

Publishing as a Way of Creating *Wirklichkeit*



Leone began to work with a friend who was a publisher. There was only him, the publisher, a warehouseman, and a typist named Signorina Coppa. The publisher was young, ruddy-cheeked, shy, and often blushed. When he called for the typist, however, he had a savage yell: 'Coppaaa!' They tried to get Pavese to work with them. Pavese balked. He said, 'I don't give a damn.' He said, 'I don't need a salary. I don't need to support anyone. All I need for myself is a bowl of soup and some tobacco.' He was a substitute teacher in a high school. He made very little money but it was enough for him.

He also did translations from English. He'd translated *Moby Dick*. He translated it, he said, purely for his own

pleasure. They'd paid him to do it, sure, but he would have done it for free. Actually, he even would have paid for the opportunity to translate it.

He wrote poetry. His poetry had a long, drawn-out, lazy pace, with a kind of cant to it. The world of his poetry was Turin, the Po, the hills, the fog, and the taverns of *Barriera di Milano*. In the end, he was persuaded to join Leone working for that small publisher. He became a conscientious and meticulous worker who scolded the others for arriving late and for going to lunch, say, at three o'clock in the afternoon. He urged them to adopt a schedule like his: he would come to work early and leave for lunch punctually at one o'clock because at one o'clock his sister, the one he lived with, would put the soup on the table.

Every so often, Leone and the publisher fought. They wouldn't speak afterwards for a few days. Then they would write long letters to each other and, in this manner, would be reconciled. Pavese, instead, 'didn't give a damn'. Leone's true passion was politics. But besides this essential calling, he had other passions – poetry, philology, history. Having come to Italy as a child, he spoke Italian as well as he spoke Russian. He still spoke Russian at home with his sister and mother, who went out very little and never saw anyone. Leone would describe for them in great detail everything he did and everyone he met.

Before he went to prison, he'd liked attending the salons. He was a brilliant conversationalist even though he

spoke with a slight stammer. And though he was always deeply absorbed in thinking about and doing serious things, he was nevertheless open to engaging with people in the most frivolous gossip, especially since he was curious about people and was blessed with a huge memory that retained even the most superficial details.

But when he came back from prison, he was no longer invited to the salons and, in fact, people avoided him because he was by then notorious throughout Turin as a dangerous conspirator. He didn't care at all and seemed to have forgotten about those salons.

We got married, Leone and I, and we went to live in the apartment on via Pallamaglio.

When my mother told my father that Leone wanted to marry me, he flew into his usual rage that occurred whenever any of us intended to get married. This time he didn't say that Leone was ugly. He said, 'But he doesn't have a secure position in life!'

Leone, in fact, didn't have a secure position in life. Indeed, his situation was more precarious than ever. They could arrest him and put him in jail again. They could, under any pretext, send him into exile. If, however, fascism were to end, my mother said, Leone would become a great political figure. Furthermore, the small publisher he worked for was, even if small and poor, bursting with promise and potential.

My mother said, 'They even publish books by Salvatorelli!'

Wirklichkeit Books, founded in 2019 in Berlin, publishes books to find words, images and actions for a new actuality. The programme includes titles by young artists and writers side by side with historic positions relating to poetry, play, language and art. Publishing is understood as an experimental and joyful act that engages with the travel of ideas and is seen as a way of creating *Wirklichkeit*.

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