

Roberto Pazzi, *Domani sarò re*, Milano: Longanesi, 1997.

Roberto Pazzi's new novel is built on a steady, unbroken telephone conversation between the first person narrator and a substantial number of characters (about thirty of them), through which the whole story is spun. Consequently, the work looks like a mosaic: the whole picture comes into being and acquires a clear-cut outline little by little, through tiny as well as skilled additions. But what is it exactly? The author imagines that the young scion of a European royal family (perhaps Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy) ascends the throne and replaces a republican government which proved unable to rule Italy.

A twenty-year-old undergraduate in Political Sciences, Max is waiting for the official crowning ceremony. After establishing himself at the Quirinale and replacing the President of the Republic, he weaves a very complex web in order to create firm ground on which to base the very important role he is about to play. Therefore, the action takes place on the eve of a political 'pronunciamento', the result of which should give origin to a re-organisation of the country. Throughout the story we shall witness that such a disrupting change will not occur without troubles or disturbances.

Times are, alas, hard for everybody. Max is the victim of a riot as he is walking up the grand staircase leading to Cortona's Town Hall during the official ceremony. But his injuries are not serious, so he can marry Anna D'Avanzo, to whom he is engaged. He met the girl in the French Canton of Switzerland,

where both their families reside. Anna is a middle-class woman (perhaps a projection of Marina Doria, the Prince's mother), whose job is dealing with art exhibitions.

Readers of the novel will be aware of the fact that Pazzi creates a fable on the restoration of a monarchy, told at a brisk pace and with a fascinating style, thanks to which he is able to make a realistic, utterly depressing portrait of the present Italian society, as it appears at the end of the present century. The author clearly and mercilessly analyses, depicts, envisages the typical behaviour of the Italian people in terms of deeply rooted vices, inborn weaknesses, all sorts of deficiencies, shortcomings, idiosyncrasies, gross misbehaviour. Nothing escapes the novelist's stern scrutiny. Several pages are devoted to the illustration of the so-called 'Bel Paese' as depicted in the Italian-style Comedy. As a good preacher Pazzi hopes his countrymen will find themselves mirrored in this story and strive hard to make amends. But let us turn to some practical examples.

Max immediately points out the low moral standards of his subjects. But this fact does not prevent him from addressing them dearly: "I love them as they are, with their bias for stealing, their superficial, religious and political beliefs, their timeserving attitude, their childish longing for TV apparitions, their unfailing support of soccer players ..." (54).

Then he adds, partly ironically and partly mockingly: "No work is done when there's a soccer match. Parliament sessions are postponed, Cabinet meetings are delayed, no news is broadcast, sick people are not admitted into hospitals, nor are the dead buried" (54).

It is no mystery that Italy suffers from a very low birth rate, to the extent that, statistically speaking, this is "the country with the smallest number of children in the world" (113). Nor are Italian European MPs spared. We know that "they can only speak their

native, local dialects". No wonder "We spend millions on interpreters" (142). A few pages onwards, the Roman Catholic Church (the writer seems now to be possessed by a sort of 'libido detruendi') becomes the subject of the novelist's satire.

Firstly, Italy is said to be "the country where the Church still opposes the condoms against AIDS". Then Italy is harshly condemned as "the country where ninety-year-old bishops are the supreme authority on sex" (67).

After such stern judgement, the writer is forced to wonder: "Why are we Italians so proud of our faults?" (114). A famous movie actor is identified as the champion of such faults. He is responsible for a hundred films, which expose Italian vulgarity, although some may say that it is rather Roman, instead of the Italian, vulgarity.

To conclude, Roberto Pazzi's opinion on Italian television cannot be neglected. He has his main character on the phone with his grandmother (perhaps Maria José) in Cuernavaca. The exiled queen tells her beloved grandson to watch out for the dangers connected with the usage of such a medium.

And here is Max's angered retort: "How can I? There's no other food. There's TV at breakfast, at lunch, at teatime, at dinner. It looks as if the Italians get their calories from TV to feel alive, indeed to prove they're alive" (53).

The novel is full of four-letter words. Why has the writer adopted this code in such an unexpected manner, instead of his usual elevated tone? Perhaps he wants his readers to come face to face with the widespread, degrading process of the Italian society. Any other explanation is hard to find.

The book contains an alarming message. It is up to the reader to take it and act accordingly.

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