AUSTRALIAN DICTIONARY OF BIOGRAPHY - ONLINE EDITION

Carboni, Raffaello (1817 - 1875?)

CARBONI, RAFFAELLO (1817-1875), linguist, traveller, author and composer, was born on 15 December 1817 at Urbino, Italy, son of Biagio Carboni and Catterina Girolama, née Fioravanti. In adolescence that restlessness which characterized his later life was already apparent. He attended the University of Urbino in 1835-36 but about 1837 moved to Rome where, with a recommendation from Prince Filippo Albani, he entered the seminary of Santa Trinità. Suspected of collaborating with the French republicans, particularly the group centred on *La réforme*, he was imprisoned briefly in August 1840 but, according to his own account in *Lo Scotta-o-Tinge*, 2 (Rome, 1873), was immediately released when the papal authorities realized that petty spite rather than genuine suspicion had prompted a superior to report him. At this time he developed his talent for learning languages. The Santa Trinità Church was then a centre for foreign travellers and Carboni learnt French, German, Spanish and took English lessons from W. Vincent Eyre, vice-rector of the English College at Rome. He left the seminary when Prince Alessandro Torlonia took him as a clerk into the Torlonia bank. In the 1840s he was encouraged to join the Young Italy movement by Giovanni Battista Cattabeni and Mattia Montecchi; the former became a colonel in Garibaldi's army and the latter a supporter of Mazzini. In the Roman campaign of 1849 Carboni received three wounds, one of which, in his left leg, never properly closed and intermittently troubled him for the rest of his life.

From 1849 exile, self-imposed but necessary, took him on a period of European travel. He visited Paris, Berlin, Malta, Cologne, Frankfurt, Hanover, but spent the most time in London, where he lived at 4 Castle Court, Cornhill. There he claimed to have been accepted as a member of the College of Preceptors as a linguist, having offered Italian, French, German and Spanish. In 1852 he was attracted, like many others, by articles, particularly those in the *Illustrated London News*, on the gold discoveries in Australia and set sail for Melbourne in the middle of the year.

Carboni began his career as a digger at Ballarat and had immediate success at Golden Point, but early in 1853 he moved with many others to Magpie Gully. However, when his 'washing stuff' was stolen, his comrade and he decided to part company; the flies got in his eyes and after a bad bout of dysentery he made up his mind to turn shepherd. He was a less successful sheep tender than he was digger, and after briefly living with an Aboriginal tribe he succumbed again to gold fever and returned to Ballarat. Until then he had paid little heed to the rumbling complaints about the price of licences: 'the shoe had not pinched my toe yet' (*The Eureka Stockade* (Melbourne, 1963), p. 7). He had attended meetings, in particular one at Bakery Hill in November 1853, and if he had spoken it had been 'for the fun of the thing'. But in this second period as a digger he was caught up in events and stayed to contribute no mean part to the Eureka revolt. Described by William Withers as 'a shrewd restless little man … under the middle height, with reddish hair and red beard cut short, and small hazel eyes that had a fiery twinkle beneath a broad forehead and rather shaggy eyebrows', he was a controversial figure among the miners. An articulate European with revolutionary experience, he was appointed by Peter Lalor, whom he admired, to organize the foreigners behind the stockade and was in a small group who went to the camp to petition for the discontinuance of licence hunting. As a member of the inner committee, though he was absent when the soldiers attacked on the morning of 3 December, and his enemies said deliberately absent (John Lynch, 'The story of the Eureka Stockade', *Austral Light*, October 1893–March 1894), he was one of the twelve charged with high treason but acquitted since no jury would convict them.

A letter to William Archer clearly shows that Carboni had intended to leave Australia much earlier but now prolonged his stay. Elected with nine others on 14 July 1855 to the new local court at Ballarat, he made forceful contributions on the question of legal representation in the court; but the probable purpose of his delay was to write the account of the stockade as a tribute to those who fell and as a vindication of his own name. The book, now rare, was sold by 'the fiery, lachrymose, faithful Raffaello' on the first anniversary of the stockade.

Carboni sailed on 18 January 1856, the only passenger in the *Impératrice Eugénie*, and used some of the

gold found at Ballarat to pay for his travels. He had already sent some of it to his brother, Don Antonio, and a small piece as a souvenir to an aunt, M. Veronica Fioravanti. After three years travel in the East, visiting among other places, Jerusalem and Bethlehem, he returned to Italy via London and Paris and worked for a time as interpreter with the French army at Milan, gaining, like all others in that service, a commemorative medal. He later transferred in 1860 to Genoa where Agostino Bertani was organizing troops and supplies for the 'Expedition of the Thousand' to Sicily. Carboni left Genoa in the *Veloce* for Palermo where he arrived on 24 June. His linguistic knowledge afforded him a position of responsibility and he worked in the administration as interpreter and translator, starting in the office of the statesman Francesco Crispi. For a time he was entrusted with the secret Anglo-Italian correspondence between Crispi and Lord John Russell and was promoted sub-commissar of war, grade 1, on 18 October. Soon afterwards he became assistant to Ippolito Nievo, the brilliant young writer who died in the *Ercole* disaster early next year. Carboni left Palermo on 28 May 1861, bound for Turin.

The national movement known as the Risorgimento had provided Carboni with an occupation which suited his talents and his ideals. He had enjoyed the company of men who were to hold important positions in the new régime, but social distinctions, temporarily levelled in the revolutionary years, revived when unity was established, and demobilization left Carboni unemployed and financially embarrassed. He travelled in Europe for a time, then settled in Naples for reasons of health. There he continued to publish his works, having already offered *Rita* (Turin, 1859), *La Campana Della Gancia* (Palermo, 1861) and *La Santola* (Milan and Turin, 1861), a copy of which he sent to Peter Lalor and Sir Redmond Barry. These and other works were separate items of his two *Magna Opera*, *Lo Scotta-o-Tinge*, a collection of libretti and plays, and *La Ceciliana*, their musical counterpart. None was represented on the stage nor has his music been publicly performed. The band of the Neapolitan Guard, he lamented bitterly in the preface to *Schiantapalmi* (Naples, 1867), had refused to equip itself with the specially large bells necessary to render the overture to *La Campana Della Gancia*. He returned to Rome where he published *Lo Scotta-o-Tinge* in two parts in 1872-73, the last edition of *La Ceciliana* having been published there in 1870. He died probably on 24 October 1875 in Rome at St James's Hospital. In the death certificate most likely to be his, he is described as 'unmarried' and 'man of letters'.

Carboni Raffaello, as he signed himself, was primarily an Italian patriot. From 1840, the first of the five times when he was imprisoned, a large part of his time and energy was directed to promoting the welfare of his country, by which he hoped also to gain personal renown. It is therefore ironical that his memory is respected in Australia while in Italy he is hardly known. His personality is still the subject of controversy, for example, in the creative literature on the Eureka stockade, such as Louis Esson, *The Southern Cross*, and Edward Timms, *Red Mask*, and his little book, at first suspected of inaccuracy but reprinted four times in thirty years, is now recognized as an important source for a turning point in Australia's history. *The Eureka Stockade* never received its 'proper edition' in Italian, as promised in the *Nota Bene* of the first edition, nor through lack of funds did he include his 'antarctic bitter-sweet' in his collected works. But his Australian experiences prompted another work, *Gilburnia*, published in the first volume of *Lo Scotta-o-Tinge*, a mime in eight scenes with prologue and moral, preceded by an 'antarctic vocabulary' where certain Australian terms are given with Italian transcription and interpretation.

Despite his lack of recognition, his patriotism did not wane though he was obviously disturbed to the point of paranoia that the very people who collectively were Italy refused him the fame he so passionately desired. Violently anti-clerical and anti-French, his works admit a self-confessed influence of Guerrazzi's *L'asino* and could be described as a fusion between the eighteenth-century reviver of the *commedia dell'arte*, Carlo Gozzi, and the twentieth-century absurd theatre, firmly influenced by the delight in verbal correlation and invention that characterizes the work of the fifteenth-century Florentine, Luigi Pulci. This linguistic exuberance, also obvious in *The Eureka Stockade*, makes some of his works difficult to understand, and could therefore lead to such critical strictures as 'wild' and 'undisciplined'. It certainly was not to the taste of nineteenth-century Italian theatre-goers.

Select Bibliography

W. B. Withers, *The History of Ballarat*, 2nd ed (Ballarat, 1887); G. Serle, ‘Introduction’, R. Carboni, *The Eureka Stockade* (Melb, 1963); Historical Studies, *Eureka supplement* (Melb, 1965); *Strenna dei Romanisti*,

18 (1957) pp 119-24; Archer papers (National Library of Australia and University of Melbourne Archives); Bargoni papers (Risorgimento Museum, Rome); Bertani papers Risorgimento Museum, Milan); Crispi papers (State Archives, Rome); I fondi dell'archivio di Sicilia and Esercito Italia Meridionale (State Archives, Turin). More on the resources

Author: Jennifer Lorch

Print Publication Details: Jennifer Lorch, 'Carboni, Raffaello (1817 - 1875?)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 3, Melbourne University Press, 1969, pp 352-354.
