

ZOYA BARONTINI

CRONACHE DALLA POLVERE

UN MOSAIC NOVEL
SUL CUORE DI TENEBRA
DEL COLONIALISMO
ITALIANO



BOMPIANI



ZOYA BARONTINI
CHRONICLES FROM THE DUST

translated from the Italian
by Julia MacGibbon

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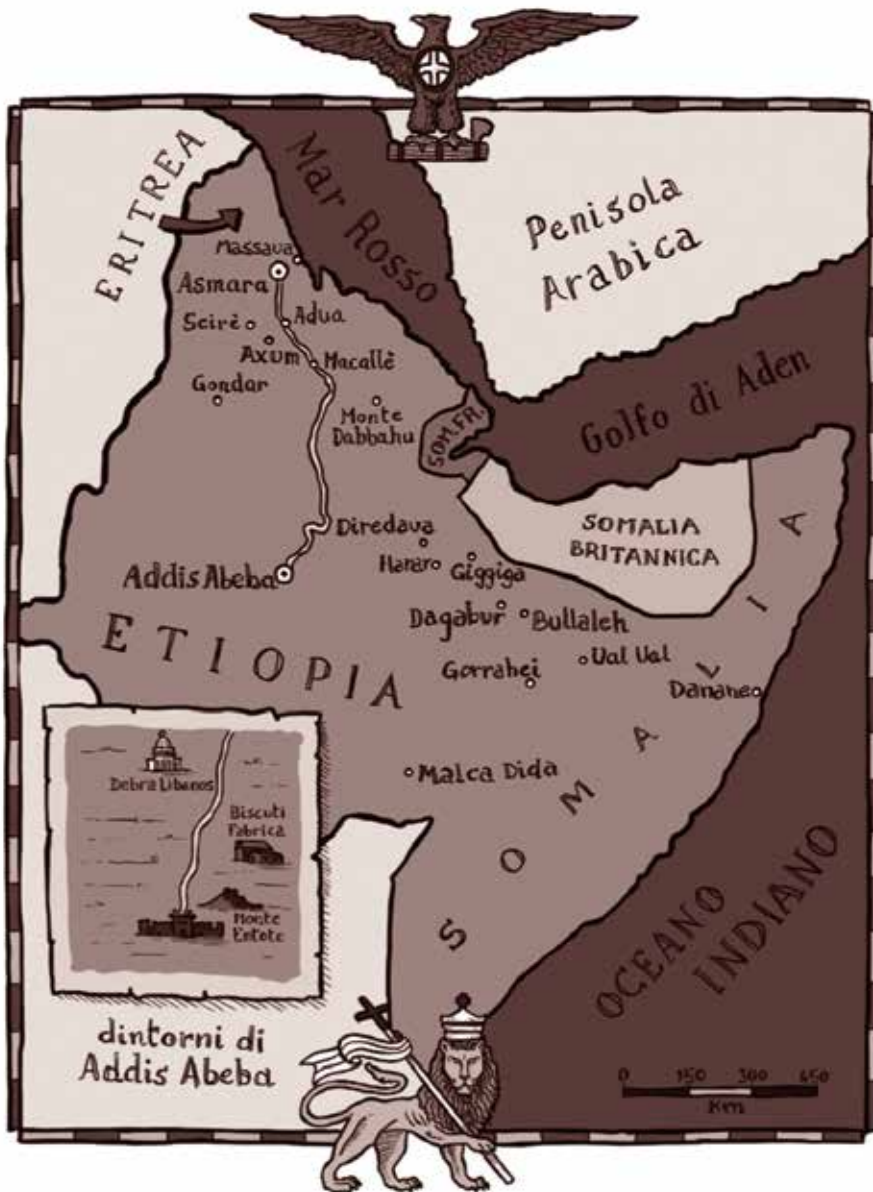
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THE ABYSSINIAN EPISODE




- **5th December 1934.** The colonial Italian troops stationed in Eritrea cross the border into Ethiopia, following a brief armed skirmish at Welwel, a contested strip of land rich in underground water. It is the *casus belli* that the fascist propagandists had waited years for, justifying an attack on Ethiopia.
- **2nd October 1935.** War begins between the Kingdom of Italy and the Ethiopian Empire. Italian troops invade Ethiopian soil from Eritrea in the north and from Somalia in the south-east. Not content with her numerical and technological superiority, Italy makes wide use of chemical weapons – including asphyxiants and the blister-agent, mustard gas – thumbing her nose at the Geneva Convention of 1925. Benito Mussolini's orders to General Rodolfo Graziani are clear: 'Given tactics employed by the enemy, as per your dispatch no.630, Your Excellency is authorized to make large-scale use if necessary of all forms of gas and flamethrowers.'
- **30th December 1935.** Italy's royal air force bombs the International Red Cross field hospital at Melkadida with mustard gas, on the orders of Rodolfo Graziani. It is a message to the League of Nations: don't interfere. Twenty-eight civilians and the Swedish doctor Gunnar Lundström die, torn to shreds and flayed alive. Having been made viceroy of Ethiopia, Graziani launches a brutal crackdown. Prison and concentration camps are set up and public gallows are erected. The insurgents are gunned down. In the camp at Dhanaane 5500 civilians die. Many of the Italian soldiers have themselves photographed next to the hanging corpses or beside baskets full of bodiless heads.


 **5th May 1936.** Despite the resistance put up by Ethiopia's army and the Arbegnoch resistance fighters, the Italian troops take the capital, Addis Ababa. Mussolini writes to the general in command of the operation, Pietro Badoglio: 'Having occupied Addis Ababa, Your Excellency will give orders to the following effect: (1) All persons in the city and environs who are found bearing arms are to be summarily executed by shooting. (2) All so-called Young Ethiopians, who are cruel and arrogant barbarians and bear moral responsibility for the depredations, are to be summarily executed by shooting. (3) All persons who have participated in acts of violence, depredation and arson are to be shot. (4) All persons who have not within the space of 24 hours relinquished arms and munitions are to be summarily executed by shooting. I await word from you confirming that these orders will – as always – be executed.'


 **The Italian tricolour flag is raised over the city and the summary executions of the rebel population begin.** Mussolini appears at the balcony in Rome's Piazza Venezia and makes a speech to the nation: '[...] It is not without emotion and not without pride that, after seven months of bitter hostilities, I pronounce these great words. But duty compels me to add that the peace of which I speak is our peace, a Roman peace, which is affirmed in these simple, irrevocable and definitive words: Ethiopia is Italian!' In the United States a campaign begins to recruit volunteers of Ethiopian origin who are prepared to sail to Africa to fight the Italians.

 **27th December 1936.** The front page of *La Domenica del Corriere*, the illustrated weekly supplement to *Corriere della Sera*, bears the words: 'All the territories of the Empire are now occupied. Its conquered people hail the Tricolor.'

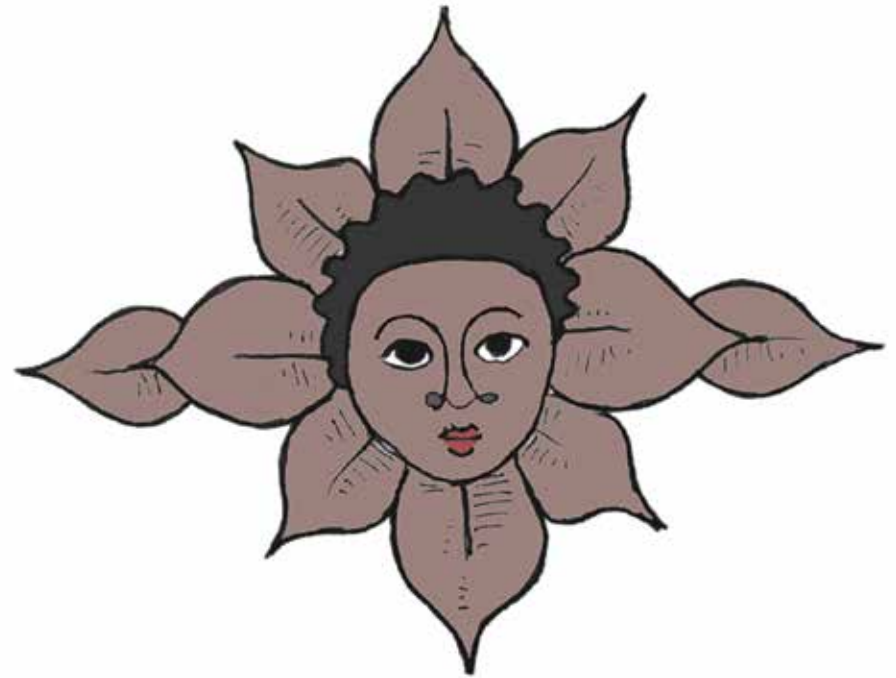
 **19th February 1937.** At midday, during celebrations for the birth of the king's son, Prince Vittorio Emanuele di Savoia, two students enter the small royal palace known as the 'Little Gebi' and fling a series of eight

hand grenades at the dignitaries on the platform. Graziani is wounded and is taken to hospital. The retaliation is instantaneous. The Italians open fire on the fleeing crowds. The city becomes an inferno. Flanked by locally recruited *ascaris*, Italian soldiers and civilians hunt down the guilty parties, devastating the capital as they do so. The acts of gratuitous violence multiply. In his secret diary, Ciro Poggiali, the *Corriere della Sera*'s special correspondent, writes: 'All the [Italian] civilians who happened to find themselves in Addis Ababa have taken it upon themselves to exact revenge, which is being done with great alacrity, employing the classic methods of the fascist paramilitary squads. They move about armed with cudgels and metal bars, coshing any natives still to be found in the streets... Needless to say, those caught up in this bloodbath include the unsuspecting and the innocent.'

 **The horror spreads across Ethiopia.** In the days following the attack, the order arrives to eliminate the rebels and anyone suspected of having aided them, by any means necessary. The Coptic Church is believed to be offering sanctuary to those responsible. The telegrams from Mussolini to Graziani are, once again, unequivocal: 'None of those arrested now or subsequently must be freed except by my order. Be they laymen or clerics, all suspects must be shot without further delay. The manhunt is on. Rebels, monks and storytellers, men of the cloth and civilians. Women, old men and children. Within a radius of 150 kilometres, 115,422 *tukuls*, three churches and a convent are all razed to the ground. 2,523 rebels are shot.'

 **21st-29th May 1937.** On Graziani's orders, Italian colonial troops, the Carabinieri, the Alpine Corps and the Blackshirts of Africa commanded by General Pietro Maletti – who was charged with subduing the Shewa region – carry out a massacre in the monastic village of Debre Libanos. The viceroy and Maletti are in contact via telegraph: 'The military attorney

has just this minute told me that he has definitive proof that the monks at the monastery of Debre Libanos were complicit with the authors of the attack. With no exceptions, you are therefore to execute all the monks, including the subprior. Please reassure me this has been done, communicating the number. Publicize the reasons for these measures.' Maletti replies, laconically: 'Liquidation completed.' At Debre Libanos 320 monks, 129 young deacons and 1600 civilians were massacred. In exterminating the Copts, the viceroy's intention is to bend the Ethiopian church and Ethiopia's ruling class to the will of Italy, but in the country's streets, on its plains, in the highlands and in the forests, the Arbegnoch resist and fight on, unrelenting. Among them there are also a few Italian deserters... But theirs is another story, a story peopled with ghosts.



CAMION



I don't give a damn

Goffredo Mameli was driving his supply truck and he was going fast. The Fiat 618c crushed the branches of the scrubland and the drying clothes of the villages he passed through. He sped along. It was a killer of a vehicle with a design fault affecting the speed control, apparently because the gear ratio was a little too high which gave it too much momentum, in other words the guys in Turin hadn't built it properly, so you'd be looking for trouble if you were to cross the road or if you happened to live in a hut on the edge of the truckway. Private Goffredo Mameli said the same thing to all the soldiers: I'll admit it, I can't drive any slower, but I don't give a damn. And the truck shared his feelings. Now, in fact, as they hurtled across the highland plateau towards the capital, it threw up clouds of clay dust which hung in mid-air forming the words *I don't give a damn*, and its exhaust pipe spewed out a gas which formed a long tail of words that said *I don't give a damn*, and its snout thrust aside the wind which rose up into the clouds forming the words *I don't give a damn*.

Goffredo Mameli also didn't give damn about the fact that he was called Goffredo Mameli, which was all of it actually his first name, while his surname was Baraldi. His father had given him this name,

Goffredo Mameli Baraldi, in honour of a hero from the Italian Risorgimento who had also been a poet and had written the words of an anthem that someone else from the Risorgimento had then set to music. But that anthem had never become Italy's national anthem, because it had been written by a democrat. In Italy they had a monarchy and one stood up for the king's march, and in Italy they also had fascism and one stood up when the party officials trooped by, and one went to war when fascism demanded it. So Goffredo Mameli Baraldi had gone to war, precisely two years earlier, in 'thirty-five, when Mussolini had demanded of the Italians that they bring him Africa.

And his father was dead, and his mother was also dead, and they were buried next to one another in the cemetery in Mirandola, so Goffredo Mameli, born in 1916, not even twenty years old, had decided that for an orphan nothing could beat adventure, heading off for a life of surprises, heedless of what might happen and living a day at a time without mulling it over. And he left for Africa. And he cared so little about his name that he now let them call him Goffredomamèli, just like that, all one word, and who gives a damn.

Goffredomamèli had set out from Taranto, two years earlier, on a hospital ship named *Urania*. He had traversed the Suez Canal in another boat, from the deck of which, once past Cape Guardafui, he had glimpsed the arid peaks of the Migiurtinia mountains. Entering Mogadishu, he had noticed that the beam from the lighthouse, which was crowned with a Lictorian axe, illuminated the exotic fish in the Indian Ocean. A chorus of soldiers had chanted the Duce's name. There was no passenger dock, so they had lowered him from the boat using a crane, had gathered him up in a canvas sling, had put a life-jacket on him, and that was how he had arrived in Somalia, off-loaded just like a mule. Then he had started driving, because that

was Goffredomamèli's trade, driving, and it was one that could be plied equally well in uniform, even in wartime, because the trick lay in going fast and not giving a damn.

Goffredomamèli was good at paying no mind to anything, good at skimming through life, even war, even death. He had no particular interest in affecting other peoples' destinies. Had he been an object, he'd have been a mantelpiece ornament, a porcelain cat, a key ring, a cup neither big nor small, no good for tea and no good for coffee. He began transporting soldiers, arms, provisions and bombs. For the campaign on the southern front. Towards Ethiopia. Towards the capital. Addis Ababa. In the Fiat 618c that went too fast. Across the lowland plains of Somalia, across the mountainous fracture which runs from Benadir to the Trans-Juba, across the tablelands and across the riverbeds, through the shrublands, through driving rain and fleeting showers. He drove past the stones, the thorns, the encampments, the burnt-out *tukuls* and piles of Abyssinian corpses, strangely blackened, their skins discoloured, wizened, liquefied like butter, violated by some form of black magic. A lieutenant told him, sotto voce: it was us who created this magic, we throw it out of the sky and burn warriors, women, old men and infants. But Goffredomamèli replied, 'I don't give a damn', and climbed back into his cab. Then the war ended. In other words, the Italians won. And Goffredomamèli entered the capital along with the rest of them. He, the victor who had shot no one, had killed no one, but who had known hundreds of deaths.



Sugar and water

Two years had now gone by. Mussolini had proclaimed the Empire. Goffredomamèli was transporting a consignment of water for the viceroy. He was to deliver it to the viceroy's Gebi, which was the former palace of the Negus but the Negus no longer lived there; Marshal Graziani, who was the viceroy, lived there instead. The load-bed of the truck could hold over fifty jerrycans. Gallons amassed and extracted with motor-driven pumps which reached depths of up to thirty metres. Then they had been rendered potable, distilled, sterilised, filtered and 'Verdunised' with small doses of chlorine. Then they had been decanted and handed over to Goffredomamèli, who transported all manner of things along the route from Massawa to Addis Ababa: food, drink, the sugar cultivated in the village of Duca degli Abruzzi, everything they needed in order to feed themselves, everything they needed in order to clothe themselves and to kill. Sometimes soldiers, sometimes women for the soldiers. And today he was transporting water.

But as he joined the road that led across the plateau, Goffredomamèli saw dense flutes of smoke rising above the capital. There were lots of them, as though they were being thrown up by invisible chimneys. It looked like a city besieged from within, combusting, self-immolating. Goffredomamèli's Fiat 618c had now reached the city, and he soon stumbled upon an inferno. A woman was naked in the dust, split open by a knife wound that ran from her belly to her breast. Three Abyssinians hung from the branches of a eucalyptus, as still as the blood that had flowed from the guts of the split-open woman. Other shattered bodies were piled into heaps like wood for burning. Stacks of corpses kept watch over the villas, the offices, the town squares, the alleyways. They blocked the view from the windows. They were mirrored in the glass, multiplying death. Goffredomamèli sped past them without stop-

ping, taking care not to crush them, otherwise he risked damaging the truck, otherwise he ran the risk of the splatters of blood and limbs forming words on the tailgate: *I don't give a damn*. And he thought: *Now I'll take the water to the Gebi and I'm getting the hell out of here, and who gives a damn*. But in Menelik Square Goffredomamèli's journey came to a halt at a checkpoint. A soldier equipped with a grin, canvas trousers and musket waved at him to turn his engine off. Goffredomamèli climbed out of the truck and asked the soldier, 'What's happening?' And the man replied, 'Reprisal. We're killing as many of them as we can. That way they'll learn not to carry out attacks.'

'But why can't you let me through? I'm taking water to Graziani's Gebi,' and the soldier explained to Goffredomamèli that it simply wasn't possible for him to reach the viceroy, and said, 'We'll take that water,' and with the help of other infantrymen they unloaded all the jerry cans, and once the truck was empty the soldier said to Goffredomamèli, 'Now get the hell out of here.'

There was a two-storey building. On one side of the building a pile of dead bodies reached a height on a level with the first floor. There were also two bulldozers. One brought in the bodies, the other scooped them up and carried them off. These heaps were constantly being assembled and demolished, and as the bodies were lifted up or fell to the ground they appeared to come to life, composing strange, slow dances with their arms and legs. And the heads of the Abyssinian corpses moved as if under the influence of powerful drugs which inhibited neck strength and muscle control. They were all dead. And they seemed alive. They had been chased, beaten, killed, broken. They played with them as though they were puppets. *All that's missing are the strings*, thought Goffredomamèli, and then he added: *But who gives a damn*. And he climbed back into the truck. And he went on his way.

Into the curves, into the colours, into the insects

After a day's journey away from the capital, moving ever further away, Goffredomamèli was now in the grassy plains of the highlands. He could see nothing but pastureland and volcanic soil. He was travelling through fertility at its wildest. He had chosen the least frequented route. He had no desire to encounter human beings. He passed only one. A young girl who was pulling a cart full of fly-blown rags. And he had coated her in dust without slowing down. Without giving a damn. He drove through a wood of huge conifers. Then he climbed upward along a track that ascended a mountain studded with boulders of quartz. The track wound its way around the peak like a cord roping down a sleeping monster. Goffredomamèli sped on, putting the gorges and the flat-topped Ambas behind him. He was already imagining the next load, the next journey, the earnings to come. He scratched his thin legs and rubbed the dirt from his eyes. A thin wind blew up as dusk began to fall. Goffredomamèli turned on the headlights, but the only thing made visible was the wind-whipped red dust. Gigantic moths flew towards the lights. The sun hid behind clouds which seemed to swell with lightning and with rage. Goffredomamèli decided he would stop for a rest at the next clearing and would set off again only at dawn. Because right now he really couldn't see a thing. Only creatures and colours. He heard the hum of large insects and the wind. He felt alone in the world, as he often had since he'd been orphaned. An orphaned driver driving, alone in the world, far from home, in the fascist colony of Africa, and not giving a damn about any of it, about corpses or killers or rights or wrongs, is truly alone in the world and is entitled to feel himself so. He looked for a place to pull over, somewhere to sleep, but found nothing. He drove on unseeing. He accelerated into the curves, into the colours, into the

insects, until he heard a noise from the fender to his left, and realised he had hit something.

He pulled on the handbrake and climbed out of the 618c. He hid his face and his eyes from the wind. A few yards back, he could see a white silhouette on the ground, twitching. It was the thing he had run over. The gloom threw no light on the creature, in fact it rendered it ghastly, it gave it the semblance of a sheep or of a huge snake that had eaten a sheep. A huge wounded snake in the process of sloughing off its skin. An enraged and bloodied beast. But Goffredomamèli, coming closer, realised that it was nothing of the kind. It was simply a boy holding his belly. He had knocked down a child. And now the child was groaning and weeping. Goffredomamèli knelt down beside him: the child was naked, he wore no clothes, and his face, his chest, his shoulders, his legs and his arms were painted with long white stripes. This paint was his clothing. Blood dripped from his temples. He looked at Goffredomamèli and said: 'Take me to the church of Yemrehanna Kristos.' At which, Goffredomamèli leapt back and fell onto his arse and yelled, in his fright, 'You speak my language! How is that possible?' But the child didn't explain. Instead, he wept a little, he tightened his hold on his belly and then he repeated, 'Take me to the church of Yemrehanna Kristos', and his voice was the voice of a supplicant, like that of a puppy begging for mercy. Goffredomamèli, though, was already sprinting back towards the truck, and set off at great speed. The stones on the road formed the words *I don't give a damn*. The whispering moths hummed *I don't give a damn*. But he saw and heard none of it. And he didn't look back at the child even once. He left him there where'd he'd hit him, and who gives a damn.

He hurtled forward. He hurtled forward. He hurtled forward.

He began the second day of his journey. He had put the mountain behind him. And other hills and other trails. Now he was skirting the banks of a gravid river, its water the colour of chocolate. He hadn't stopped ever since, not even to piss, not even to rest for half an hour. To keep himself awake he bellowed, 'I don't give a damn'. He yelled it at the landscape, at history and at death. He screamed it at the child. *What's a child doing alone on a mountainside? And he was naked. Those savages. And his body was painted. Those savages...*, thought Goffredomamèli. And he resolved to forget it. He was good at forgetting, at putting to one side the things he had witnessed that brought him no benefit. Had it been possible to stack all of the corpses he'd ever seen, starting with those of his father and his mother, he'd have fashioned a column as tall as a five-hundred-year-old sequoia. But he forgot them. His memories reached no higher than a shrub or a bonsai. Goffredomamèli had mastered the art of self-inducing amnesia. And now he feigned himself emptyheaded and asked himself: *But did I really hit that little savage? Perhaps I just dreamed it? But yes, it must have been the tiredness making me imagine things, and anyway, who gives a damn.*

He crossed the river with the help of a bridge that had been built by the Italian engineering corps. He reached a long, broad stretch of road from which the stones had been removed. So he accelerated and the truck picked up speed. Now the hot wind began to tangle his hair. The truck bed creaked in its metal frame. The wheels and the chassis made a strident clamour, overpowering the natural surroundings, invading the land and its sounds, colonising the fields of castor bean plants and durum wheat. He drove past termite mounds that were over twenty feet high. He scared away herds of zebras and

flocks of wild goats, and he laughed to himself. He thought: *Now I'll go even faster, as fast as I can, until I get down to Massawa, and then I'll sleep, at long last.*

He was about to put his foot to the gas when he saw a white outline in the middle of the road. A shepherd perhaps. It didn't move. It stood there, perfectly still. Goffredomamèli slowed down, and as he and his truck got closer, he realised that the shepherd was tiny. *He must belong to a race of dwarfs*, he thought, *because he really is tiny.* But once he got within yards of the man, he saw that he wasn't a man, not even a shepherd, and not a dwarf, and he wasn't dressed in white but he was completely naked and his skin was painted white, and he was the boy from the mountain, the one he had hit back up on the mountainside, just yesterday, and a great many miles from this river plain. At that point Goffredomamèli began to sweat and to tremble.

He opened the door and lent against it, he put his feet on the running board and yelled at the child to get out of the way, to let him past. But the boy spread his legs a little further apart in order to gain better purchase, raised his arm and opened his hand like a jellyfish stretching out in the water. And he said simply this, in Goffredomamèli's native tongue: 'Take me to the church of Yemrehanna Kristos.'

Take me to the church of Yemrehanna Kristos, take me to the church of Yemrehanna Kristos, take me to the church of Yemrehanna Kristos.

Blood still dripped from his temples. His eyes were the colour of the river. The white with which he was painted was the colour of the resin spread on the corpses of luckless warriors. His lips were engorged. His hair was as untameable as the bush. The hand that he hadn't raised, his left hand, continued to massage his belly just as it had the night before, in the spot where the Fiat 618c driven by Gof-

fredomamèli had hit him. Goffredomamèli, who now thought: *That's not possible...* Who now shouts: 'I'm not taking you anywhere! Go away! Let me past!'

But the boy didn't move, he lowered his hand and said simply: 'I have spoken to your father Giuseppe. He is suffering and he complains. He says the cancer still hurts his throat. He says you've forgotten him, and that hurts him more. And I have spoken to your mother Marietta. She says she's no longer in pain and she's now breathing well. But she is sad because you forget her, because you never think of her and you never apologise.'

Now Goffredomamèli climbed back into the cab. He gripped the steering wheel. He moved the gearshift. He hurtled forward towards the child.

He hurtled forward. He hurtled forward. He hurtled forward.

And the child didn't move, and he hit him, and the child's body was hurled into a gully, amid the plants and the flowers, in the red soil.

And Goffredomamèli never once looked back at the child. He left him there where'd he'd hit him, and who gives a damn.

Chiarizia soup

He began the third day of his journey. He hadn't slept for three days. He drove past fields of coffee with green leaves and red berries. On he raced, alongside gazelles and buffalo. But he noticed none of it. He thought only of the child. If he could have, he'd have bellowed: I don't give a damn, but no words came out. He'd have forgotten the words he had heard, but he remembered every one of them: 'I have spoken to your father Giuseppe. I have spoken to your mother Marietta.' Goffredomamèli thought: *Damn me. Damn me to hell.* He could

no longer self-induce amnesia. He decided the boy must have come from the world of his mother and father. Had been sent by the dead who were disappointed in him. He thought: *My father and my mother are angry, they're not resting in peace, but what have I done that's so wrong?* Then he remembered that when his father was dying he had not gone home. Had not wanted to witness his father's death. Then he remembered that when his mother was dying he had not held her hand, and his mother's eyes had reproached him: *I'm dying and that's how you act.* Then, who knows why, he remembered the corpses encountered during Mussolini's campaign, from Bullaleh to Degeh Bur, from Jijiga to Harar, from Korahe to Dire Dawa to Abbis Ababa. And he remembered that they had curled up like parchment. Those Abyssinians had all been dehusked. They had inhaled the fascists' rain. Goffredomamèli remembered it all and could no longer think *Who gives a damn*, and could no longer say: I don't give a damn. Instead, he thought: *Damn me. Damn me to hell.*

He stopped at a village for petrol. He spoke with no one. He moved like a ghost among the Galla farmers and slave merchants. He hunkered down between the wheels of the Fiat 618c and ate a tin of Chiarizia soup. A Somali passerby, in his shamma, looked at him in fear. Two black-cloaked Abyssinians pointed at him and then clutched one another as if for protection. Then Goffredomamèli climbed back into the truck and set off once again. He climbed the last string of ridges before one reaches the plateau nearing the sea. He drove carelessly. Every so often he swerved off course and skidded. The cliffs below him grew higher as he grew more careless. The great basalt mountain seemed to be waiting for him. A flock of turtledoves flew beside him for a stretch. Meanwhile, Goffredomamèli murmured: 'Damn me.'

Now the truck scrambled upwards like an ant on the back of a large mammal. Night fell. The air grew cooler. The windscreen was

wet with dew. Goffredomamèli started to play a game with himself: whenever he encountered a bend in the road, he was tempted to drive straight on and throw himself into the void, but then at the very last minute he yanked the steering wheel round and, laughing, he yelled, 'I'm not dying yet.' Now he laughed without stopping. In the dark, icy air of the mountain. *Maybe I've understood*, he thought. And he laughed. *Mamma, Papà, forgive me*. And he wept. *Maybe I did wrong, I chose the easy route, this war which isn't my war*. And he laughed again. *It certainly wasn't easy to be at your side when you were dying, it certainly wasn't easy to ask why all those bodies were burnt*. And he laughed.

A tree blocked the road. It had fallen and couldn't be passed. To the right of the tree lay the abyss. To the left lay the mountain. Goffredomamèli thought to himself: *And so the journey's over*. He climbed out of the truck but he didn't switch the engine off, or even the headlights. He walked up to the tree. The boy was sitting on the trunk. He was still naked and still painted white. Blood dripped from one temple onto his cheek and, from there, onto his shoulder. He massaged his belly. The skin had been scraped from the right-hand side of his body. A bone and some cartilage poked out from his shin. He waved at Goffredomamèli to sit down beside him, and the driver obeyed.

'The church of Yemrehanna Kristos isn't far from here. Later I'll show you the way,' said the boy. And Goffredomamèli replied: 'Alright.' Now the child took his hand: 'Tonight I spoke to a dead soldier. He said he remembers everything. He said he can't forget any of it and now he understands all the reasons why. He said he has learned to remember and that he likes it. Do you know who that soldier is?' And Goffredomamèli replied: 'It's me,' and he added: 'Now I should like to join my father and my mother.'

'You'll find them in the church, over there,' said the boy, and he pointed to a precipice on the edge of the mountain.

'I'll be off then,' said Goffredomamèli, and he stood up and caressed the child, then he climbed into his truck and freed the handbrake, then he put his foot to the gas and turned right, then he launched himself into the emptiness with his Fiat 618c.

Then came silence. And the black of the night and the void. The calm and the sadness for those who are absent. The darkness of all the time lost. The boy rose from his seat on the tree and limped his way to the edge of the mule track. He looked into the void and said simply: 'I see you. Talk to me.'



Zoya Barontini

Chronicles from the Dust

CRONACHE DALLA POLVERE

A ghost tale from the Italian past. A mosaic novel about Fascist colonialism's heart of darkness.

1936: The Italian Army conquers the capital city of the Ethiopian Empire, Addis Ababa. One of the blackest pages in Italian history begins: the occupation of the Abyssinian Territories, the reprisals, the defiant struggle of the Arbegnoch resistance fighters, destruction, massacres and the use of chemical weapons. This mosaic novel recalls the horror of that war and of that era, which the local inhabitants have never forgotten, and takes us on a journey into a time and a place peopled with war drums, dust and wind, Ethiopian guerrillas, Italian soldiers and mysterious ghostly presences.

Zoya Barontini is the collective name that a group of Italian writers have chosen for themselves as the authors of this mosaic novel, curated by Jadel Andreetto and illustrated by Alberto Merlin. The authors who have taken part in the project are Massimo Gardella (1973), Lorenza Ghinelli (1981), Sirio Lubreto (1973), Gaia Manzini (1974), Michela Monferrini (1986), Davide Morosinotto (1980), Davide Orecchio (1969), Guglielmo Pispisa (1971), Igiaba Scego (1974), Aldo Soliani (1971) and Nicoletta Vallorani (1959).



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