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# Salviamo l'Italia<sup>1</sup>

**Paul Ginsborg**

In January 2009 I became an Italian citizen. At the Prefect's office in Florence they informed me that I had come after a Chinese and before an American, each of us part of a constant flow of some 40,000 foreigners becoming Italian every year; not enough to make Italy a multi-cultural country, but certainly a beginning.<sup>2</sup> In the ceremony conferring citizenship, the then President of the Florentine Consiglio Comunale, Eros Cruccolini, asked me to read aloud two articles of the Constitution and then presented me with an Italian flag, the rainbow flag of peace and a copy of the Italian constitution.

When I told my friends that I had become an Italian the great majority of them reacted with astonishment. "Why on earth would you want to be an Italian?" (Chi te l'ha fatta fare?) was the most frequent comment; "above all, *now*?" One or two asked me solicitously whether I'd had the good sense to keep my British nationality as well (dual citizenship is in fact almost automatic in these cases). The most caustic of them all commented: "Well Paul, at last you'll be able to say, along with the rest of us, 'I'm ashamed to be an Italian'" (Mi vergogno di essere italiano).

It would be untrue to say that these reactions amazed me. I have lived in Italy long enough, some eighteen years, and studied it for nearly forty – to have an idea of the underlying humours of its people. But the choral nature of the comments – and from people often active in civil society – certainly gave me pause for thought. Is there another nation in the world whose citizens would react with the same measure of self-deprecation? Certainly not the Greeks or the French, nor the Americans or the British for that matter. What deep-rooted cultural habit lies behind these reactions? That most lucid of nineteenth-century Italians, Carlo Cattaneo, suggested an answer when he wrote in 1839 of "quel vizio *tutto italiano* di dir male del suo paese quasi per una *escandescenza di amor patrio*" (1960, 134, emphasis in original; that quintessentially Italian vice of speaking ill of one's country almost as if in an overflowing of love for the fatherland).<sup>3</sup> Yet it is difficult to accept that excessive love of country explains the unison of my friends' reactions. Rather I discern a great sadness about the present state of Italy, accompanied by deep-seated resignation.

The title of this book – *Salviamo l'Italia* – as well as its contents, are intended as an antidote to such attitudes, however comprehensible they may be. What follows is not primarily a political programme – though there are strong propositive elements in it – but rather a historical reflection. Italy is about to celebrate 150 years of existence as a nation. I think it is interesting, even revelatory, to look at some of the problems of today not only through our own eyes but through those of the Risorgimento generations. Risorgimento history is not generally loved by those who have had to study it in Italian schools. It is too often taught in an unimaginative and learn-by-heart manner – not bombastic (as under

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<sup>1</sup> [Editors' note: What follows is the author's original English version of the first chapter of his own 2010 Italian book of the same title. Published with permission of the author.]

<sup>2</sup> For recent annual figures of Italian citizenship see Polchi (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, translations of Italian texts are those of the author and editors.

Fascism) but simply boring. Yet the protagonists of the Risorgimento make up an extraordinary gallery of personalities and their writings remain of great resonance for today. In the pages that follow I intend to trace in comparative fashion the answers they gave, as well as our own, to some of the principal problems that face Italy as a nation. The opinions and solutions that reach us from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are far from exhaustive or unanimous: there are questions which torment us today about which Risorgimento intellectuals barely thought. Yet what strikes me is how surprisingly contemporary are their reflections, how much their anxieties are also ours, even if very many decades of a tumultuous national history now separate them from us. I have not tried, for obvious reasons, to recount here all that history, or to calculate the degree of responsibility of different parts of Italy's past in the forming of her present. Rather, I have wanted the voices of the Risorgimento to intermingle directly with our own.

I have organised this book around the concept of salvation, *salvezza*, with brief chapters which treat of different aspects of the same problem. The first chapter asks the heretical question: is Italy worth saving? The second asks, if it is worth saving, then what should its place be in the contemporary world? The third asks from whom and from what is Italy to be saved? The fourth and final one treats of human agency – *who* will save Italy and *by what means*? In each chapter I have tried to outline some Risorgimento answers and to compare them with some of our own. I don't know whether this will stir any of my friends from their despair. I hope so.

As a preamble, I would like to say something about *decline* and *decadence*, states of being in national histories often antecedent to attempts at renewal and salvation.<sup>4</sup> National decline, even liquefaction, is very much one of the themes of today. But so was it in the early years of the Risorgimento. How did contemporaries perceive and measure decline in the early years of the nineteenth century (circa 1810-1830), when Italy still had to be made; and how in the period 1990-2010, when Italy has undoubtedly been made, but made badly?

In the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence, that unplanned Pantheon of Italian greatness, between the tomb of Machiavelli and the empty monument to Dante stands that of the dramatist and poet Vittorio Alfieri, certainly lesser known today than his two illustrious compatriots. His neo-classical tomb, sculpted by Antonio Canova in 1810, is of great magnificence and impact (De Koomen 1993). It is dominated by the imposing and stately figure of a woman, dressed in long robes. She is crying but with composure, and wiping her tears away with a handkerchief. At her feet lies, abandoned, a cornucopia, the symbol of plenty. On her head she wears a crown composed of turreted gates and walls, the symbolic way of indicating that she represents a city or a state. Indeed, she is Italy. Her figure, neither maternal and protective, nor girlish and virginal, not a Marianne with her breast uncovered nor a Britannia with her spear poised for action, fascinated all contemporaries, including Ugo Foscolo: “Ed è pur bella l'*Italia*! Bella! Ma sta ad ogni modo sopra un sepolcro” (1954, 102 quoted in De Koomen 1993, 216; And *Italy* is beautiful: beautiful! But there she stands upon a tomb).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See the valuable entry by Le Goff (1978, 389-420).

<sup>5</sup> I would like to thank Francesca Serra for leading me to Alfieri's tomb (Serra Forthcoming) and Alberto Banti for his discussion of the European female allegories of nationalism (2005, 3-32).

How could Italy stop standing on a tomb? Canova's famous statue was weeping for Alfieri, but she was also understood to be mourning the fate of the country she symbolised. Some 300 years had passed since the 'great catastrophe,' the brief period between 1494 and 1530 when a divided Italy opened the gates of its cities to rule by foreign dynasties. From that time forth, Italy's decadence and decline had been there for all to see. In his famous poem of 1818, "*All'Italia*," Leopardi lamented the long-lost age of Italian greatness:

O patria mia, vedo le mura e gli archi,  
E le colonne e i simulacri e l'erme  
Torri degli avi nostri,  
Ma la gloria non vedo,  
Non vedo il lauro e il ferro ond'eran carichi  
I nostri padri antichi (1987, 5).

O my fatherland, I see the city walls and the triumphal arches,/ and the columns and the statues and the deserted/ towers of our ancestors,/ but I don't see the glory,/ I don't see the laurels and steel borne by/ our ancient fathers.

At a historical level, no one described better Italy's lost autonomy and former civic greatness than the Swiss historian Simonde de Sismondi – born in Geneva, but Tuscan by elective affinity – in his celebrated, multi-volume history of the Italian Republics (1807-1818). At the heart of Italy's problem lay her loss of that most precious of freedoms, the liberty from dependence.<sup>6</sup> By dint of her subjugation to foreign rule, Italy's national character had become "corrotta e snervata" (corrupt and enfeebled) and her foreign rulers, once having conquered her, despised her for her pusillanimous submission. The Italians had lost any history of their own: "le loro sventure non sono altro che episodi nella storia delle altre nazioni" (their misfortunes are nothing but episodes in the history of other nations).<sup>7</sup>

For the Italian patriots of the early Restoration period, this emptiness and moral decline was everywhere to be seen, in private as well as in public. In 1826 the *London Magazine* published a corrosive article entitled "The Women of Italy." The author was anonymous but in reality Foscolo ([1826] 1978, 417-69). By no stretch of the imagination could Foscolo be described as a paradigm of male virtue, but his denunciation of the habits and practices inherent to upper class Italian families rang true. Young girls were educated from a tender age in convents, from which they learned nothing about life and a lot about "fanatismo, ipocrisia e cupidigia" (ibid., 443; fanaticism, hypocrisy, and greed). Once married, they and their spouses enjoyed little independence or measure of freedom from their parents. Leading empty and frivolous lives, the women of Italy

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<sup>6</sup> For liberty as absence from dependence see Skinner (2002).

<sup>7</sup> These quotations are taken from Sismondi's one-volume compendium of his great work, first published in Lugano in 1833; see now Schiera (1996, 342-3).

thought more about their lovers than they did about their families. For Foscolo, the *cicisbei* or ‘cavalieri serventi,’ that is, the young gallants who accompanied married women in public and more often than not shared their beds in private,<sup>8</sup> epitomised the decline of Italian morals (Bizzocchi 2007, 69-96). Disconsolate, Foscolo reflected on how much these relations damaged any prospect of Italy’s patriotic revival:

Thus, in a country where nature has, perhaps, endowed her daughters, more liberally than in any other, with the treasures of mind and heart calculated to render them the mothers of free citizens and the nurses of patriots, bad government, and consequent bad usages, have rendered them so degenerate, that their domestic life corrupts every germ of virtue in their children. (Foscolo [1826] 1978; 466)

What was true of elite families was also true of elite culture. In 1816 the formidable figure of the French *dame de lettres*, Madame de Staël, daughter of Baron Necker, the one-time economic minister of Luigi XVI of France, opened a fierce debate in Milanese literary circles by insisting that the Italian literary tradition, based on classical texts, had thoroughly fossilised. She urged the Italians instead to translate the recent poetry of Germany and England so as to acquaint the Italian public with the finest products of northern European romanticism. The carapace of convention and conformity had to be broken. How was Italy to stop mourning her fate, asked de Staël, if she did not open her intellectual frontiers and welcome what was new in European culture?

Italian literati responded indignantly; why, they asked, should they sacrifice Greek and Latin mythology in favour of the confused and undisciplined outpourings from the North; why give up Homer for Ossian? (Asor Rosa 2009, 438). De Staël was defended principally by three manifestos of early Italian romanticism, all published in 1816. The most resonant of them today is that of Giovanni Berchet. It was Berchet who sought a literature “of the people,” in which novels (*romanzi*), based on romantic ideas and sentiments would reach a wider reading public and eventually become the basis of a national political project. As he wrote in his *Lettera semiseria*, “mille e mille famiglie pensano, leggono, scrivono, piangono, fremono e sentono le passioni tutte, senza pure avere un nome né teatri” (1912, 17; thousands and thousands of families think, read, write, cry, tremble, and feel all the passions, without a famous name or a theater of their own). The culture of romanticism, with its emphasis on breaking down everyday routines, on self-education and self-expression, on passion and popular culture, could open “un altro orizzonte” (ibid.; a new horizon) to the poet in particular and the Italian reading public in general. It could accustom them “ad altri pensieri ed a più vaste intenzioni” (ibid.; to different forms of thought, and to much greater ends).

“Insomma siate uomini e non cicale,” Berchet exhorted his fellow Italian letterati, “e i vostri paesani vi benediranno, e lo straniero ripiglierà modestia e parlerà di voi coll’antico rispetto” (ibid. 26: In sum, be men and not crickets; your fellow countrymen will bless you for it, and the foreigner will again assume an attitude of modesty and speak

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<sup>8</sup> This type is parodically ‘celebrated’ in Giuseppe Parini’s “Il giorno,” a poem much admired by Foscolo (cf. “Degli sepolcri,” 54-78).

of you with the respect of days gone by). The theme of regaining respect abroad was an overriding one in these years. Italy and the Italians had no longer to be a backwater, a periphery in the world of European culture.

History, family life, culture – these then were three fields in which Italy's decline was perceived and denounced. But it was above all in the realm of political ideas and actions that patriots measured themselves and were found wanting. The revolutions of 1820-21 shook the whole peninsula. In the North, Piedmontese aristocrats tried to convince the young Charles Albert, then Prince of Carignano, to embrace the liberal and national cause. He let them down and many, among them Santorre di Santarosa, were forced into exile to save their lives. In the South, Naples, as well as Avellino and parts of Campania, had revolted several months earlier. On the Adriatic coast the local *carbonari* enlisted the help of Lord Byron who at the time was living in Ravenna, in the house of his last great love, the Countess Teresa Guiccioli. She was married to a husband much older than herself, and Byron acted out with glee and self-irony his allotted role of *cavaliere serviente*. He also backed the local nationalist conspirators. They were defeated, as were their like throughout the peninsula. One morning in late April, 1821, Byron and Teresa, she seated at the harpsichord and he striding up and down, expressed their shared despair for the fate of Italy: "Ahimè", sighed Teresa with tears in her eyes, "now the Italians must perforce dedicate themselves to opera." "I fear," commented Byron, "that *that* and maccheroni are their strong points."<sup>9</sup> But he also added, and in this he touched upon a constant theme in modern Italian history: "there still exist amongst them some lively spirits" (ibid.).

In Italy today the theme of decline and decadence is as acutely present in public debate as it was in the first decades of the nineteenth century. There are many overlaps, none more so than in the decline of manners and customs. There are also important differences.<sup>10</sup> One such is the present-day feeling of *cosmic* decline, in the sense of a world in its dotage and the risk of its imminent destruction. This is a very contemporary anguish, one far removed from those of the Risorgimento generations. Another element of difference regards *economic* decline, a contemporary obsession as we shall see in a moment. A third difference concerns *religious* decline, so present in the Risorgimento's searing criticisms of the Catholic church, but so absent as a critique today. Overall, there is a feeling of contemporary dissatisfaction at least as profound as that of 200 years ago, and perhaps more insidious as it appears to induce passivity more than protest.

Let me begin with families. We have no commentator similar to Foscolo, calling to account the prevailing models of family life. The *cicisbei* have long since gone, and so has convent education for girls, but a deep unease remains. Is family life, as we now know it, a real education in becoming "liberi cittadini" (free citizens) to use Foscolo's term? I think not. On one level, members of families are freer and have more rights than ever before – to make choices about their lives, to travel, to vote in elections. On another, they are trapped by prevailing models of consumption and self-interest that risk being

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<sup>9</sup> Cited from Origo (1949, 252), based on a letter from Byron to Moore of April 28, 1821 (Byron 1821, 105).

<sup>10</sup> See Burke (1976, 137-52), who lists six criteria of decline; the question is further discussed in Le Goff (1978, 409ff).

more pernicious than those of the early nineteenth century. Italian families have many virtues – those of emotional proximity, of strong solidarities between generations, of a deep-rooted capacity to enjoy life – all characteristics that visitors from the individualist and emotionally cooler North have commented upon with envy. But they have few *civic* virtues, and the global market model on which home life is now based does nothing to make Italian families more aware of their civic responsibilities.

Here the transmission mechanisms of modern culture play a crucial role. The key cultural battles are no longer those of the beginning of the nineteenth century, when tiny groups of *letterati* disagreed bitterly over the respective merits of Romanticism and Classicism. They are located instead in popular culture, and on a mass scale. Television, as is well known, is the predominant cultural instrument of an estimated 80% of Italian homes. It is not a *medium* but a *subject*, the most powerful cultural actor of the contemporary scene. Television is not an absolute evil, as Karl Popper tried to argue in the last years of his life (Popper and Condry 1994). In Italian history it has played a vital role in spreading a single, national language and a sense of national community. But when its control is concentrated in very few hands, and in the Italian case almost exclusively in a single pair of very carefully manicured hands, then it is a deeply pernicious instrument. It serves up an endless diet of soap operas, of football, of variety and ‘reality’ shows, inexorably seasoned by industrial quantities of advertisements, all oriented towards reinforcing the “work and spend” model of everyday life under consumer capitalism. Television in its present form seduces and anaesthetizes us all. Nothing in it, to return to Berchet, encourages us “to different forms of thought, and to much greater ends.”

In historical terms, the Italian Republic, founded in 1948, has in many aspects been a success story – its Constitution is one of the best in the world, its population released from grinding poverty, its political participation levels still among the highest in Europe. Its history, in other words, has been marked by genuine pluralism and progress (Foa 1994). And although its public education system has always left much to be desired, the Republic, in its more than sixty years of history, has been able to create ever wider circles of citizens who have received higher and further education.

Yet the Republic is not respected and its institutions are not loved. Here the question of how we live our experience of the state distinguishes us from the early nineteenth century. The patriots of the early nineteenth century had a strong sense of nation, one which combined geography, language and culture, but they had no state. Indeed the Italians’ incapacity to construct a unitary state over a very long period of time was considered one of their greatest inadequacies. Today Italy has a state, but little sense of nation. The two concepts – state and nation – are intimately connected, both in theory and in practice. In the Italian case any sense of national identity has been undermined by a state that has so often been unable to fulfill its role: its laws complex and uncertain, its public administration hobbled and corrupt, its judicial system exasperatingly slow. The 12<sup>th</sup> annual report on *Gli italiani e lo stato* (Italians and the State), revealed extraordinarily low levels of trust in the institutions of the Republican state; while the President of the Republic still enjoyed the confidence of 70.3% of the adult population, and the school system a surprising 57.5%, Parliament had sunk to 18.3% and the political parties to just 8.6% (Diamante 2009).

From the bedrock of this institutional inadequacy, there has developed a political life characterised by surface polemics of great intensity, even melodrama, but limited capacity for reform. The Right has chosen a high risk, personalistic and populist version of modern politics whose main message seems to be that of Louis Philippe in the 1830s – ‘*Enrichissez-vous*’ (become rich!) – not an easy undertaking in the present economic climate and not a very edifying one at any time. The Left seems totally disoriented by the events of the last twenty years, quite unable to react to the end of Communism, without ideas or intellectual courage. The tentacles of the *partitocrazia* (government not of the people but by the parties) that the Italian political class has collectively created reach far down into the intestines of society, controlling resources and distributing them in highly questionable ways.<sup>11</sup>

The reaction to all this took the form in 1992-94 not of a revolution (by now a very rare occurrence in Western Europe), but of a campaign, principally fought by the judiciary, to clean up Italian public life. For a brief moment Italy showed Europe the way, as a relatively independent judiciary waged war on the corruption of politicians, entrepreneurs and administrators alike. The events of 1820-21 and those of 1992-94 were obviously dissimilar in many ways, but they had interesting elements in common: their protagonists wanted public life in Italy to be placed on a completely different footing, constitutional in the first case, legalist in the second. Yet in both cases they were too isolated within Italian society for initial victories to be consolidated. In the case of 1992-94, this was true at a political level, with the ex-Communist party too frightened of the skeletons in its own cupboard to lend political direction to the protest. It was true of the President of the Republic, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, too concerned with re-establishing a quiet consensus. But above all it was true of a significant part of the nation, itself corrupted by decades of misgovernment. The magistrates called for a general return to the rule of law, but this meant that many families would have had to face up to a series of decidedly difficult questions concerning their own behavior: to what degree the dominant political culture was in fact *their own*.

The failure of 1992-94 has meant that Sismondi’s telling description of Italy as “*corrotta e snervata*” is as relevant today as it was in 1833. Indeed, if then there was a feeling of a steady state of Italian decadence, now there is both the sensation and the reality of *precipitous* decline. In the annual tables charting the perception of global corruption, issued by a Berlin based anti-corruption NGO, Transparency International, Italy has slipped further and further behind: 31<sup>st</sup> position in 2002, 41<sup>st</sup> in 2007, 55<sup>th</sup> in 2008, as low as 63<sup>rd</sup> in 2009. By this time, Turkey, Cuba, Namibia, Samoa, Jordan, and Bahrain, to mention only a few, all came in ahead of her.<sup>12</sup> The governments of Silvio Berlusconi, which have been in power for the greater part of the last decade, (2001-2006, 2008-10) have never given any impression of being concerned with this dramatic slippage in public morals. On the contrary. Much of their legislation – like the radical de-penalisation of crimes concerning company accounting; the frequent ‘pardoning,’ on payment of a small fee, of those who have constructed houses without building permits; the new, simplified procedures’ regarding major public works and infrastructures; and the

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<sup>11</sup> [Editors’ note: on these questions see the translated excerpt from Salvatore Settis, *Paesaggio, Costituzione, cemento* published elsewhere in this issue.]

<sup>12</sup> The TI Index is based on business-opinion surveys carried out by respected organisations such as the World Economic Forum and the Economist Intelligence Unit.



so-called ‘fiscal shield’ allowing illegally exported capital to return to Italy on the payment of a small fine – have worked against transparency, competition and control, and in favour of a rampant crony capitalism.<sup>13</sup>

It is in this context of the decline of public morals that we should place the continuing spread of criminal organisations throughout the peninsula. Once upon a time, it was the Sicilian mafia that dominated all attention and academic investigation. This is no longer the case. The spread of illegality into parts of Campania and Calabria, which previously had been relatively immune; the criminal groups’ growing connections to the economy of the centre and north of the country; the pervasive corruption of social relations recounted in Roberto Saviano’s world-famous *Gomorra*: all are evidence of an advanced cancer which finds no parallel in the Italy of the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Given this dramatic social and moral situation – crying out for radical reforming action – the historian can only note with astonishment that the primary debate on national decline, that which dominates the energies and resources of the ruling elites, is almost entirely dedicated to the economy. We are inundated with instruments of measurement both ephemeral – like the daily figures of the activity of the Stock Exchange – and more durable, such as the annual growth of the Gross Domestic Product measured both by volume and *per capita*. Taken together, these comparative economic statistics tell a story of slow but inexorable Italian decline. Italy’s percentage of world trade, both in merchandising and commercial services, shows a marked loss of position over the last ten years. The rate of change in *per capita* income recounts a similar story.<sup>14</sup>

Economic prosperity matters – indeed it is one of the principal pillars upon which nations construct their history. But it cannot be the single measure of comparative well-being. Adam Smith was a great economist but he was also Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow. He wrote *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) but also *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1790). The need to revive the link between economics and ethics – and to use this link as a measuring-stick for government action – appears to be of great urgency at the present time.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, it is not just the *accumulation* of wealth that matters – Italy even in relative decline remains amongst the ten largest economies of the world – but its *distribution*. Over the last twenty years Italy, along with other major capitalist countries, has become an ever more unequal country. Conspicuous resources are increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small elite, and the gap between rich and poor is widening.

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<sup>13</sup> Very useful on the whole theme of corruption is della Porta and Vannucci (2007). See also the illuminating interview, conducted by Marco Travaglio with one of the magistrates who was a protagonist of *Mani Pulite*, Piercamillo Davigo (2010). On the reform of the *falso in bilancio* of 2001 (law concerning deceptive accounting practices), for instance, Davigo comments: “they lowered the penalties and hence changed the rules; it’s impossible to carry out trials in a reasonable amount of time; and, furthermore, they introduced very high thresholds for punishable offences.”

<sup>14</sup> Italy in 1997 held 5.4% of exports in world merchandising trade, compared to only 3.3% in 2008. The equivalent figures for Italian exports in commercial services were 5.5% in 1995 and 3.2% in 2008 (WTO 2009, tables 1.8 and 1.10). As for GDP per capita, taking the EU average as 100, in the year 2000 Italy’s was 116.9, above that of France and not far from Britain and Germany. By 2008 it had fallen to 102.0, well behind the other three countries of comparison and inferior to Spain as well (102.6) (Bonafede and Di Pace, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> This argument is elaborated in Ch. 2 of the book (Ginsborg 2010). For a famous debate on this theme and an analysis of the work of Smith in relation to it, see Sen (2000, pp. 31ff).

For any Republic worth its name, this is a crucial criterion of overall worth. Even more so as recent research has shown that per capita GDP (*Pil*) turns out to be much less significant for a nation's general well-being than the size of the gap between the richest and the poorest 20% of the population. The greater the gap, the greater the unease in the nation as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

Let me finish this Prologue by returning to Canova's *Italia* weeping at the tomb of Alfieri. No representation of Italy, so it seems to me, could be further from prevailing gender models in contemporary Italy. Although Italian women are more educated, freer and with more rights than at any other time in the history of the unified state, they still suffer on the margins of an overwhelmingly male public sphere. In the whole of the republican period not one public statue has been dedicated to a woman. However, the problem goes even deeper than this urgent need for gender equality. Ever since the birth of Silvio Berlusconi's commercial television in 1984, Italian mass culture, especially television culture, has projected onto the small screen such a reductive image of women as to earn itself a dubious primacy in the whole of Europe. Gender relations on what is called 'generalist' television have been characterised by the ubiquitous presence of middle-aged male *compères* and comics who do all the talking and directing, accompanied by scantily dressed soubrettes who are required to smile, dance and applaud, but not to speak. Cameras zoom in upon them from below and behind, emphasizing anatomical details whenever possible. Rarely has the male erotic gaze been constructed in so crude and infantilising a manner, nor women so clearly reduced to commodities (Zanardo 2010). To some readers this may seem of relative importance but there is no better indicator of the health or malaise of a nation than its self-representation in gender terms.

On 19 November 1810, the Swiss historian Sismondi wrote to the countess of Albany to complement her on the monument that she had paid for in Santa Croce. He found the figure of Italia to be of "rare beauty, touching and noble," like a "queen in mourning." But he also noted that she was not an integral part of the tomb, but separate from it, a "spectator," forming part of "the crowd gathered to mourn the great man's passing" (1933, 325). In metaphorical terms, we must hold on to this image of Italia's separateness. It is time for her to cease her mourning, put away her handkerchief, pick up her cornucopia and stride majestically out into the crowded Piazza of Santa Croce. For better and for worse, her nation awaits her.

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<sup>16</sup> See the recent and fundamental work of Pickett and Wilkinson (2009).

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