seoskom djecom koja su teško radila. Analiza sadržaja, grafičkoga dizajna, vizualnoga jezika i obrazovnih ciljeva toga časopisa, pokazuje kako se njegovom djelatnošću u Italiji ostvarila nepredviđena društvena vidljivost one vrste djetinjstva koja je bila svakodnevica njegovih čitatelja.

**Cljučne riječi:** Giovanni Cena, *Il Piccolissimo*, talijanska dječja književnost, nepismenost, Prvi svjetski rat.