

# **90 Years Later: Bartolomeo Vanzetti's Letters Reconsidered**

© 2017

Megan Emily Jones

B.A., Indiana University, 2014

Submitted to the graduate degree program in English and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

---

Chair: Dr. Maryemma Graham  
University of Kansas

---

Dr. Philip Barnard  
University of Kansas

---

Dr. Christoph Irscher  
Indiana University

Date Defended: November 1, 2017

This thesis committee for Megan Emily Jones certifies that this is the approved version of the  
following thesis:

**90 Years Later: Bartolomeo Vanzetti's Letters Reconsidered**

---

Chair: Dr. Maryemma Graham

Date Approved: November 1, 2017

## **Abstract**

90 years after Sacco and Vanzetti's infamous executions, it is time for a fresh look at their letters and a new edition of them. Although the most recent edition of Sacco's and Vanzetti's English letters, *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti* edited by Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter, is riddled with errors and omissions, it has had an indelible impact on the mythos and historical understanding of the Sacco and Vanzetti case. In part because of that edition, Sacco and Vanzetti have been presented as mirror characters whose lives were necessarily intertwined together instead of as individuals whose fates were only linked by the actions of the State. Both Sacco's and Vanzetti's narratives are worthy of study apart from considerations of culpability or fairness of their trial, but this has not often been done. The first step in reconsidering the men and their case is a new, complete and unedited edition of Vanzetti's letters, apart from Sacco's.

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis would not have been possible without the *Everett Helm Visiting Fellowship* from the Lilly Library at Indiana University.

## Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	V
INTRODUCTION .....	1
PROBLEMS WITH THE JACKSON AND FRANKFURTER EDITION (JFE).....	4
IMPACT OF THE JACKSON AND FRANKFURTER EDITION ON SACCO AND VANZETTI'S LEGACY .....	7
THE CASE FOR A NEW EDITION.....	11
THE LETTERS .....	14
Undated .....	15
April 10, 1924 (evening) .....	16
July 22, 1925 .....	18
June 17, 18, and 23, 1926.....	21
October 3, 1926.....	24
December 4, 1926.....	28
May 3, 1927 and 3 Maggio 1927 .....	33
May 22, 1927.....	39
CONCLUSION.....	45
APPENDIX .....	46
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	48

## Introduction

I first encountered Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in my high school history textbook. I remember seeing that iconic image of Sacco and Vanzetti in which they were staring straight at the camera with their arms chained together. I asked my history teacher about it, unsatisfied with the brief blurb under the photograph which said that they were Italian anarchists executed in Massachusetts in 1927 for a robbery and homicide that they may or may not have committed. He told me not to worry about the men because nothing about their case would be on the final exam. I mostly forgot about them, until a few years later when I was at the Lilly Library at Indiana University Bloomington. I recognized their names in the finding aid for the Mary Donovan Hapgood archive, so I read through all their letters. I was especially captivated by the numerous letters written by Bartolomeo Vanzetti.

As I read the letters in the archive, I started to wonder if anyone had published them. Sure enough, in 1928, Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter compiled an edition of letters that the Sacco and Vanzetti Defense Committee collected by “urg[ing] all friends of Sacco and Vanzetti to aid [them] by sending in any letters they may have.”<sup>1</sup> That edition, *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, fulfilled the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee’s desire to preserve the memory of men and to provide character evidence of their innocence.<sup>2</sup> I immediately found a copy of that edition, but something startled me about it.

Many of the letters in the edition were changed significantly or were left out entirely. Jackson and Frankfurter included a list of what they excised from the edition in the preface:

---

<sup>1</sup> Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, *Bulletin* 18 (1928): 5.

<sup>2</sup> Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, ed. Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter (New York: Viking Press, 1928)

“personal references, allusions of interest only to the correspondent, repetition of matter in other letters, passages whose meaning is entirely obscure, or lengthy recitals of fact relating to political movements in other countries.”<sup>3</sup> Jackson and Frankfurter claimed that these omissions created a “greater degree of unity” and that a “minimal number of textual changes had been made, chiefly where comparison with other parts of the text has revealed mistakes in spelling due to carelessness or stress.”<sup>4</sup> They also asserted that in the edition “the authentic character of the letters [was] unimpaired.”<sup>5</sup> A Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee bulletin said that “in the editing of these letters especial [*sic*] care has been taken not to eliminate any statements of the two men merely because they might offend some readers. The letters are the unexpurgated pictures of the men.”<sup>6</sup> Bruce Watson, author of *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, The Murders and the Judgment of Mankind*, only recognized that two phrases from Vanzetti’s letters, “I will try to see Thayer death before his pronounciation of our sentence” and a “ranting against his ‘betrayers . . . [and] murderers” and one phrase, “Revenge our death” from a joint letter were omitted from the Jackson and Frankfurter edition.<sup>7</sup> Watson said that other deletions, of which he admitted were many, were “far more mundane—a greeting to a friend, a redundant call for revolution echoing many included here, or another cry of innocence. As written and published, these letters bear witness to the two men, presenting Sacco and Vanzetti in all their perplexing duality, as sentimental militants, hopeful, bitter, resigned.”<sup>8</sup> However, there were deletions in the letters from Vanzetti to Mary Donovan, secretary of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, which did

---

<sup>3</sup> Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, ed. Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), lii

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, lii

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, lii

<sup>6</sup> Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, *Bulletin*, 18

<sup>7</sup> Watson, Bruce. Forward to *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, ed. Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), x.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, x.

not fit any of Jackson and Frankfurter's stated criteria for omission and which Watson neglected to mention. For example, Jackson and Frankfurter removed critical portions of this passage from Vanzetti's May 22, 1927 letter to Mary Donovan:

I felt to jump to they throad— I know the privileges and the kindness that the cheriff and his difendents have had for German spie and cold blood murderers. But do you want me to spoil my blood and my kidneys in useless wrath? No, no, one day, if I can, I will tell it to the world— of course, if the governor's counsel will interview me, I will tell this too him, just to be sure; and if I lost— — to ather to revenge me— But to spoil myself by allow these things to overwork me— no, it is no wise. You should do just the same.

Vanzetti was upset about being treated unfairly by the prison guards and wanted to seek justice for himself. He was even ready to tell the Governor of Massachusetts that he was being treated worse than the "German spie and cold blood murderers." He also wanted others to seek revenge on his behalf for this if he lost at getting the justice he deserved in this situation, but felt he should not waste his time at a fruitless enterprise. Jackson and Frankfurter changed this passage to

I felt like to jump at their throat. . . But, do you want me to spoil my blood and kidneys in useless wrath? No, no, some day if I can, I will tell it to the world. . . . But to spoil myself by allowing these things to over-work me—no, it is not wise. You should do just the same.<sup>9</sup>

The material excised in this letter does not fit any of Jackson and Frankfurter's categories and the claim that the sheriff and his defendants give the "German spie and cold blood murderers" special privileges is far from "mundane." This is just one example of the numerous excisions that make a new edition of Vanzetti's letters necessary.

The Jackson and Frankfurter edition of letters has contributed to an inaccurate portrayal of the men by selectively quoting their words, misrepresenting some basic biographical facts, and contributing to the false narrative in which Sacco and Vanzetti are treated as two parallel aspects

---

<sup>9</sup> Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, ed. Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 192.



of the same entity, instead of as individuals who faced similar circumstances and whose fates were linked together by the State. Vanzetti's unpublished letters are critical for a better and more accurate historical understanding of Sacco, Vanzetti and their case.

### **Problems with the Jackson and Frankfurter Edition (JFE)**

The Jackson and Frankfurter edition (JFE) is the most cited primary source concerning the Sacco-Vanzetti case, aside from the court transcripts.<sup>10</sup> Because of the heavy reliance on this edition, false information presented in it has made its way into most historical accounts of the men. For example, the JFE was the first to state 1908 as the year of Sacco's arrival in the United States. A footnote to Sacco's November 23, 1923 letter to Mrs. Evans states, "Sacco landed with his brother in Boston from Italy in April, 1908. He was seventeen the twenty-second of that month."<sup>11</sup> Citing this footnote, Paul Avrich wrote in *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* that Vanzetti arrived in the United States after Sacco;<sup>12</sup> Susan Tejada contextualized Sacco and Vanzetti within the "jostling crowd of 129,000 Italians who came to America in 1908, their heads filled with hopes for a better future;"<sup>13</sup> Michael Topp emphasized that Sacco and Vanzetti arrived in the same year "separately,"<sup>14</sup> and Joughin and Morgan wrote, "In April, 1908, as a boy of seventeen, Sacco came to the United States. . . on June 9, 1908, [Vanzetti] left for the United States with the blessings of his family."<sup>15</sup> While it is true that Vanzetti immigrated

---

<sup>10</sup> *The Sacco-Vanzetti Case: Transcript of the Record of the Trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in the Courts of Massachusetts and Subsequent Proceedings 1920-7* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1928)

<sup>11</sup> Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, ed. Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 8.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 13.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Tejada, *In Search of Sacco and Vanzetti: Double Lives, Troubled Times, and the Massachusetts Murder Case That Shook the World* (Lebanon: Northeastern University Press, 2012), 13.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Topp, *The Sacco and Vanzetti Case: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 6.

<sup>15</sup> Louis Joughin and Edmund M. Morgan, *The Legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 456.

to the United States in 1908, Sacco did not actually arrive in the United States until the spring of 1909—a year later than all biographical accounts have noted. Nicola Sacco, whose birth name was Ferdinando Sacco, departed Naples, Italy with his older brother Sabino Sacco on March 31, 1909 on the *S.S. Romanic*. They arrived in Boston on April 12, 1909.<sup>16</sup> Because the ship docked on April 12th, ten days before his birthday, accounts that Sacco was 17 when he arrived are accurate. Passenger lists for the ship *La Provence* show that Vanzetti departed La Havre, France on the ship *La Provence* and arrived on Ellis Island on June 19, 1908, almost an entire year before Sacco set foot in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Every consulted biography of Sacco and Vanzetti either cites the Jackson and Frankfurter edition’s footnote reference for 1908, or has taken his arrival in that year to be common knowledge. This incorrect date has cultivated a double narrative of the men—one that creates a convenient beginning point for their story.

Sacco’s arrival is not the only incorrect date in the JFE. Jackson and Frankfurter dated Vanzetti’s July 18, 1925 letter from Vanzetti to Mary Donovan as July 8, 1925, and Vanzetti’s December 30, 1925 letter to Mary Donovan as December 5, 1925 in their edition. “Dec., 30, 1925” is plainly written in the top right corner of the holograph letter in the M.D. Hapgood mss. Vanzetti discusses the “two tablets of writing papers and the politician pencils which [Mary Donovan] sent to [him] soon after this later visit,” which were likely a Christmas present and not a spontaneous gift which the incorrect date suggests. There were other significant changes made to this letter.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> *Book Indexes to Boston Passenger Lists, 1899-1940*. Microfilm, T790, 107 rolls. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>17</sup> Bartolomeo Vanzetti Passenger Record. *Statue of Liberty - Ellis Island Foundation*.

<sup>18</sup> Other changes made include the omission of Vanzetti’s comment that he remains “busy as a Jew,” a joke about Christians was changed, and the punctuation in a poem Vanzetti wrote was altered in such a way that it changed the meaning entirely; Megan Jones, “Vanzetti’s Voice: A Critical Look at the Letters of Bartolomeo Vanzetti,” (undergraduate thesis: Indiana University Bloomington, 2014)

In their preface, Jackson and Frankfurter attempted to distinguish Sacco and Vanzetti from each other, but those differences centered on Sacco's and Vanzetti's knowledge of English and their positions within the prison. For example, while Vanzetti worked because he had also been convicted of a hold-up in Plymouth, Sacco was still waiting to be sentenced so he did not work and therefore rarely left his cell.<sup>19</sup> The men were only considered in relation to each other and their case, and not as individuals whose words deserve to be read outside of that context. The portions of the letters that Jackson and Frankfurter considered important, therefore, were those that reflected upon either their innocence or their positionality with regard to their case. Jackson and Frankfurter did not consider their opinions about matters that they deemed trivial necessary for readers to believe them innocent. The reduction of Sacco and Vanzetti to their case is apparent.

Jackson and Frankfurter also conflated Sacco's and Vanzetti's anarchist beliefs and opinions, stating "readers of these letters of Sacco and Vanzetti will be struck by the depth of their reliance on the doctrines of anarchy, and the consistency of their belief that what happened to them in those fatal seven years happened because they were anarchists."<sup>20</sup> While Sacco and Vanzetti were comrades and both participated in the anarchist community in Boston, they were not joined at the wrist like that iconic photograph of them suggests nor were they always in agreement.

Jackson and Frankfurter wrote, "to their friends, the calm with which they accepted the failure of their long struggle for freedom was a manifestation of their innocence and a

---

<sup>19</sup> Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, ed. Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), li-lii.

<sup>20</sup> Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, ed. Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), liii.

confirmation of their true character. To the rest of the world, their character can only be revealed by these letters, written for their own and others' comfort during the years of waiting, and by the simple courage with which they met their death."<sup>21</sup> This contrasts sharply with a *Boston Daily Globe* report on August 15, 1927: "Sacco continued his hunger strike, refusing all meals offered him yesterday. Vanzetti, on the other hand, ate heartily of the meals served him and, when not eating, spent his time writing letters to several persons, only one of which was held back because of its being written in Italian."<sup>22</sup> Sacco often withdrew from the world; Vanzetti involved himself as much as he could in the world outside.

### **Impact of the Jackson and Frankfurter Edition on Sacco and Vanzetti's Legacy**

Because there have been so many creative works based on the Sacco and Vanzetti case and a mythos has been cultivated around the men, it is easy to consider them to be mirror characters of each other—whose traits signal a perfect double-martyrdom for the working class. It is a tempting story really—two men both immigrate from Italy in the same year, one from the North and one from the South. Opposites in personality. Both anarchists, they meet each other nine years later when they both flee to Mexico to escape the draft. Three years after that, they are arrested together for a crime they did not commit and, seven years after that, they are executed within minutes of each other, their legacies intertwined as they are remembered forever as martyrs. This oversimplified and misleading representation of what happened is the basic narrative for the many portrayals of the men. But it does not allow room for consideration of other influences in the men's lives or for a more nuanced understanding of what happened more broadly with relation to the case and its international impact.

---

<sup>21</sup> Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, ed. Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), lii-liv.

<sup>22</sup> "Sacco Continues Fast, Vanzetti Writes Letters," *Boston Globe*, August 15, 1927.

Distinctions between the men to the extent that they are made turn Sacco and Vanzetti into foils of each other or complement the oversimplified narrative. Sacco and Vanzetti are often referred to as the “good shoemaker and the poor fish peddler,” respectively. Joughin and Morgan wrote in *The Legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti*:

The community also knew that Sacco and Vanzetti were working men, but it is likely that a distinction was drawn between the two. Sacco was a dependable and highly skilled craftsman, liked and trusted by his employer. . . Vanzetti on the other hand, held a variety of lowly jobs, had learned no trade, and made no real money; at best he was probably thought of as a good-natured but shiftless Dago<sup>23</sup>

Joughin and Morgan’s descriptions of the men are almost opposite those of others’ who have also pitted their characteristics against each other. In a review of the Jackson and Frankfurter edition of the letters, Francis Lamont Robbins wrote:

Rarely do personalities emerge so clearly from written pages. The “good shoemaker” becomes young, ardent, a lover and father, a boy “who was always hunting for find one plant of those good red rose,” pleased with the verses of Carrie Jacobs Bond, proud, bitter, understanding completely the nature of his martyrdom and incapable of compromise with his principles in any attempt to alter it. The “poor fish peddler” is a student and philosopher, gentle, often humorous, childlike at times, of a sanguine temperament, more pitiful, more tolerant, *older*. Both men loved Italy, loved nature and all natural things. Their letters show much of the universal quality of tragedy<sup>24</sup>

Whether it is Sacco or Vanzetti who is portrayed as the more likeable of the men, they are rarely considered individually without being contrasted with each other.

The lines between fact and fiction have been blurred often in their case, especially because so many people considered them martyrs for a variety of leftist, working class causes. In 1928, Upton Sinclair wrote a “contemporary historical novel” about the case called *Boston*, and a

---

<sup>23</sup> Louis Joughin and Edmund M. Morgan, *The Legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 201.

<sup>24</sup> Francis Lamont Williams, review of *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, by Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, ed. Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter, *The Outlook and Independent*, 28.

condensed version called *August 22<sup>nd</sup>* in 1965.<sup>25</sup> In his preface to *August 22<sup>nd</sup>*, Sinclair asserted that “as far as concerns the two individuals, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, this book is not fiction, but an effort at history; everything they are represented as doing they actually did, and their words have been taken from their letters, or from the dictation of their friends and enemies.”<sup>26</sup> Sinclair consulted the letters published at various times throughout the men’s imprisonments by the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee and those included in the Jackson and Frankfurter edition of the letters in his writing of *Boston*.<sup>27</sup> Because of this, inaccuracies presented by the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee were incorporated into Sinclair’s documentary novel.

Although Sacco and Vanzetti’s case became an international affair and their names are rarely separated, no one considered Sacco and Vanzetti as a unit or dared to hyphenate their names before they were arrested on May 5, 1920, on suspicion of being involved in the April 15, 1920 murder and robbery of Alessandro Berardelli and Frederick A. Parmenter.<sup>28</sup> It was the State which joined the men to each other, and it was only their joint trial that caused the two to become one. According to the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure Rule 8(b) on the Joinder of Defendants, “the indictment or information may charge 2 or more defendants if they are alleged to have participated in the same act or transaction, or in the same series of acts or transactions, constituting an offense or offenses.” Because Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested together under suspicion of being involved in the same crime, there was justification for their joint trial. This

---

<sup>25</sup> Upton Sinclair, *Boston: A Documentary Novel of the Sacco-Vanzetti Case*, 2 vols. (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1928); Upton Sinclair, *August 22<sup>nd</sup>* (New York: Award Books, 1965).

<sup>26</sup> Upton Sinclair, *August 22<sup>nd</sup>* (New York: Award Books, 1965), vii.

<sup>27</sup> “*Boston – Sources Sacco and Vanzetti*,” Box 3, *Upton Sinclair Miscellaneous Uncataloged Materials: Articles, Source Materials, Photographs, Recordings, Memorabilia, Etc.* [1883-1965], Sinclair mss., Lilly Library, Indiana University Bloomington.

<sup>28</sup> Moshik Temkin discusses how the Sacco-Vanzetti Case became a transatlantic affair in *The Sacco-Vanzetti Affair: America on Trial* similar to the Dreyfus Case in France.

court practice worked to join Sacco's and Vanzetti's fates together—the Defense worked on behalf of both of them, and as a result they came to be recognized as two aspects of the same entity in popular opinion and imagination. Even though Vanzetti was also tried and convicted for allegedly holding up a paytruck in Bridgewater on December 24, 1919, and sentenced to 15 years in prison, he was still considered as one half of the Sacco-Vanzetti case; his “Plymouth Trial” was treated as more of an extra detail and side-note to the main narrative of the joint trial. John Dos Passos speculated that Vanzetti had been convicted in the other hold-up case because he had been active in a successful Plymouth Cordage Factory strike, an action which had blacklisted him from working in the cordage factories.<sup>29</sup> The Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee simply followed suit in treating the two men as one.

Associates of Vanzetti did not recall having had much acquaintance with Sacco before the trial. Beltrando Brini, a son of a family with whom Vanzetti lived for years and who considered Vanzetti to be a second father, said: “I never heard [Vanzetti] mention the name Sacco. Sacco was a complete mystery to me. The first time I heard of him was when he and Vanzetti were arrested. I saw him, of course, at the Dedham trial, but he had never been to our house, as far as I know, and I had never laid eyes on him before.”<sup>30</sup> The close associates of both Sacco and Vanzetti did not think of them as a single entity, unlike the masses that hailed them as martyrs.

Sacco and Vanzetti's martyrdom for the working class was recognized early in their defense efforts. On October 31, 1921, Anatole France wrote an appeal to the American people to save Sacco and Vanzetti, stating that they had been convicted for a “crime of opinion” and that

---

<sup>29</sup> John Dos Passos, *Facing the Chair: The Americanization of Two Foreignborn Workmen* (Boston: Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, 1927), 20.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Oakland: AK Press, 2005), 103.

“the death of Sacco and Vanzetti will make martyrs of them and cover you with shame.”<sup>31</sup> In another pamphlet widely circulated by the Defense Committee, poet Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote, “For whether or not these men whom I do not name were guilty of the crime of murder, it was not for murder that they died. The crime for which they died was the crime of breathing upon the frosty window and looking out.”<sup>32</sup> In 1927, the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee published John Dos Passos’ pamphlet *Facing the Chair: Story of the Americanization of Two Foreignborn Workmen*, in which he stated “Sacco and Vanzetti are not the only men who have been framed, but they have become symbols. All over the world people are hopefully, heartbrokenly watching the Sacco-Vanzetti Case as a focus in the unending fight for human rights of oppressed individuals and masses against oppressing individuals and masses.”<sup>33</sup>

As symbols and martyrs, Sacco and Vanzetti do not exist independently of each other, as but the mythology around the men has taken on a life of its own. Sacco and Vanzetti were not flat, fictional characters existing in a duality that fit a working-class martyrdom narrative; they were human beings with all the complexity which that entails.

### **The Case for a New Edition**

Now 90 years after their executions, it is time to remove the chains linking Sacco and Vanzetti which the state put on them. In order to fully decouple the men from each other, we need to stop seeing them as parallel and equally yoked. An edition of Vanzetti’s unexpurgated and previously unpublished letters can help accomplish this task. This is not to say that Vanzetti’s

---

<sup>31</sup> Anatole France, “Anatole France’s Appeal to the American People,” printed in full in *Facing the Chair: The Americanization of Two Foreignborn Workmen* (Boston: Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, 1927).

<sup>32</sup> Edna St. Vincent Millay, “Fear,” *Outlook and Independent*, 9 November 1927, 293-95, 310.

<sup>33</sup> John Dos Passos, *Facing the Chair: The Americanization of Two Foreignborn Workmen* (Boston: Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, 1927), 20.



words are the more important because his letters were more numerous. However, the major changes in and the deletions of certain letters paint a partial and distorted picture at best.

Vanzetti was considered a writer and orator by the anarchist community even before his arrest. Joseph Moro, Italian secretary for the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee after 1926, recalls having listened to Vanzetti speak at anarchist meetings in Haverhill in 1919.<sup>34</sup> Vanzetti also wrote for the *Cronaca Sovversiva*, Luigi Galleani's anarchist periodical. He was translating J.P. Proudhon's *La Guerre et la Paix* into English.<sup>35</sup> He wrote poetry, and wrote a poem called *The Nightingale* with the help of Alice Stone Blackwell, the notable translator and women's suffrage activist.<sup>36</sup> He wrote for an anarchist newspaper, *Cronaca Sovversiva*, in 1916 and continued his philosophical and anarchist musings throughout the many letters he wrote his friends and comrades. *Non piangete la mia morte* (Trans. *Don't Mourn My Death: Letters to Relatives*), is a 1962 edition of his Italian letters written to his family. *Altri non dovrebbero aver paura: lettere e testimonianze inedite*, 2012 (Trans. *Others Would Have Been Afraid: Unpublished Letters and Testimonies*) is an edition of Sacco and Vanzetti's English letters translated into Italian. *Altri non dovrebbero aver paura* includes some of Vanzetti's previously unpublished letters, but they were translated into Italian and therefore not in their original English form.<sup>37</sup> A table comparing the existing English and Italian editions can be found in the Appendix.

A complete edition of all of Bartolomeo Vanzetti's known English letters would allow focussed attention on the texts themselves, without being influenced by the earlier decisions

---

<sup>34</sup> Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Oakland: AK Press, 2005), 115.

<sup>35</sup> Aldino Feliciani mss. Boston Public Library, Boston, MA.

<sup>36</sup> M.D. Hapgood mss. Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

<sup>37</sup> Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *Non piangete la mia morte: Lettere ai familiari*, ed. Cesare Pillon and Vincenzina Vanzetti (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1962); Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *Altri non dovrebbero aver paura*, ed. and trans. Andrea Comincini (Rome: Nova Delphi, 2012).

made by editors or the prevailing dual narrative of Sacco and Vanzetti. The most pressing of Vanzetti's unpublished letters however, are the ones he wrote to his friend and the secretary of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, Mary Donovan.

Mary Donovan who had become the secretary of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee in 1924, just as quickly became Vanzetti's close friend and confidante. She devoted so much of her time and energy to the case that she was fired from her job at the Department of Labor in April of 1927; her boss cited the reason being her radical activities.<sup>38</sup> She demanded a hearing, which she could do because her job was in civil service. The Commissioner of Labor oversaw the hearing and "found no fault with his own decision." She spent two days in court, unable to restore her employment. Vanzetti comforted her during this time and drew parallels between their cases.<sup>39</sup> Since she was unable to get her job back, she worked around the clock in Sacco and Vanzetti's defense, well beyond their executions. She even named her daughter, Barta, after Vanzetti. Barta placed her mother's papers, including the Sacco and Vanzetti letters she had in her possession, at the Lilly Library at Indiana University Bloomington.<sup>40</sup>

In the Mary Donovan Hapgood mss. at the Lilly Library at Indiana University Bloomington, there are sixty-one letters from Vanzetti to Mary Donovan and four undated letter fragments. In 1924, Vanzetti wrote two letters to Mary Donovan. In 1925, he wrote her nine letters dated separately. In 1926, he wrote her twenty-eight letters. In 1927, he wrote her twenty-two letters. I have been able to narrow down the date ranges for each of the four undated letter fragments. The "P.S." addressed to "Friend" must have been written after September of 1926. The fragment that begins, "That happened when the just-ice Gargatua was in vacation," was

---

<sup>38</sup> "No Tears for My Youth: Autobiography Outline, n.d." M.D. Hapgood mss., Lilly Library, Indiana University Bloomington.

<sup>39</sup> M.D. Hapgood mss. Lilly Library, Indiana University Bloomington.

<sup>40</sup> M.D. Hapgood mss. Lilly Library, Indiana University Bloomington.

written after October 26, 1926. The “P.S.” addressed to Mary Donovan that begins “Of course I have many ather [sic] things to ask” must have been written in 1927, as it discusses an incident in which Alice Stone Blackwell published a claim that Boston serial killer Jesse Pomeroy killed a cat and drank its blood while at the Charlestown State Penitentiary—an allegation that Vanzetti says “everybody denies.”<sup>41</sup> I have not been able to date one letter Vanzetti wrote to Mary Donovan that includes a poem written in invisible ink and instructs Mary Donovan to write to him between the lines of her letters in lemon juice.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Letters**

Included here are a selection of Vanzetti’s letters to Mary Donovan that expose aspects of Vanzetti’s life that are not revealed elsewhere. Before each letter, I have provided a brief description and explanation for its inclusion.

The transcriptions maintain Vanzetti’s unconventional grammatical constructions and spellings, punctuation and capitalization, as well as the corrections he added later, with the conventional spellings and grammar footnoted the first time they occur, whenever this is necessary for clarity. Deletions and insertions are represented when they are complete words or phrases. I insert line breaks when it is obvious that such line breaks are intentional for effect and not a matter of space on the page.

Anglicizations of Italian words are noted and commentary for these letters has been provided for context and readability.

---

<sup>41</sup> N.D., Sacco-Vanzetti Papers, M.D. Hapgood mss., Lilly Library, Indiana University Bloomington

<sup>42</sup> This undated letter is included in the transcriptions.

## Undated

This letter is a rare example of Vanzetti's poetry and evidence of Vanzetti's use of invisible ink to communicate with those outside the prison. The only other surviving example of Vanzetti's use of invisible ink is in a letter to his English teacher, Virginia MacMehan.<sup>43</sup>

*Description: Handwritten on 25.5x20.5cm lined sheet of paper in both black ink and orange juice that has been burned to make it more visible. The portions of this letter that were written in invisible ink have been represented by italics. Line breaks have been maintained.*

Dear Mary: try to be strong. Arrivederci—

*Dear Mary:—*

*Petals of pensies of dallias of roses,*

*Petals of flowers, petals ofs of my soul,*

*To gladde your eyes, to god your soul—*

*Petals of of flowers, of soul, of Roses*

*I sent to you— remembering you.*

*Like this is seems to me to write in the air— as when I think. Mary, be of brave heart.*

*Bartolomeo.*

Dear Mary:

If you want tell me something that you do not wish the censor knows— cut in half a lemon, use a new-pen-point, and wrote between the appearescently written lines and margin. I will warm the paper and the world will become visible. I did it above, with orange, which is not

---

<sup>43</sup> May 9, 1924, Series 1 Box 2 Folder 10, Aldino Felicani mss. Boston Public Library; Vanzetti fell in love with his married English teacher, Virginia MacMehan. His letter to her in invisible ink expressing his desire for her was also not included in the Jackson and Frankfurter edition.

so well and more visible than lemons are. Before to sent it— observe well if it is invisible or not.  
Burn this at once. Greetings and good wishes.

B.

**April 10, 1924 (evening)**

In this letter, Vanzetti discusses certain books he is reading. He also expresses that if freed, he would like to “put on some fight for the liberation of our friends and the destruction of the prisons.” Jackson and Frankfurter collected this letter but did not include it in their edition.<sup>44</sup>

*Description: handwritten in pencil on front and back of one sheet of 21.2x21.5cm, unlined white paper.*

April 10, evening, 1924

Dear Comrade Donovan:—

And I had just finished to write you when your letter of to-day reached me— You say that you would like to read those of the books that you ordered for me, and which you have not yet read, and reread those which you have already read. Very well; I am proposing a bargain: When you can, send me the Poems of Francis Ledwidge,<sup>45</sup> then, no matter which first, the “Poor People”<sup>46</sup> and “The Croack of Good.”<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile I will returne you “The P.I.”<sup>48</sup> through

---

<sup>44</sup> Aldino Felicani mss. Finding Aid, Aldino Felicani mss., Boston Public Library

<sup>45</sup> Irish poet Francis Ledwidge, known as the Poet of the Blackbird, who served as a soldier in the British Army fighting in World War 1 and was killed at Ypres, July 31, 1917.

<sup>46</sup> 1845 novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

<sup>47</sup> The 1912 novel *The Croack of Gold* by James Stephens

<sup>48</sup> *Penguin Island*, 1908 satire by Anatole France

comrate Amleto<sup>49</sup> and I will have to read for a long time— during which you may read the ordered book. The title of Stevens<sup>50</sup> book suggest the idea of an Irish croock—<sup>51</sup> safe if the Crook of Good were not a foreigner— ↑or less croocks than the straight ones↓ Do not get excided, comrade Donovan— I like to foolish and the world is ↑so↓ overfilled with croocks— sø that no one as<sup>52</sup> reason to get blushing, but all must boast themselves.

Seriously, my misfortune has proved to the world that humaine solidarity and friendship are a in spite of all, neither myths nor pretence, but truth.

It exposed both the bad and the good side of our nature— it moves the fundamental goodness— and reveals what we could be in a true environment.

My friends and comrades are almost all anarchist: we are joined by the greater Idea of our times; Galleani<sup>53</sup> is our teacher— a great master. We hate deadly and therefore we love supremely. I have hated and loved immencely in my freedom— and love alway bloom and fruittifies. Sometime I am touched to the tears, by such sacrifice— as that of my friend, for my freedom.

Sometime I am ashamed and regretting for being so helped— and I fear to damage or be unjust toward ather imprisoned workers and rebels Nonethall be forgotten. If I will be free, I shall put on some fight for the liberation of our friends and the destruction of the prisons. I have heard of the born-poet Francis Ledwidge, and also, alas, of the Irish Famine. Do not trouble

---

<sup>49</sup> Amleto Fabbri, the Italian secretary of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee until 1926 when he asked Joseph Moro to take over for him.

<sup>50</sup> James Stephens

<sup>51</sup> crook

<sup>52</sup> has

<sup>53</sup> Luigi Galleani

yourself for any eventual delay about the books— I have had to read till now— and I have Ressurrations,<sup>54</sup> now. Good wishes and cheers to you from BV.

### **July 22, 1925**

This letter was published in part in the Jackson and Frankfurter edition of letters, but incredibly important parts were left out. In a portion of this letter omitted from the Jackson and Frankfurter edition, Vanzetti refers to Luigi Galleani, an anarchist comrade of Vanzetti's who was accused of being responsible for the 1919 Wall Street bombing, as his "master." This letter shows a connection between Vanzetti and the circle of anarchists that comprised the *Cronaca Sovversiva*, a periodical to which Vanzetti subscribed and sometimes wrote.

*Description: handwritten in black ink on lined paper. Vanzetti's page numbers have been omitted.*

July 22, 1925

My dear Com. M. Donovan:

Your typewritten letter and your explanatory note are here. They came together and were enjoyed one after another by me. Thank you very much for your happy idea and action to send me a picture of our John Larking.<sup>55</sup> Him and Debs<sup>56</sup> and Evel<sup>57</sup> are the three american men who have the admiration, love and respect of me and of my comrades, included Galleani, for, fanatic as we may be we know a little about sincerity, character and faith, and those who have them. Nick will be as glad as I to have such a picture.

---

<sup>54</sup> 1900 novel *Resurrection* by Leo Tolstoy

<sup>55</sup> Vanzetti likely confused John Reed and James Larkin, two of the founders of the Communist Labor Party. John Reed was American, and James Larkin was Irish. Mary Donovan was acquainted with both of them, and even went to visit James Larkin in Ireland after he was deported in 1923.

<sup>56</sup> Eugene Debs, Socialist Party leader and union organizer. He made several appeals on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti.

<sup>57</sup> Hippolyte Havel, editor of *The Road to Freedom*. Vanzetti does not often pronounce the "h" at the beginnings of words, and often leaves them off while spelling.

Thank you also for your informations about Galiani and his works. Strange enough— but I never hear of him— I do not know if it is because He is not known by us, or if, maybe, because his works might be superated by the time, or discordant from the actual socialism. I believe that one of the two later hypotesys is the most corrisponding to the truth. Anyhow, it is strange to me (this ignoring of him) and I will — — dig out a little.

His name is Galiani,<sup>58</sup> while that of my Master is Galleani.<sup>59</sup>

I had understood at once why your letter is not signed— but the little note opened a vista to me: I see you tipewriting, reading the letter, quit sadisfy, inclosing it— go to the box, drop the letter and— — o my my g — — I forgot to signed it. I see your nose more than everything else. Do you see me laughing? Well, well.

Yesterday a received a letter from Cora Meyer, segretary of the W. C. Club for P. Prisoners— which addressed to the International L. Defence.<sup>60</sup> She spoke of it saying that the anarchist have neither sent delegates nor message of incouragement or of indorsement to the conference. I will be a little imbarased in answering.

She told me of the death of our unforgottable Kate M. Dial. Her last thoughts were for the prisoner— her last letter ask me to write her. She was a real anarchist, a real good woman.<sup>61</sup>

Yesterday I also received a letter from Alice S. Blackwell. She says: "I ~~know~~ ↑too believe↓ that you and Nick will never be executed, even if the effort for a new trial will fail. I have good hope that, if worse come to worst, we may get executive clemency."

---

<sup>58</sup> Italian economist Ferdinando Galiani (1728-1787)

<sup>59</sup> Luigi Galleani, militant anarchist who edited the *Cronaca Sovversiva*

<sup>60</sup> Cora Meyer, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin was the secretary of the Workers national Prison Comfort Club.

<sup>61</sup> Kate M. Dial was the District Secretary Treasurer for the Workers National Prison Comfort Club. She wrote to Vanzetti at least three times in 1923. In her October 27, 1923 letter, which may be this last letter that Vanzetti refers to, she said, "I surely do honor the men and women who have gone to prison for striving to make conditions better fort heir class, which is my class, but for the useless parasite I have a withering contempt. The sacrifice thaty ou and Nick and many others have made, will not be in vain. . . Try and get wor to me that you receive my letters, as I would not like you to think I forget you" (Felicani mss.)



And she quotes an her friend's letter,

I have not worried much about Sacco & Vanzetti, because I have felt all the time that there were too many people in Mass. who would never submit to the shame of their execution. I know it has taken, it will take, incessant hard work to save them, but I am certain that they will be saved.

Even the bourgeoisie will get out and hustle now, rather than let them to be murdered in name of Capitalism."

It seems to me that the words of them both, means: they will be saved by the chair— the governor will commute their sentence to life imprisonment." And I am sorry of such letter through the official channel.

This is what the people are saying, and if the comrades and the prominent personalities begin to say it— them as well— showing that this result will satisfy them— surely that a new trial will be denied. I wrote and told it to her.

You have already surprised me with your Italian — "In Morta del Bona— splendid— but it takes a nose sharp as mine to understand that it means: "In Morte del Boia" But you are a brave typewriter and letter-writer.

Now, before to close, let me give you some advice— about traveling and seasickness— which I forgot when you were here.

Eat plenty of garlic— it is good against seasickness— provide yourself of a wide linen strap and ~~tie~~ tight it stretched around your abdomen (on the skin) as a belt. It prevents the sacking of the intestines— which produce seasickness. Have your stomach as clean as possible before to sail— why sailing— have some green or onions with olive oil salt and pepper, (salad) morning and evening. A teaspoon of olive oil, each morning before eating— and hot coffee after it— does very good. And above all— be at rest and of good cheer.

I would be but too happy to accept your cordial invitation— I like the country— I need it— and I am sure I ↑would↓ like your father and your sister as I like you— But— the chance is thin— getting thinner.

You look fine when you were here— and I hope you will be even finer next September.

To John and all the Comr. who you will meet— give my brotherly regards.

Farewell, comrade Donovan.

Bartolomeo

P.S. While walking in the ship— do not keep yourself rigid— but bent a little accordingly to the ship rolling— and sit as relaxed as possible— thus avoiding to be saked and, disturbed: sick.

### **June 17, 18, and 23, 1926**

In this letter, which actually spans three days, Vanzetti expresses his desires for his writings to be widely published and for “agitation” to intensify in order for the “hangers to free [them].” He gives Mary Donovan his theory on why fascism exists, and updates her on his daily activities at the prison.

*Description: “Mary Donovan” is written on the verso of the first page. Vanzetti numbered the top of each page, but these page numbers have been omitted. June 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> are all written on the same page.*

Mss. Mary Donovan.

17 June, 1926

Bunk-Ill's Day.<sup>62</sup>

Dear Comrade Donovan:—

---

<sup>62</sup> Bunker Hill Day, public holiday in Massachusetts marking the anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill

I would and should have answered before to your letter of June 4, 1926— for I would be self-content instead to be self-reproaching for my lost opportunity to delivered the answer to you— Mr. Th.<sup>63</sup> <sup>64</sup>has been here yesterday and to day. But, let us never regret on what has happened to pass. To-day we idle in celebration of the Bunk-Ills battles—<sup>65</sup> this inable me to write to you— as I am doing.

Since I have learnt that the things are so going that we have more time ahead us than I had believed— I have decided to write more than one articles on "The Plutocratic Press Versus Us"—<sup>66</sup> instead of one, as I told you. The first one, dealing with the press-behavior after our arrest, is already but unsodasfitlylly<sup>67</sup> (correct it) written. Therefore, it will be re-written. I do not believe that any pluto- or liberal journal will dare to published it— for, it tells facts an calls things by name. It is for the revolutionary folks. That' all. And the two reverend will be presented too.

Yesterday Mr. Th.<sup>68</sup> said that he does not yet know if the New York World will, or not, published my letter. My inference is that he will, first, trust in the good will of our archanglers—<sup>69</sup> Then, if it will failed— and only when it has failed and the further damage irreparable— he would put in action the reserved "48." A policy that can bring forth nothing else but failure and vanquishment. Pitagora<sup>70</sup> was right: kinds and quantities determine both the natural and human phenomena.

---

<sup>63</sup> Mr. William G. Thompson, defense attorney for Sacco and Vanzetti after Fred Moore was fired in 1924.

<sup>64</sup> Mr. William G. Thompson

<sup>65</sup> The Battle of Bunker Hill

<sup>66</sup> "The Plutocratic Press and the Sacco-Vanzetti Case" by Vanzetti is in the Aldino Felicani Sacco-Vanzetti Collection Series 1 Subseries 3 Box 5 Folder 35 at the Boston Public Library.

<sup>67</sup> unsatisfactorily

<sup>68</sup> Mr. William G. Thompson

<sup>69</sup> archangels

<sup>70</sup> Pythagoras

We were foolish too many times already by such tactics. And not we alone, but the world proletariat. The fascismo exist because the Italian revolutionists have adopted such tactics: to opposs fractions to unities; so that the latter, though weaker and smaller than the revolutionary forces, triumphed. We must put all our cards on the table—it seems to me— and not wait for a further loss. So I will write, with the hope and wish that the greatest possible publication will be give to my writtings. For the truth is plain: If the agitation will keeps ~~and~~ intensifies, in large itself, now, and claims our right, it may compel the hangers to free us! If it will loose down, we will be imposed of the greatest damage of which the enemy will be capable upon us. It is a question of kinds and number.

Now, do you know why I have wished so much to write you? Because I perceived that you was glad of your trip to Wash. for its results, but that you were tired and needy of a good rest, and I would have raccomanded you to take a real good rest— to sleep 36 hours— at your country home— and ↑also↓ to received an assurance that you are not seek.<sup>71</sup> I hope and wish that you are well; and also to see you soon. O, Sen. Penbrook,<sup>72</sup> is it his name?, failed to stop the State's, or whatever ather sort ↑of↓ police, to not interfere in our works. Katzman<sup>73</sup> setted himself at ...↑O↓ work... minacing, using intimidation to hinder the defence. This show once more that we must not confide in their good will- hell to them, to the State, to the elected's reputation. They have no weaknesses, no human respect, scrouples, uncertities: they use everything against us. If we vacillate, they doomed<sup>74</sup> us. Tell me: is not this a long phylippica? Well, the weather if the last 48 hours have been glouriously beautiful, though a little chilly at night; and I hope you have injoyed it, wholly and fully, at your country home, and get restored. And in this hope I will close

---

<sup>71</sup> sick

<sup>72</sup> There was no Massachusetts senator by this name.

<sup>73</sup> Frederick Katzmann, district attorney

<sup>74</sup> portmanteau of “doomed” and “damned”

my letter. O, one thing more: I have not yet found the time to read your two Dostoyesky (spell it right) books, so that I cannot yet returne them to you. But of this..., lately.

Have my hearty regards, and be brave and cheerful,

Arrivederci presto. Bartolomeo Vanzetti.

P.S. I have smoke some stogies to-day— and how pellucid, beyond their smoke, seems to me the sun— ↑in↓kindled air. But I am a little dizzy (spell it correctly. When will I see your feasts on the Italian?

18 June, 1926. I am told that Mr. Th. will be here to-morrow, and that the Boston's papers of this morning have a big, good "piece" about the case. I only seen the Post— there is nothing in it.

Now that I rimind it: please, try to secure the numbers of those Boston Travaler, ~~in~~ which talk against the Madeiros' confession."<sup>75</sup> I would report it on my writting on the matter. Salutissimi,

B.V.

23 June— This morning In feeling most happily. Well Five words about the matter on the Traveler, would be O.K.

P.S. Now that we have talk about the Bulletin I will suggest and propose several things for it. <sup>76</sup>

### **October 3, 1926**

In this letter, Vanzetti discusses the case, his intention to begin a hunger strike, his own writings, and his opinions about communism.

*Description: handwritten in ink on standard sized, lined paper, some of the pages Vanzetti numbered at the top- these numbers have been removed for consistency*

3 Oct., 1926.

---

<sup>75</sup> Celestino Madeiros, a fellow prisoner, confessed to the Bridgewater hold-up in 1925

<sup>76</sup> postscript written in pencil at the bottom of the page

My dear Comrade:—

Yesterday evening, after the "yard time," Mr. Th.<sup>77</sup> was here. I told him of that bird; given the "irregular time of his visit, he did not even call for Jame W.<sup>78</sup> and, as for the other one, he will think it over if it will be better to confer, or not, with. He believe that Madeiros<sup>79</sup> will have another reprival— at most; and I told it to Jame.

Then, I told him about my intention to begin a starvation. Of course he is contrary to it, but the given reasons— why of his opinion do not persuade me by any means. Indeed he shaw to have hopes, confidence, optimism in the outcome of the case: "I too," he said, "haved believed Thayer was going to deny a new trial, because he did not granted it at once, but I have ↑subsequently↓ thought that he wanted time to strongly justify his granding." "Public opinion is swiftly turning to your favor, and Thayer is very responsive to it." A son of a great...father (he named him) is now believing that you had not had a fair deal—" bet your booths we have not— and that is good." "I guess I will win before the State Court, if Thayer will refuse; we have 63 strong affidavits."

The last assertion impressioned me strongly; for, I have never believe in such possibility— I have believe it an impossibility. Another of his reason against my projected fasting, is that "these fellows" are good friends of you, have done a great deal for you: would not you trust them?" Well— the hint was that they would not eletrecute<sup>80</sup> me— if worst comes to worse— only keep me for even. Of course, I cannot agree. To spare us from execution is certainly a partial victory to him; not to us. Of positive he has nothing- at least, he gives nothing.

---

<sup>77</sup> Mr. William G. Thompson

<sup>78</sup> James Weeks, witness who validated Celestino Madeiros' confession of responsibility for Bridgewater crime and insisted that Sacco and Vanzetti were innocent.

<sup>79</sup> Celestino Madeiros, a fellow prisoner at the Charlestown State Penitentiary, confessed to the Bridgewater hold-up in 1925 and denied Sacco's and Vanzetti's involvement in it. This confession was the basis of an appeal for a new trial, which it was denied. He was executed at the same time as Sacco and Vanzetti.

<sup>80</sup> electrocute

"I am not going to tell you that the State Court will give you a new trial, because I have believe, have told so the time before and I want not make such a mistake again, but I thing so."

Everythings bondle<sup>81</sup> together, it seems that he is given a great importance to the fact that "that certain american element, which will counts with the black-gowned and which has been till now against us, is now turning favorable. I call that "to clang to rasors' blades." And of course- being him against the hunger-strike, all the several ones- you know- stick together as one man, and yet discording, in order to induce me to desist from my determination. This is all what has been said,

I told him that I will think it over— Anyhow, he promised to return next week— "with Aldino,"<sup>82</sup> I added. So, we will speack it over again.

Anyhow, we shall, of course, be of good cheer and confident in victory- for, he who fight with the heart of a defeated, cannot win. The best police<sup>83</sup> is to think that ~~us~~ they shall be compelled to give it against their will. Smart, eh?

Now, something about writtings. Till now I have sent away my writtings without retaining a duplicate of them- just for sparing work. But I shall do the contrary ↑hereafter↓ ~~heretofore~~ For, I forget what I have written, and how can I write a sequel of writtings on a same subject, under such condiction?<sup>84</sup> Now, for example, I would keep on the journalistic subject, but to avoid repetitions and meanwhile exploite and treasure to the atmost the already exposed, to do a good work, in a good word, I should have the precedent writtings under my eyes— So I expect

---

<sup>81</sup> bundle

<sup>82</sup> Aldino Felicani, founder of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee

<sup>83</sup> policy

<sup>84</sup> condition

eagerly, to receive the two bulletins which contain "the journalistic lynching<sup>85</sup> and the "conspiracy of quietness.<sup>86</sup> Also a copy of my letter to Librado<sup>87</sup> is badly needed— so please, furnish it to me, when possible.

I am not been so well the later few days, and have indulged in lesyness,<sup>88</sup> chiefly because I was unable to do anything worth-while. But now I am better— and I have done last than nothing, except the reading of "a copy of "the Nation," one of the "Masses" (the first that I have seen) and a lot of journalistic trash. Alas! how the distorted will of power, main of those who deal in socialism, mains<sup>89</sup> and pervert the great, real socialism. There are truths in the comunists writting, expecially in their criticism— but those truths are not "communism, and ↑the↓ communism of the communist is not truth. "Get away from there that I want place myself." Exept what is fundamentally socialist in their doctrines, all the rest is but a replacement of herrors to herros, fallacies to fallacies, prejudices to prejudices, and a turning of the same individual complexes ↑stream↓ that make serves and master, into another bed. And they are consciouse of it. This is heart-bracking. Well dear Mary, have you read the financial account of the Garland's Fund."?<sup>90</sup> All the capital is invested, now.

Here is the address of Beltrando:<sup>91</sup> 9 Wheeler Str., Boston, Mass. Some of you may need it. Now I am regretting my failing to get the name of that ↑stricker↓ actually employed here. I foget to do it. I have so much in my mind that I even feel dizzy— you will forgive me for this forgotness.

---

<sup>85</sup> "A Journalistic Lyncing[sic]" by Vanzetti is published in the August 1926 Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee Bulletin.

<sup>86</sup> Printed in the October 1926 Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee Bulletin

<sup>87</sup> Librado Rivera; the publication of this letter is mentioned in several letters

<sup>88</sup> laziness

<sup>89</sup> mains

<sup>90</sup> Also known as The American Fund for Public Service, it was established by Charles Garland.

<sup>91</sup> Beltrando Brini, son of the Brini family with whom Vanzetti lived for many years. He considered Vanzetti to be like a father to him.



Yesterday was indeed a great good day to me, not only for the Thompson's visit and encouragement but because I felt much better and improved than the antecedent few days. The prison and the passion are squishing the life out of my bones and often I feel numb and blunt as if dying. Yet I am still alive and my responsive ↑responsiveness↓ proves that I am still strong. I am determined to win- this is good because it help me morally-- that, atherwise the victory, if victory we will have, will be ought to you and to all our friends making the fight.

Be careful for your bread, and at easy for me. I am quite well now— and improving. I hope you are well and that I will see you again better than ever.

Greetings and good wishes to you.

B.V.

P.S. By goat! I guess Gitlow<sup>92</sup> was in Boston on the 1th of Oct., and you forgotten to tell him to come here- is not it so? Nevermind! Who can remember everything when one has so many things to remember of? As you have? Seriously,

arrivederci.

### **December 4, 1926**

In this letter, Vanzetti tells Mary Donovan about his opinions on Clarence Darrow replacing Mr. William G. Thompson as his defense attorney. The Communists, mostly those in New York were in support of Sacco and Vanzetti and wanted Darrow to take over the Defense. Vanzetti liked Mr. Thompson and believed he was capable of obtaining a new trial, but was willing to have Darrow join the Defense if Mr. Thompson was okay with it. Darrow did not end up joining in the efforts.

---

<sup>92</sup> Benjamin Gitlow established the Communist Labor Party with James Larkin and John Reed. He was convicted of violating the New York State Criminal Anarchy Act in 1919. He was released from prison in 1922 pending appeal of his case. He was pardoned by the Governor of New York in 1925. Clarence Darrow was his defense attorney, and was also considered to defend Sacco and Vanzetti.

*Description: handwritten in black ink on lined paper. Vanzetti's page numbers have been omitted.*

Dec., 4., 1926

Dear Comrade Donovan:—

I miss to tell you that I have know what number of 'Il Martello' that Moro<sup>93</sup> wish to have. But don't worry about it: ↑either↓ one of the two numbers that I will send to him, is the one that he want. I was called to the office of Rev. Witney, to day, after our conversation. He told me— he is the one who smiles so sweetly— about Sibley, the humidor, those of the Globe: of the prominent persons who wrote in our behalf; ending by expressing his believe that "we will go out from here." I lended him the last number of the Defence's Bulletin.

This afternoon I talked with Jame, in the yard, and he got mad in hearing certain thinks. He said to had told to Mr. Th. that if any person unknow to his wife would ~~have~~ goes to her home and request any affidavit or similar things, she would put him to the door, being fearful of, and resented against police and law's people. Conseguently, Mr. Th. told him, "I will have to go in there in automobile." And Jame to him: "Well, since you go there you could bring my wife and our children here— I will have a talk with her, and she will give a good affidevit." Mr. Th. proposed to send her some money to cover the railroad trip expences, but Jame objected that it was too difficult to his wife to travel alone by railroad with her three little children." "This, says Jame, is what I asked for, not \$25." It seems to me that Mr. Th.<sup>94</sup> said that he would have to interview also Jame's parents, for an affidevit, and that that is an accumulative reason why he shall go to Providence.

---

<sup>93</sup> Joseph Moro, Vanzetti's comrade and the Italian secretary of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee after 1926.

<sup>94</sup> Mr. William G. Thompson

So, you see, if this letter will reach you in time, as I hope, you will anylonger have to whorry about the sending of money.

Instead the Committee, together with Mr. Thompson, have to arrange for the means and date to bring Jame's family here and get the affidavit. I presume that Mr. Th. dislike such a trouble, and I don't blame him— But some of us could submit to it.

I pray the Committee to insist in having the affidavits from Jame's family, from his parents, and from Bedard. They are of utmost importance- because they are scandalous.

I wonder if you read, in *The Christian Science Monitor* of Nov., 29,<sup>95</sup> or elsewhere, that the Worcester County Bar Association has presented Thayer of a bouquet accompagned by a letter which the Association prases<sup>96</sup> and extols "The courage and firmness of Thayer's conduct. Our case and names are not mentioned— but it is as if they were.

The Boston Post of Dec., 2, has an item thus headed: "Bushnell Bucks Up Ruling of Jude Thayer;" "Critics of Sacco Case Assailed.

I also wonder if you have read the interview with Fuller, by a scribble on capital punishment, inserted in the "Success" of Dec., 1926, under the title "Why I believe in Capital Punishment. I have read a secension of it in the "Boston American," of Nov., 14. The American says that the Gov.'s words have a special significance, because mentally ~~relied~~ related by the Gov. to the "Car barn Case"<sup>97</sup> and to Sacco-Vanzetti.

---

<sup>95</sup> "Judge Thayer Honored by Bar— Worcester Association Shows with Flowers its Confidence in His Integrity," *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 November 1926.

<sup>96</sup> praises

<sup>97</sup> Vanzetti is referring to a case in which three men, John J. Devereaux, John J. McLaughlin and Edward J. Heinlein, called the "Car Barn Bandits" in the press, were executed in Charlestown State Prison on January 5, 1927 for the murder of James Fenereaux, a watchman at the Waltham Car Barn.

The Gov's words reported by the "American" are bad enough, revealing in him "all the religious's ferocity and the implacability of the law"— to say it is with Angiolillo.<sup>98</sup> But those who have read "Success," tell me that the fury and sadism revealed by Fuller is unspeakable.

You see that the reaction is reacting openly— and who could know what they are doing under cover?

To hope that our enemy will give us by love privilege and liberty after havin tramped by hate upon all our proves, reasons, and right, seems absurd to me. It is for this reasons that I insist to get all the affidavits that we can, to treasure of everything— and without compromises except if granted by the enemy of liberty and justice. Since I cannot know what the defense knows and his doing; nor its ultimate intentions and goal— of the case— I can give no judgement of what I ignore. But if the defence knows that the enemies are decided unrevocably to loss us:— if they are denying everything except formalities: if they keep the defence in darkness: than I would know one thing positively. That defending us by defending the Commonhell<sup>99</sup> is honor and honesty and by safeguard the hangers' incolumity— as it seems to be done— we are throughing out the window the poor's money, and, beside the defeat we will have the mockery. Givin my experiences on the antecedent journalistic conduct of our enemies, I am compelled to believe that the Governor have really intended to secure his "group" and insult us by his angelic interview.

It is all these reasons together that cause me to think insistenly of Darrow.<sup>100</sup> I realize that, given the actual standing of the case and the tecnicity of law, he would have but little opportunity to use his great capacity— I also understand that no oneelse is more fit and able than Mr. Th. to obtain a new trial, and that if they are decided to deny it to us— there is no use. . . . !

---

<sup>98</sup> Michele Angiolillo, anarchist who assassinated the Spanish Prime Minister in 1897

<sup>99</sup> Vanzetti often indulged in wordplay, so this was likely an intentional play on "Commonwealth" and "Hell"

<sup>100</sup> Clarence Darrow

But if it is so, by friendly ways, than, why should we not use teeth and pawns? Hence Darrow. I would write down every little things and give it to him. He is an anarchist and has for the willing beast our own feeling. Admitted that we have to spend and fight resultless— since the enemy can do all what he please— why not burry them in their shame, crimes and filths— before the whole world? There is the probability that the dogs— knowing to have to face a fearless and merciless man of genius— may yeld.

To decide on this, we must first see that Mr. Th. is willing to have Darrow with him and be told interely on the whole standing of the things. So do not worry for this. Yet, if we need him, it is now, to obtain a new trial, which is more difficult than to win it after having had it.

I will also write to the Committee on all these topic. I am writting an open letter on the case “status,” expecially for the rest of the world. And I guess I will write to Mss. Blackwell and wait for her answer before to talk with old Jesy Pomroy.<sup>101</sup>

Well, I am going to close. Be of good cheer. The bell as ring. I shall retire, in few second the light will be out, so good nigh dear comrade Donovan: arrivederci. Affectionately yours,  
Bartolo V.

P.S. Morning of Dec., 5. I have forget something last night: The letter of Elisabeth G. Flynn,<sup>102</sup> is inserte in the “Daily Worker of Nov., 10., under the title: Another “Forward” Bluff is Called.” Try to have it; it is worth to be read by any of us. Now, my dear friend, I am going to ask you one thing and raccomand you of another one: I have lost the R. Sergent’s interview published in the “Traveler, and I would also have a copy of the Federal Chief Flynn, which was published, if I am right, by some New York’s daily on the ~~May~~ ↑March 5,↓ 1922—, and one or

---

<sup>101</sup> Jesse Pomeroy, a serial killer also known as “the boy torturer,” was in prison at Charlestown State Penitentiary, where Vanzetti was, too, when he was when he wrote this letter.

<sup>102</sup> Elizabeth Gurley Flynn

few weeks after, in the Boston Traveler. Speack with Moro;<sup>103</sup> that he may have them— but please, three times please— I do not want you to spend your packet for it. It is not right. Let the Com. pays.

Do you know that I have thought with horror, yesterday morning, last night and this morning: what would be of me if my coat pockets would be as small as your overcoat packet. I could not carry homelet and sanguiches around with me— nor chew tobacco, journals, memorandas, ect., ect. ect. I wonder how you can get along with such small a packet.

Well, I hope you and all of yours well. Salute them for me when you will go home next Saturday, and do try to get a good rest. Again, arrivederci.

Bartolo V.

Mss. Mary Donovan 130 Myrtle St. Boston, Mass<sup>104</sup>

### **May 3, 1927 and 3 Maggio 1927**

Vanzetti wrote two letters on May 3, 1927 to Mary Donovan. He dated one letter May 3, 1927 and the other 3 Maggio 1927. The letter dated in English was written first. Jackson and Frankfurter included a portion of the letter dated 3 Maggio 1927 in their edition, but did not maintain the Italian date. Both letters expose some of the arguments that the socialists, anarchists and communists were having with regard to how to best defend Sacco and Vanzetti.

*Description: Handwritten in black ink on two sheets of lined 20x25.5cm paper. Vanzetti's numbers on the top of each page have been omitted.*

---

<sup>103</sup> Joseph Moro

<sup>104</sup> Mss. Mary Donovan. . . on verso

May 3, 1927

Dear Comrade Donovan:—

I have began to wonder of your silence and to fear it dued to sickness. Are you sick, or some ones of yours? Mr. Thompson has been here several times during these later weeks, on account of the petition.

I have hoped of seeing or hearing from you— I would like to know your opinion on this matter. I am sure that you are informed about it. Mr. Th. has promised me, last Saturday that he would have been here yesterday: he was not, so I expect him this afternoon together with some comrades; for I want to discuss the matter with all before to signed it— and it must be as I wish it to be if I have to sign it. Maybe you will come with them. This petition is terrible to me.

It seems that your-efforts and those of all our friends and comrade I turning the tide. Such as things are and stand now-day— it seems that the hangers will never dare to kill us— yet the danger still exist.

There is another danger: that they may try to quail the agitation by dooming us to life prison with a commutation of sentence. We would refuse it, but they could impose it on us. Of these we must look out, you must make it clear that such measure will only accentuate the struggle in our behalf.

This very morning I received a letter from the I.L.D.<sup>105</sup> by C.<sup>106</sup> It stills asks that I should use my name “to compel unity in the movement if you will say the word for it.” I<sup>107</sup> laments that “in a number of principal cities and also in national scale certain elements are striving to bring the controversies of the labor and radical movement into” the work for us, thus splitting it. And it

---

<sup>105</sup> International Labor Defense

<sup>106</sup> James Cannon

<sup>107</sup> It

also laments that certain meeting in our behalf were turned against the I.L.D., and the Communist Party and that in ↑a↓ number of cases delegates of the said I.L.D. and C.P.<sup>108</sup> were denied admittance to or expelled from S.V. Conferences.

Well, as soon as I can I will answer him.

Now I shall put down certain notes on the petition and be reading for Mr. Th. coming.

I am quite well; so is Nick, and so I hope of and wish to you and yours. Be brave; well you are brave; but I mean to be tranquil and stady as much as possible. And drop a word, if you can.

And now, dear and brave Mary Donovan, I just salute you with all of my heart, of which I send you the better greetings, good wishes and regards.

Yours,

Bartolomeo Vanzetti

*Description: Handwritten in black ink on three sheets of lined 20x25.5cm paper. Vanzetti's numbering on the pages has been omitted.*

3 Maggio 1927

Dear Mary:—

---

<sup>108</sup> Communist Party



This afternoon Aldino,<sup>109</sup> Amleto,<sup>110</sup> Miglio,<sup>111</sup> R si.,<sup>112</sup> where here with Mrrsr. Th.<sup>113</sup> Eh.,<sup>114</sup> and a good by of the N.Y. World were here for the last correction and signatures of the our petition to the Governor. It is to me legally splendid and passable as to principles. Yet Nick refused to sign it in spite of all the reasons and argumantations of all. Amleto went away alone, weeping silently. It is two weeks that I am hammerring this matter with him. I got tired and hopeless. These seven years have told their tale on him— and it seem useless to reason with him. I am wholly discorceted of this plit— for I hate to disagree between us in this important and public matter. I hope his emotional will change his mind for to-morrow and that some comrade at the Defenders will come back to-morrow morning to a last effort to obtain his signature. Anyhow, if I will find him more propenced to sign, I will telephon to Mr. Thompson. Now, I got your letter which proof you very good and brave. And I am also glad to know that you are not sick but quite well and that so are your family who I thank for their welcomed regards. I would tell Mr. Th. to bring you to-morrow. But you see? I think that several old comrade will come to try to convince Nick, and maybe also Rosi. If there are someones who may succeed it is them; and I doubt if all will be admitted.

In a way Nick is right, there are all the reason for mistrust, pessimism, and scorn for further appeals after so many vain ones. Were the defence intitled to carry our case to the executive without our petition to the Governor, I too whould have preferred to not appeal personally. But being our signature to the petition necessary; having, after all, no right to scorn a

---

<sup>109</sup> Aldino Felicani, founder of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee

<sup>110</sup> Amleto Fabbri, Italian secretary of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee until 1926 when he asked Joseph Moro to take over.

<sup>111</sup> Emilio Coda

<sup>112</sup> Rosa Sacco, Nicola Sacco's wife

<sup>113</sup> Mr. Thompson

<sup>114</sup> Mr. Herbert B. Ehrmann, junior defense counsel under William G. Thompson in the attempt to obtain a new trial for Sacco and Vanzetti. He also ran the Boston Legal Aid Society.

man whose hearts and mind bentting toward the case we know not, and in consideration to those who wish our appeal to him, I toiled hard to redact the appeal and signed it, and I believe without incoherence or wrong.

Yes, indeed, neither I have ever expected so much from the bourgeouse classes. They are very active, as I can see by the press. It is for that that I told you that I believe that we will not be executed all at one time. It is also true that the press said very little of the proletariat, either here or abroad. But if they, are with us— it is good— if they are not too passive. A propose of newspapers: till sometime ago we have ↑daily↓ received either a whole “Herald” from Mrs. Evans, or its clips on the case from Mrs. Ehrmann,<sup>115</sup> or the one and the athers as well, but these later three or four days we have received nothing. Few days ago, while walking in the yard with Nick, a prisoner through me a cigarettes-bag, filled with clips. The guard saw it. On the ather end, Mrs. Evans went to Framignam<sup>116</sup> and she might have stop her sending. But there are no explanation for Mrs. Eh. So not knowing why, this morning I asked Mr. Curtis<sup>117</sup> if he has begun to barre those papers from us. He denied it and said to have received any exept the 2 Italian papers.

Since I expect the press to talk at lenght of the petition and of its consequent public controversies I would like very much to have what the Herald and the New York World will report about and so I pray you to save the clips for me and ↑to↓ send them by the Defence. In my original, I have said something of the letter and spirit of those few petitions which ask for our execution and of they reason. But it was eliminated in the correction. Seing it and considering

---

<sup>115</sup> Sara Ehrmann, wife of Herbert B. Ehrmann who served as the junior defense counsel under William Thompson. She became active in prison reform and efforts to abolish the death penalty as a result of the Sacco-Vanzetti case.

<sup>116</sup> Framingham, Massachusetts

<sup>117</sup> Mr. Curtis was a guard at the Charlestown State Penitentiary

everything, I did not even mention to Mr. Th., the seven pages on this topic which I wrote yesterday to provide him of more material on this matter.

But I thought I could write a quite good writing for the Buletin<sup>118</sup> on this subject and deal it properly, fully and freely; and make an Italian copy to be send in Franch and South America. For this I need all what the Herald has published on the case from 11 April to to day—<sup>119</sup> for consultations and quotation. Will you please buy it with the Defence money (you are poor) and sent it to me Mr. Th. Now, I long to see you, and I will tell Mr. Thompson to take you here at the first possibility. Meanwhile, be brave, study, and have all the little care of yourself, as possible. We are beat yes, but not yet lost: we may still win. M. & A. have read the Can—. letter.<sup>120</sup> It also said that if the workers forces will lack of unity and fighting spirit, the enemy will avail himself of it and give us life— as it happened with Mooney & Billings.<sup>121</sup>

Well, maybe I will write him to-morrow morning. And now I am going to close this long scribbling. It is over ten o'clock now. I would like you to be in deep and peaceful rest now— but

---

<sup>118</sup> The Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee published a total of 18 volumes of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee Bulletin periodically as they had news to put out. Vanzetti sometimes wrote for the Bulletin.

<sup>119</sup> “Wait Defends Decision on Sacco; Fuller Assails His Fellow Republicans” April 12, 1927 Boston Herald, “Prof. Frankfurter Charges Dean Wigmore Misquote” and “Wigmore Didn’t Read Case, Says Frankfurter” April 28, 1927 Boston Herald, “To Editor of the Herald, One View of the Supreme Court” by Steven T. Byington April 25, 1927, “Pardoning Power- A letter to the editor of the Herald” by F.W. Grinnell April 16, 1927, “From an eminent authority – a letter to the editor of the Herald” by Warren F. Spalding on April 22, 1927, “That ‘Amazing Statement’ – to the editor of the Herald” by Franklin Gray April 14, 1927, “For the Courts- To the Editor of the Herald” by George B Rowlings, April 18, 1927, “Ask Freedom or Death for Men—Roosevelt Club Committeemen want ‘No Easy Evasion’ in Sacco Case” and “Appeals Coming In From Abroad” and “To Hold Sacco Rally on Boston Common” in April 21, 1927 Boston Herald,

<sup>120</sup> James Cannon wrote Vanzetti a letter on behalf of the International Labor Defense, which Vanzetti tells Donovan about in the letter also dated May 3, 1927.

<sup>121</sup> Tom Mooney and Warren Billings were two radical labor leaders convicted of having bombed the San Francisco Preparedness Day Parade in 1919. Mooney was sentenced to death and Billings to life imprisonment. It was proven that the District Attorney of San Fransisco suppressed evidence that they were framed and were actually innocent. President Woodrow Wilson intervned and was able to get Mooney’s death sentence commuted to life, but was unable to free the men. The Mooney-Billings case was often cited as a reason for why it might be possible to get Sacco and Vanzetti’s death sentences commuted to life. Vanzetti did not believe that spending life in prison would be better than execution, but some of his supporters, like Alice Stone Blackwell, believed that life imprisonment would be an acceptable alternative to death by electric chair.

I fear you are still working for us at this moment. At any rate I am going to bed. I am quite tired, I have written this after the light went off; in the penumbra, and it made me ↑somnolent↓ sleeping. May you receive it after a good rest. Be well, dear comrade and give my regards to your father and sister and have many, many of them from me. Arrivederci presto e bene.

Bartolomeo V.

Don't let poor Celestino<sup>122</sup> without few dollars to buy something. No matter how little from you is better than nothing— though I know it is hard on you.<sup>123</sup>

(I suppose you are going to publish part or all of my talk, corrected. If otherwise explain that my bad pronoun pronunciation caused more mistakes than I did in the steno-record.)<sup>124</sup>

Mary Donovan

### **May 22, 1927**

This letter was partially included in the Jackson and Frankfurter edition of letters, but parts which were omitted are incredibly important—especially for considering Vanzetti's reactions to his own case, his opinions on his position at the prison, and his compassion for his fellow prisoners. In this letter, Vanzetti discusses a letter to James Cannon and an argument he had with the editor of the Italian newspaper, *Il Proletario*. This letter contextualizes Vanzetti within the larger Italian anarchist community.

---

<sup>122</sup> Celestino Madeiros, the fellow prisoner who confessed to the Bridgewater hold-up

<sup>123</sup> *Don't let poor Celestino*. . . was omitted from the Jackson and Frankfurter edition. It shows Vanzetti's compassion for the person who admitted to committing the crime for which he was to be executed.

<sup>124</sup> Written at top of page

*Description: Handwritten in black ink on lined paper. Vanzetti's numbering of the pages are omitted. This letter was published in part in J&F's 1928 edition of letters.*

May 22, 1927

Dear Mary:—

Well, I have been pleased to see the three who were here the day before yesterday. Usmanno,<sup>125</sup> the young Italo-American lawyer who came from Pittsburgh Pa., to petition Fuller in our behalf, seems to be a good boy. Seemly he reported a good impression of us and he went, afterward, to see Rosy. Joe<sup>126</sup> gave me your letter of which I was glad.

You are pessimist on the account of your case:<sup>127</sup> Strange enough, on these later days I oftenly thought of it in your same way. The laws are the codified will of the dominating classes; the laws are made to legalize the State organization of violence; the laws and the courts are therefore the servant tools of the bosses as the judges, police, hangers and spies are their servants. Then an inferiour is always wrong, in ↑the↓ courts ↑which↓ made to hupheld the superiour will and command. Then a rebel or a novator is always guilt before the laws-made for conservation. This is why each new idea, religion, regime, ↑truth,↓ has been compelled to smash by violence the resisting violence of the pre-established and resisting idea, religion, or regime. So, turning from the general to your particular you are an inferiour and a know novator, v.s. a great disadvantage because the judges are there to buttress the superiour; and a guilt very much worse thant that which your bosses may pretend. As we, before the judges are guilt of a worse guilt than that of an ↑alleged↓ murder— you are guilt of a worse guilt than the alleged fault. This is why you have been thinking as I was thinking on the outcome of your case. Yet, because ~~the~~

---

<sup>125</sup> Michael Angelo Musmanno, representative for the Pittsburg Sons of Italy

<sup>126</sup> Joseph Moro, friend of Sacco and Vanzetti who became the Italian secretary of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee in 1926 after Amleto Fabbri asked him to take his place and take care of the Italian materials.

<sup>127</sup> Mary Donovan had appealed being fired from her job at the Massachusetts Department of Labor

~~rule~~ each rule has its exception, you may win the case and such is my wish. I learnt very late that Mr. Eh. would have come last Friday; I do not know that your case is to be resolved to-morrow; I had several letters to answer; I expected a visit for yesterday: Else I would have ready a note for you— I could reach you to-morrow through the official channel but there is no use of it.

Consequently I refrain for further prognostications which— since I hope to see you soon— could reach you after the happening and after our future conversation and thus be useless. What I wish to recommend to you is that, if you lose— to not let it bother you. I understand the reasons why one is apt to be hurt by such things as this is. I am not one of those who claim that things are nothing except what our mind and feelings make them to be. On the contrary I deem that things are what they are in themselves no matter what we think of them or how we feel toward them. But it is wise to not let them boss us— master, we must, all our swivels and keep calm and undisturbed— at least, as much as possible.

Take, for example, the matter of the Herald clippings and subscription which you sent and made for me: You already know what the keepers did about it; and I know also the sneaky, meaning way they did it— they are not men enough to admit that they barred those papers and hide it under the lie: "nothing as come"; finally when forced to speak, they say that the "papers" is against the rule but we give you the clippings"— which they did not. I felt to jump to they throat— I know the privileges and the kindness that the sheriff and his defendants have had for German spies and cold blood murderers. But do you want me to spoil my blood and my kidneys in useless wrath? No, no, one day, if I can, I will tell it to the world— of course, if the governor's counsel will interview me, I will tell this too him, just to be sure; and if I lost— — to avenge me— But to spoil myself by allow these things to overwork me— no, it is no wise. You

should do just the same. And never minds about the clipping; I have enough of them to prove my subject; from now on send all through the Defence.

I am like the much Rev. Father Zapata<sup>128</sup> who preach well and rolls badly. Sometime I get impatient or harsh to or resented from Nick. Then I think that I might be worse had I been seven years segregated as he is. And then I consider everything and yet ashamed of my conduct with him and regret it. All depend on one idiosincrazy: Now I put myself in this mood: he does not intend to offend or even if he intend so, you must be man enough to understand it all and be just. Then nothing disturbs me. Whereas if I do not consider will and take things as they are not and let my selflove rules— I suffer and react. You see, I just handle well the swivels of my being— and— everything is O.K.

The May Bulletin is magnific. I read the needful "Clarification." Well, here is another story:

In the edictorial ↑on the case↓ of our weekly, from N.J. (issue of April 23 it is said: "the cinic indifference of the whole American people— — —." They are just of these days, the unique, the only few voices from the breast of these people, not for the liberty of the innocent victims destined soon to the most cruel killing— it seems impossible but it is so— those few voices are asking for a prompt, immediate execution of our two better comrades."

The edictorial was globally good and well for it criticized the little measure taken in our defence by the labor unions in general (here) and warn against vain obbtimism. I wrote so to its author adding that its statement on the American people's conduct was wrong and eccessive, and that it would convey,<sup>129</sup> abroad, an erroneous impression. To prove him the veridicity of my

---

<sup>128</sup> Emiliano Zapata, Mexican revolutionary

<sup>129</sup> convey

affirmation I cited the A. F. of Labor,<sup>130</sup> the Amalgamated, the Socialist Party, the American C.L. Union,<sup>131</sup> the Wellesley Collage, and other American institution which were with us almost from the beginning; ect., ect.

Well, what do you think he answered me? Just this: "As for the American Public, I am still of my opinion, for if it is true that there are some exception, especially among the Intelligentsia, the exceptions confirms the rule; there for nothing excessivity but absolute objectivity." — (in his statement. This is an anarchist who speak in this Popely way, insisting in a mistake, in face of the tremendous protest that he denys.

Well, I just close tighly, at once, of my swivell— and everything is O.K. Then I answered him that "it seems to me that he is pointing his feed and closing his reason (which swivel should always be left open) and I cited him a page-full of American institutions and individual which and who are in our behalf. Then I told him that his paper should be (but is not) the informer on the case to all the Italian speaking friends and comrades, and that it is a poor service to the case to tell the world that all the people of this country are against us. Positively they will intertain resentment against my sincere and reasonable letter— but my swivel are all closed— it is O.K.

And what about Cannon's letter to me,<sup>132</sup> if my swivels were not ↑all↓ in good condicions? Just think of it. And what about the Cline letter?

There is a guy in New York who directs il "Proletario, the weekly of the Italian I.W.W. Like me he likes to boast his own and keeps calling his paper "the older revolutionary journal of the U.S. of America and the Canada." He printed it on a letter-circular for fund, a copy of which

---

<sup>130</sup> American Federation of Labor

<sup>131</sup> American Civil Liberties Union

<sup>132</sup> The letter Vanzetti refers to is the same one he discusses in his May 3, 1927 letter to Mary Donovan where he tells her that he received a letter from James Cannon of the Communist Party, who wants Vanzetti to use his name "to compel unity in the movement if you will say the word for it."



was sent to me— to me that I know the story. So, I wrote him: "Say Mangano, your paper is the youngest "revolutionary paper of U.S. of A. & Canada. It was founded by the Italian socialist, who you call "reformist" and it was their "unrevolutionary organ until the 1911 when, at the Utica Congress came the scission in "syndicalists" and "socialists. The former get the "Proletario" and turned it in "revolutionary syndicalism from "reformist socialism" as it had been till then.<sup>133</sup> The socialist issued another weekly which they boast as the oldest of the U.S. of A. and Canada. He who hears both of you and does not know that fact, wonders which one of you is wrong. But the socialist are right and yours is the youngest revolutionary papers in this country because it became so when two anarchist ones have been published for decades. And I send him a couple of dollars, saying that this is a trifle and that I would be glad to renounce the elderness of our own papers where I able to begin anew something better.

You know what comrade M. answer me?

"Well, next time I will call it the oldest worker's paper— is it alright?" Maybe, and I care a rap, I just laugh at that "fixed idea of elderness." But he also explains that he cannot call it "the oldest socialist paper" for all of us are socialists, "even you." He seems to have discovered America, in saying so. But I like his general way of redacting his paper; and, to be sure, he stick with us.

Of all this I am only sorry because a great Cause needs great men to triumph— while, alas! these letters do not testimony it— for all the rest I just turn the swivels close.

This is Sunday morning and mine seems a sermon on "the swivels." It was suggested by my consciouness of your being in trying circumstance and by my wish to land you a hand. If you would be compelled to delay your call— let this help a little.

---

<sup>133</sup> Vanzetti wrote to Mangano, the editor of the Italian newspaper *Il Proletario* in May of 1927. This letter, written in Italian, has been digitized by the Boston Public Library: <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:z603sk18q>

But when you write “arrivaderci” instead of “arrivederci”— I let every swivel opened and laugh well. That is unreasonable and ungenerous; don’t? Well, arrivederci dear comrade. My regards to you father & sister and to our valourous Jackson.<sup>134</sup> Many to you, Bartolomeo

## **Conclusion**

When we rely on editions of Sacco and Vanzetti’s letters that are inaccurate and when Sacco and Vanzetti are only considered in relation to each other, we miss the other ways in which he contributed to the Italian and anarchist communities in New England and the significance of the friendships he forged with important, and often overlooked, female socialist labor organizers like Mary Donovan and Alice Stone Blackwell. It is time to think about Sacco and Vanzetti from a lens that is not necessarily legal and that is not necessarily framed through their criminal case. Sacco and Vanzetti were conjoined by the State. If both men are to be freed from the chains that the State put upon them, we must acknowledge their humanity and look at them as they were instead of as we would like them to be. A new edition of Vanzetti’s letters, separate from Sacco’s, is just the first step.

---

<sup>134</sup> Gardner Jackson, co-editor of *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti* and active member of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee

## Appendix

**Table 1: Contents of Existing Editions of Sacco and Vanzetti Letters**

Edition	# of Sacco's Letters and Writings	# of Vanzetti's Letters and Writings	Return Correspondence	Time Span of Letters	Location of Original Manuscripts	Note on Edition
<i>The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti</i> , edited by Jackson and Frankfurter (1928)	60	145; also includes Vanzetti's open letter to Gov. Fuller and "Vanzetti's Last Statement"	Not included	1921-1927	Felicani mss. at Boston Public Library (BPL), Hagoood mss. at Lilly Library (LL)	The letters included were originally written in English. Many omissions and changes to the original manuscripts were made. It is the only edition of Sacco and Vanzetti's letters in English.
<i>Non piangete la mia morte: lettere ai familiari</i> [Don't mourn my death: Letters to Relatives], edited by Cesare Pillon and Vincenzina Vanzetti (1962)	0	109; also includes <i>Mia Vita Proletariana</i> [My proletarian life]	Not included	1901-1927	In possession of Vanzetti's family; typescript copies in Felicani mss. at BPL	The letters in this edition were originally written in Italian and have never been translated into English. The letters in the edition match the typescript copies in the Felicani mss.
<i>Altri dovrebbero aver paura: lettere e testimonianze inedite</i> [Others Would Have Been Afraid: Unpublished Letters and Testimonies], translated and edited by Andrea Comincini (2012)	6; also includes <i>Note autobiografiche</i> [Autobiographical notes]	78; also includes <i>Una vita proletariana</i> [A proletarian life], <i>L'Usignolo</i> [The Nightingale] and <i>Eventi e Vittime</i> [Events and Victims]	Some return correspondence from Alice Stone Blackwell and Mary Donovan included	1921-1927	Hagoood mss. at LL, Archivio Berneri-Aurelio Chessa at the Biblioteca Panizzi di Reggio Emilia	The letters in this edition were all originally written in English and translated into Italian; some of Vanzetti's other writings are included in their original Italian. The reason for omissions made was noted as illegibility.

<p><i>Lettere e scritti dal carcere</i> [Prison letters and writings], translated and edited by Lorenzo Tibaldo (2012)</p>	<p>60; also includes <i>Note autobiografiche</i> [Autobiographical notes], <i>Ai rivoluzionari . . . cristiani</i> [To revolutionaries. . . Christians], <i>Il sogno dell'ignoto</i> [The dream of the unknown] and a letter to the editor of <i>L'Adunata</i></p>	<p>146; also includes <i>Roba da chiodi</i> [It's unbelievable], <i>Brutture sintomatiche</i> [Symptomatic eyesores], <i>Come si inganna e si turlupina il popolo</i> [How to deceive and cheat the people], <i>Sindacati e sindacalismo</i> [Syndicates and syndicalism], <i>I documenti della Malafede</i> [Documents on hypocrisy], <i>Al proletario solidale</i> [To the sympathetic proletariat], <i>Il retroscena della tragedia</i> [Background of the tragedy], and <i>Il processo di Plymouth</i> [On the Plymouth Trial]</p>	<p>Not included</p>	<p>1921-1927</p>	<p>Letters originally in English are translated from the JFE; Others in Archivio Berneri-Aurelio Chessa at the Biblioteca Panizzi di Reggio Emilia and at the Istituto storico della Resistenza e della società contemporanea in Cuneo, Italy</p>	<p>Tibaldo did not consult any of the manuscript collections in the United States in preparing this edition, so he relies solely on the JFE in translating the English letters into Italian. The other writings are a mixture of translations from English and writings originally in Italian.</p>
--	--	--	---------------------	------------------	---	--

Translations of The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti and *Non piangete la mia morte* into other languages without additions made have not been included in this chart. *Non piangete la mia morte* has never been translated into English. The number of letters in each edition was determined by counting those that are dated separately. Letters to multiple people under one date heading have been counted as one letter.

## Bibliography

Aldino Felicani mss., Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts.

Avrich, Paul. *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America*. Oakland: AK Press, 2005.

Avrich, Paul. *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Bussel, Robert. *From Harvard to the Ranks of Labor: Powers Hapgood and the American Working Class*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.

Dos Passos, John. *Facing the Chair: The Americanization of Two Foreignborn Workmen*. Boston: Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, 1927.

Cerise Jack mss., Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

*Cronaca Sovversiva*. Chronicling America, Library of Congress, Accessed on 9 October 2017: <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/2012271201/>

Gentry, Curt. *Frame-Up: The Incredible Case of Tom Mooney and Warren Billings*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1967.

Hannon, Michael. "The People v. Benjamin Gitlow (1920)" accessed on October 9, 2017. [http://moses.law.umn.edu/darrow/trialpdfs/Gitlow\\_Case.pdf](http://moses.law.umn.edu/darrow/trialpdfs/Gitlow_Case.pdf).

Jones, Megan. "Vanzetti's Voice: A Critical Look at the Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti," Undergraduate thesis, Indiana University Bloomington, 2014.

Mary Donovan Hapgood mss., Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

Millay, Edna St. Vincent. "Fear," *The Outlook and Independent*, 9 November 1927: 293-295, 310.

"Sacco Continues Fast, Vanzetti Writes Letters," *Boston Globe*, August 15, 1927.

- The Sacco-Vanzetti Case: Transcript of the Record of the Trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in the Courts of Massachusetts and Subsequent Proceedings 1920-7*. Volumes 1-4. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1928.
- Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, *Bulletin* no. 18 (1928): 5.
- Sacco, Nicola, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. *Altri non dovrebbero aver paura: lettere e testimonianze inedite*, Edited and translated by Andrea Comincini. Rome: Nova Delphi, 2012.
- Sacco, Nicola, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, Edited by Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter. New York: Viking Press, 1928.
- Sacco Nicola, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, Edited by Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter. New York: Penguin Books, 2007.
- Sinclair, Upton. *Boston: A Documentary Novel of the Sacco-Vanzetti Case*. 2 vols. New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1928.
- Sinclair, Upton. *August 22<sup>nd</sup>*, New York: Award Books, 1965.
- Tejada, Susan. *In Search of Sacco and Vanzetti: Double Lives, Troubled Times, and the Massachusetts Murder Case That Shook the World*. Lebanon: Northeastern University Press, 2012.
- Temkin, Moshik. *The Sacco-Vanzetti Affair*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
- “Three Massachusetts Bandits Die in Chair For Killing of Watchman in Car Barn Hold-Up,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Jan. 6, 1927.
- Topp, Michael. *The Sacco and Vanzetti Case: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2005.
- Upton Sinclair mss., Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

Vanzetti, Bartolomeo. *Non piangete la mia morte: lettere ai familiari*, Edited by Cesare Pillon and Vincenzina Vanzetti. Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1962.

Watson, Bruce. Forward to *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, Edited by Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter. New York: Penguin Books, 2007.

Watson, Bruce. *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders, and the Judgment of Mankind*. New York: Penguin Books, 2007.

Williams, Francis Lamont. Review of *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, by Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Edited by Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter. *The Outlook and Independent*: 28.