



**HAL**  
open science

## Virgilia and her men

Isabelle Felici

► **To cite this version:**

Isabelle Felici. Virgilia and her men. Women Editors and Translators beyond Borders: Women in Anarchist. Transnational Print Culture (1890-1939), Lucia Campanella Maria Miguelañez, Mar 2024, Madrid, Spain. ⟨hal-04940524⟩

**HAL Id: hal-04940524**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04940524v1>**

Submitted on 11 Feb 2025

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



HAL Authorization

Isabelle Felici

**Virgilia and her men.  
Male comments on Virgilia D'Andrea's publishing activities**

International Conference Women Editors and Translators beyond Borders: Women in Anarchist. Transnational Print Culture (1890-1939)  
Madrid, 19-21 March 2024.

## CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL

### EDITORAS Y TRADUCTORAS MÁS ALLÁ DE LAS FRONTERAS: MUJERES EN LA CULTURA IMPRESA TRANSNACIONAL ANARQUISTA (1890-1939)

#### INAUGURACIÓN

Martes 19 de marzo de 2024

**"Kati Horna en ¿ESPAÑA?**

**Impresiones anarquistas,  
fotografía y Guerra Civil"**

Conferencia a cargo de Almudena Rubio, Instituto Internacional de Historia Social, Amsterdam.

**Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo, 18 hs.**

#### MESAS DE DISCUSIÓN

Miércoles 20 y jueves 21 de marzo de 2024

Ponencias presenciales y en línea y debate.

Asistencia libre con inscripción en la [página web del congreso](#).

**Universidad Carlos III, 9h30 a18h30**

#### CIERRE

Jueves 21 de marzo de 2024

Cierre y consideraciones finales a cargo de Teresa Abelló Güell, Universitat de Barcelona.

**Universidad Carlos III, 18h30.**



Universidad Carlos III,  
Campus Puerta de Toledo,  
Ronda de Toledo, 1.  
Aula 1.A.08

Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo,  
Calle de las Peñuelas, 41

## EXPOSICIÓN

### MOLDEADORAS DE LA IDEA: MUJERES EN LA CULTURA IMPRESA ANARQUISTA 19 de marzo al 26 de abril de 2024

Exposición de materiales del archivo de la Fundación y de otros archivos públicos y privados, a cura de Lucía Campanella, María Migueláñez y Jordi Maíz.

**Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo, lunes a viernes, de 10:00 a 14:00 horas / martes a viernes, de 17:00 a 20:00 horas**



Este proyecto ha recibido financiación del programa de investigación e innovación Horizonte Europa de la Unión Europea en el marco del acuerdo de subvención Marie Skłodowska-Curie n° 101065157. No obstante, los puntos de vista y opiniones expresados son exclusivamente los del autor y no reflejan necesariamente los de la Unión Europea. Ni la Unión Europea ni la autoridad que concede la subvención pueden ser consideradas responsables de las mismas.



Proyecto 221604.01/1

Abstract:

Virgilia D'Andrea (1888-1933) was a teacher, poet, journalist and lecturer. She is one of the few women listed in the bibliography compiled by Leonardo Bettini in the 1970s (*Bibliografia dell'anarchismo* vol. 1&2, now on line <https://bettini.ficedl.info/>), and one of the few women having edited of a journal, *Veglia*, published in Paris in 1926-1927. Given the scarcity of women whose leading role in the movement has been recognised, it is not surprising that studies on the life and work of Virgilia D'Andrea are increasing, particularly concerning the time she spent in the United States where she had joined her partner Armando Borghi in New York in 1928. There she died prematurely in 1933. Errico Malatesta called her the poet of anarchy, Armando Borghi referred to her in some chapters of his autobiography and after her death several Italian anarchists, including Luigi Fabbri, wrote about her.

This paper aims to analyse the statements about Virgilia D'Andrea's work made by the men in her political entourage and to contrast the resulting image with the one that emerges from her poetry and journalistic work, especially through her role as director of *Veglia*. By comparing these representations, I aim to explore the ways used by Virgilia D'Andrea to establish herself in a predominantly male environment.

Resumen:

Virgilia D'Andrea (1888-1933) fue profesora, poeta, periodista y conferenciante. Es una de las pocas mujeres que figuran en la bibliografía recopilada por Leonardo Bettini en la década de 1970 (*Bibliografía dell'anarchismo* vol. 1&2, ahora en línea <https://bettini.ficedl.info/>), y una de las pocas mujeres que editaron una revista, *Veglia*, publicada en París en 1926-1927. Dada la escasez de mujeres cuyo protagonismo en el movimiento ha sido reconocido, no es de extrañar que los estudios sobre la vida y la obra de Virgilia D'Andrea sean cada vez más numerosos, sobre todo en lo que respecta al tiempo que pasó en Estados Unidos, donde se había reunido con su compañero Armando Borghi en Nueva York en 1928. Allí murió prematuramente en 1933. Errico Malatesta la llamó la poetisa de la anarquía, Armando Borghi se refirió a ella en algunos capítulos de su autobiografía y, tras su muerte, varios anarquistas italianos, entre ellos Luigi Fabbri, escribieron sobre ella.

Este artículo pretende analizar las declaraciones sobre la obra de Virgilia D'Andrea realizadas por los hombres de su entorno político y contrastar la imagen resultante con la que se desprende de su poesía y de su obra periodística, especialmente a través de su papel como directora de *Veglia*. Comparando estas representaciones, pretendo explorar las vías utilizadas por Virgilia D'Andrea para establecerse en un entorno predominantemente masculino.



I'd like to thank Lucia and Maria for organising this very interesting conference. I have met Lucia before in places where communication was a challenge due to the number of languages spoken. It is also a challenge for me to speak today in English, with slides in Spanish about a woman who lived in Italy, then France and the United States! I find it useful for my research to experience in the flesh the linguistic issues linked to migration. Virgilia D'Andrea had exactly this kind of issues since she was forced to leave Italy and change countries several times during Fascism. She was an anarchist, a teacher, a journalist, a publisher in a male dominated milieu. That's the reason why this paper aims to analyse the statements about Virgilia D'Andrea's work made by the men in her political entourage and to contrast the resulting image with the one that emerges from her journalistic work, especially when she published the journal *Veglia* during her stay in Paris.

Virgilia D'Andrea is one of the rare female figures of Italian anarchism and Italian anarchist press. Unfortunately, her life was very short. Born in 1888, in Sulmona, Abruzzo, she died in her forty-six, in 1933, after having suffered from health problems for at least a decade. The story of her life didn't start very happily: she lost her mother when she was a baby and her father when she was six. Because she came from a well-off background, her relatives had the means to lock her up in a religious institution. There, she learned to live in solitude and she became a rebel, while developing a passion for studying and writing. For a short time, she was a schoolteacher. Teaching brought her into close contact with the underprivileged and forgotten populations, especially during the 1915 earthquake in Abruzzo. The experience of the earthquake deepened her anger towards the system. As a teacher and victim of the earthquake, she observed how the State forgot about the people when they needed help but then remembered them again during the conscription for the First World War.



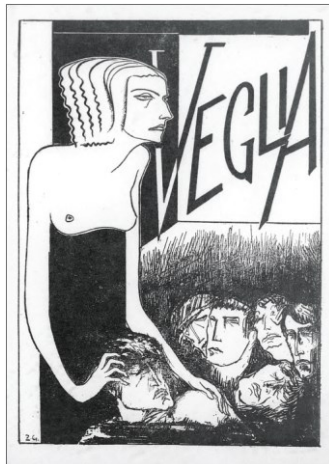
*Earthquake in Abruzzo 1915*

Virgilia D'Andrea began to participate in socialist groups and then, when she met her companion in life and struggle, Armando Borghi, in 1917, in anarchist circles. She became active in the Italian Syndicalist Union of which Borghi was the secretary and she started writing for the periodical *Guerra di classe*. She was sent to prison in 1920, along with the entire Union's committee. During the rise of Fascism, she became very close to Errico Malatesta, a prominent figure of Italian and international anarchism, who had just returned from exile in London. In 1923, she left Italy with Borghi to attend a syndicalist congress in Germany and also avoid arrest: she never returned to Italy. She also travelled to the Netherlands and settled in Paris. Her situation was precarious in France because Borghi was a clandestine and was threatened with expulsion. This was the reason why next they left for North America, he first in October 1926, and D'Andrea two years later, in November 1928. Despite her poor health, she gave talks all

over the United States. She died the day after the publication of her last book, in May 1933, *Torce nella notte*.

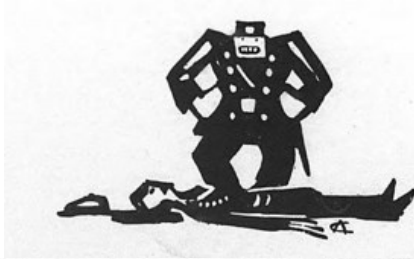


Virgilia D'Andrea's works fall into various categories: articles, of which we don't have yet a complete list, poetry, essays, the texts of her talks and the journal she edited in Paris: *Veglia*. As I promised to Lucia, let's concentrate on *Veglia*.



*Veglia* (which means Vigil) has a number of original features. Its graphics were innovative and its format was seldom used in the anarchist press. Eight issues of 24 richly illustrated pages were published in 1926 and 1927.





TUTTA LA VOSTRA VOCE PER SACCO E VANZETTI



(Xilografia del pittore Zucchi, ispirata ai due martiri.)

La minaccia su Sacco e Vanzetti persiste: VEGLIAMO!



(Xilografia del pittore Dumas, per "Veglia")

IL DITTATORE

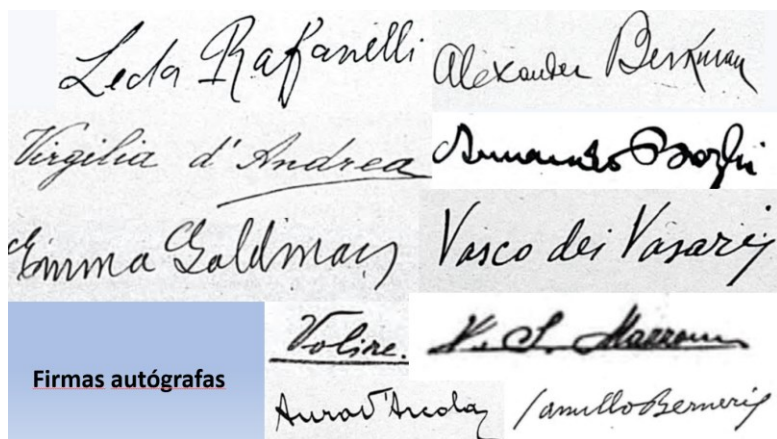


Xilografia del pittore DANESCO per "Veglia")

The number of illustrations was justified by the journal's purpose: it used art as a means of communicating its political ideas. Here are a few examples of those illustrations. This wasn't a new idea: another journal published in Italy was on the same line, *Vita*, one of the last anarchist periodicals published before the reinforcement of fascism. *Vita's* editorial programme explained how art can contribute to the popularisation of an idea. The journal *Vita* used art as a way to evade censorship in Fascist Italy. Even though *Veglia* was watched both by the French police and by the Italian spies who infiltrated into the anarchist milieu, it didn't have to evade censorship. Its political programme was to create (recreate) union between anarchists, as announced in the circular sent out by Virgilia D'Andrea in January 1926:

It will be the journal of all anarchists: each of us will find in it a feeling, a pain, a memory, a part of our spirit, our secret, our infinite aspirations. It will not demand that anyone renounce, diminish or devalue the particular approaches of their current, but it will work to build a solid spiritual union between us all, a union necessary for the defence of the vital essence of anarchism, an essence which is common to all anarchists.

The decision not to differentiate between the various currents of anarchism was rather rare. It can be explained by the circumstances of its publication. At the time, other periodicals in Italian, particularly in France, reflected the ongoing controversies within Italian anarchism. *Veglia* intended to mitigate the effects of the split between the anarchist currents and it managed to attract the signatures of the leading figures of Italian and international anarchism of the time. Many articles were accompanied by the autographs of their author to attest the contacts *Veglia* had established with them.



The prospect of Virgilia D'Andrea's departure to join her partner influenced the dynamics of the journal, which was not intended to be published over the long term. Nevertheless, Virgilia D'Andrea had recreated an "anarchist family" in Paris and established a network of solidarity, that helped her to publish *Veglia*.

This network was composed mainly by men. Inevitably, Virgilia D'Andrea was often referred to as the "companion of", the "friend of", although she never missed an opportunity to speak in the first person. The general impression one gets reading about her is that her political work arrives on the second level, after her human qualities. I selected the words of a few men who were close to her: Malatesta, Luigi Fabbri, she met in Bologna when she began her activism, Eusebio Carbó, she met while in exile, and her partner. Additionally, I found it interesting to include a quote from a police officer.

Let's start with Borghi who, as you'd expect while recalling memories, primarily focused on himself. It seems that he also understood their relationship to be centred on him:

She had the same opinions as me.

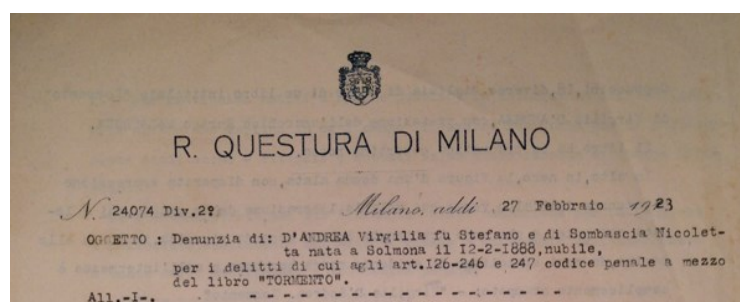
Virgilia was my counsellor.

Virgilia duplicated my work and travelled for me. (Borghi, *Mezzo secolo di anarchia* 174)

In fact, there are testimonies of the work she did for him and of how she advocated for him in some occasions.

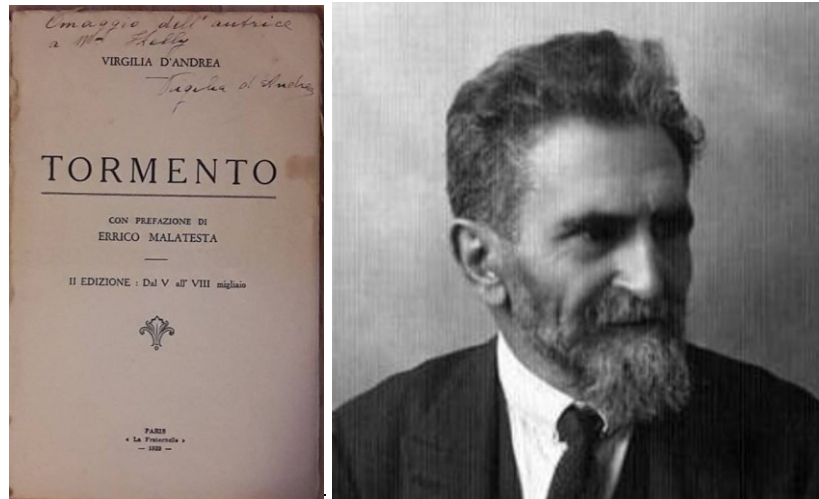
The preface Malatesta wrote for the collection of poems D'Andrea published in 1922, *Tormento*, gave her a lot of visibility. Thousands of copies were printed and seized by the police. One of D'Andrea's best readers was the head of the police in Milan. Here is his accurate description of her volume:

The book is written in verse, and the verses are bursting with feline bile against Italy in its powers and social order; those are verses written thoughtfully and studiously, to incite crime, excite class hatred and vilify the Army.



In a way it is exactly what Malatesta said in his preface, calling Virgilia D’Andrea the poetess of anarchy. According to Malatesta:

Virgilia uses literature as a weapon and she is worthy of taking the place left vacant by Pietro Gori. (Pietro Gori is the author of the famous song *Addio Lugano Bella*)



At least Malatesta and the head of the police speak of D’Andrea as herself, as an author. In other texts by men about her, it isn’t always the case, maybe because a lot of those texts are obituaries, written by anarchists who knew her well. For instance, Eusebio Carbó highlighted her human qualities by comparing her with four men, Gori, Malatesta, Fabbri and Galleani.



Luigi Fabbri wrote another warm tribute to Virgilia D’Andrea on the occasion of her death, mentioning her works, her books and the “successful journal” she published in Paris, but he too compared her to Gori rather than giving her a place of her own.



These illustrative examples give the impression that Virgilia D'Andrea's human qualities were more important to her male friends than her political activities. Would we do the same while talking about a man? Would we highlight his qualities comparing them with somebody else's? Would we ever say about a male writer that he spoke "first and foremost to the heart and imagination"? Wouldn't we explain what was his "clear and precise thought"?

Even though it would be indispensable to analyse D'Andrea's whole writings, a look at *Veglia* suffices to understand that the journal deals with a lot of different topics: economics, fascism and imperialism, it contains pieces on the history of anarchism, on the political situation in various countries. Some articles mention women: one on motherhood and social injustice, one about women in the Russian revolution, by Emma Goldman. Art in relation with anarchism is also present, as the main objective of the journal. There are few articles by Virgilia D'Andrea herself, which is enough to understand that it was her writing style which emphasised the sentimentality and enough to understand that the ideas she expressed were the result of her thinking and will to fight. The conclusion we come to about the men I've quoted is hardly surprising: they are very conservative about the role of women and see them mainly as helpers and supporters, rarely as key players. Although D'Andrea has never spoken out directly on the issue, she has always acted as a protagonist, notably by directing the publication of *Veglia*.

That's the reason why I would like to conclude with some of Virgilia D'Andrea's words, published in the first issue of *Veglia*, in a text where she pays tribute to all the people suffering from political and social injustice and where she plays on the conventional but still effective image of the opposition between light and darkness:

It seemed to me to see, that evening, faithful and sublime Vigils waiting for the day.  
To be awake at the first dawn tomorrow.  
To answer aloud at the first chime tomorrow.  
All our great, immense pain has merged with the blue. It became the mountain of light  
that overthrew the darkness.

Thanks for your attention! Gracias por la atención !

