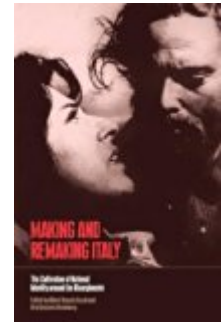


Albert Russell Ascoli, Krystyna von Henneberg, eds.. *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento*. Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2001. xviii + 332 pp. \$75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-85973-452-0.



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The wave of concern with questions of national identity that has swept through Europe at both a popular and a historiographical level in the last two decades was relatively late arriving in Italy--a circumstance that some might hold to be typical of the "backward" character of Italian culture. It is (mis)judgments such as this that the editors of this volume, Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg, have set out to overturn through a re-examination of the "making and re-making of Italy," utilizing those methods of cultural deconstruction that have been responsible for returning questions of "national identity" to the historical agenda at the expense of the hoary stereotypes of "national character."

As Silvana Patriaca demonstrates in the concluding essay in this book, many of the intellectual debates about the nature of national identity in Italy, which began in the wake of the rise of the Leagues and the collapse of the "First Republic" in the 1990s and have continued in part as a response to the rapid increase in immigration, are still couched in terms of character rather than identity. That is to say they deal in fixed, supra-

historical traits, rather than projects of cultural construction. The characteristics on which such commentators have honed their thoughts are largely negative ones, such as transformism and familism, identified as products of the "basic reservation about modernity" that Giulio Bollati identified as being at the heart of Risorgimento culture in his seminal essay on Italian national character published in 1972.[1] The problem, as Patriaca points out, is that acceptance of these features of Italian life as static characteristics is not only ahistorical, it also precludes any possibility for change.

It is precisely such possibilities, however, that motivate attempts to construct a national identity. The editors have assembled an assortment of essays treating projects to represent an Italian identity either during, or through reference to, the Risorgimento. Covering a chronological arc that stretches from the early nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth, the volume examines Romantic, Liberal, Fascist, and Left attempts to construct, reform, or subvert Italian identity through a variety of media including art, litera-

ture, music, film, and ceremonial. The book is well illustrated and although, as in all such enterprises, its components vary in quality and pertinence, there are enough connections between the essays to make the volume cohere as a whole.

The first essays in the volume explore the demand for cultural products that could foster national identity during the Risorgimento era itself. History, of course, was one of these and Adrian Lyttelton recounts how such "local" episodes in the Italian past as the creation of the (original) Lombard Leagues and the uprising of the Sicilian Vespers were remobilized during the nineteenth century into a national story of campaigns against foreign aggressors, even though their interpretation was still contested between neo-Guelphian and neo-Ghibelline camps aligned or opposed to the church. His essay is at its most intriguing, however, when—reverting to his one-time occupation as a historian of art—he analyzes the impact of Romanticism on the depiction of historical events through an exploration of the work concerning the patriotic painters of the early nineteenth century such as Francesco Hayez. Lyttelton sees Hayez's 1829 picture of *Peter the Hermit Preaching the Crusade* as emblematic of the dethronement of classicism in that it shifts attention away from the noble leadership of the First Crusade to a focus on a popular figure inspiring the crowd to action.

Hayez's work was subsequently much praised by Mazzini whose calls for depictions of collective agency in place of individualism were met, as Anne Smart explains, in Verdi's 1848 opera *La Battaglia di Legnano* when the sound of the off-stage chorus singing "Viva Italia" moves Arrigo, locked in a tower, to leap from the window in order to join up with his suicide squadron. Smart's Verdi, however, is not quite the Risorgimento tunesmith that we may have supposed. For example, she debunks the myth of the "Va Pensiero" chorus being immediately adopted by the public as an unofficial national anthem, showing that it

was another religious chorus in Nabucco that received an illicit encore at its first performance in 1842. In fact the public preferred works such as Pietro Cornali's "Canto degli italiani" whose accessibility derived not just from its lyrics, which celebrated both the Lombard League and Sicilian Vespers alongside a chorus urging the audience not to sleep until Italy belonged to them, but also due to the offsetting of these by a tune full of dissonances and melodic shifts that calls the listeners' attention back to the words. By contrast, Smart suggests, "Va pensiero," which sustains a single mood across the whole of the piece, is a nostalgic invocation of a lost nation but "carries no impulse toward action, change or movement" (p. 106).

The importance of form, as much as content, is reiterated in Andrea Ciccarelli's analysis of the influence of Dante on literature in the nineteenth century. Mazzini urged nineteenth-century writers who wished to be involved in the Risorgimento project to adopt Dante as their literary, as well as ethico-political, model. Until this juncture, it was Petrarch who had been the most powerful influence upon Italian literature. This was seen not just in the position of the Petrarchan sonnet as the most common lyric form used by Italian writers, but also in the world view that this form fostered. The sonnet dealt introspectively with personal emotions, using reference points from the past to produce a sense of resignation, whereas Dante's narrative could allow for political and civic action and the possibility of change. According to Ciccarelli, it is this failure to accept and relate the possibility of change via life's journey that disqualifies apparently nationalist writers such as Alfieri, Foscolo, and Leopardi from claiming Dante's mantle, since all are essentially *a priori* pessimists whose political writings merely reflect their resignation to the current political situation. Only Manzoni can be exempted from this critique which is why he and Dante became the two most lionized literary figures of Liberal Italy, even if their work was subsequently neutered in the official interpretations to which it was subject. In-

deed, Ciccarelli highlights the irony that the attacks of Papini and his colleagues on the so-called Dantisti, as literary critics who dwelt exclusively in the past, echoed Dante's own literary message on the need for experimentation and admitting the possibility of change.

The essays by Nelson Moe and Lucia Re address the question of whose Italy the new Liberal state actually was. Moe once again offers his reading of the early encounters of Moderate leaders with the South, arguing that they had already been conditioned in their reactions to the Mezzogiorno by accounts of Bourbon backwardness spawned by Southern exiles keen to provoke intervention in the 1850s. This eased their slippage from seeing the South as the product of historically determined conditions to a static vision of an essentially different territory and character. His reading supports Patriaca's point that the perception of the nature of "national character" has alternated between a belief that this can be forged through experience (held, for example, by the leaders of the Risorgimento and by the Fascists), and the pessimism that Italians possess innate flaws which undermine such projects for transformation (seen in the literature on the Southern Question that emerged in the decades following unification, and the analyses of familism and transformismo developed during the Republic).

Lucia Re, in probably the most effective essay in the volume, examines the position of women and, in particular, women writers in the post-Risorgimento state. The Moderate leaders of the Risorgimento argued that women should act as domestic angels who kept their own talents hidden while peaceably resolving potential political and class conflicts within the home. This vision had two roles. First it contrasted the private, essentially middle-class Risorgimento woman with the aristocratic, theatre-going, decadent public woman of the court. Second, women's private reconciliation of conflict was intended to parallel the activities of the Liberal state in promoting consen-

sual harmony in the public sphere. The representation of women within cultural artifacts associated with the Risorgimento was consequently heavily constrained. Lyttelton records that patriotic painters frequently depicted the conflict between public duty and family affection in works such as that of Hayez entitled *Pietro Rossi, lord of Parma ... invited to assume the command of the Venetian army ... is begged with tears by his wife and daughters not to accept the enterprise* (1818-20). There were, however, no Marianne-type figures to be found in these forms of cultural production and when Verdi tried to create one in the warrior soprano Odabella in the 1846 opera *Attila*, the work was poorly received by the public. Significantly, the female lead in the later *La Battaglia di Legnano* was the more conventional figure of Lida, a blank and passive figure who serves as wife and mother for the nation.

Although the Liberals had promoted basic literacy for women, the further cultivation of knowledge via reading and writing could be seen as a selfish act, taking a woman away from her primary duties in the home. The evolution of a female reading public therefore fostered anxiety in Liberal Italy, particularly once this audience began to consume the products of women writers who occupied a particularly problematic position between public and private. Pirandello's novel *Suo Marito* (1912), in which a woman playwright's increasingly successful insertion into the public sphere is paralleled by the disintegration of her family in the private one, was indicative of the ambivalence surrounding such figures. Women authors rarely dealt with their own situations and even those that did, such as Sibilla Aleramo and Matilde Serao, were careful to court male approval. For example, Aleramo refused to be photographed in the act of writing, while Serao presented herself both in her life and through her work as an "honorary man" who subscribed to the gender norms of her generation.

Several essays explore the ways in which Mussolini's project for a total reform (*rifacimento*) of the Italian national character generated tensions in the treatment of the relationship of Fascism to the Risorgimento. The Liberal claims for "ownership" of the Risorgimento were epitomized by Croce's assertion of the continuity between the unification movement and the liberal regime in his *Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915* (1928) and his characterization of Fascism as a "parenthesis" in Italian history. In order to reclaim the Risorgimento as a national foundation myth, the Fascists therefore had to abstract it from its Liberal context. As Roberto Dainotto shows, Giovanni Gentile (the regime's leading intellectual) approached this task by treating the Risorgimento as a prophecy of an event yet to come, the spiritual resurrection that would enjoy its ultimate synthesis in the ethical state instituted by Fascist corporativism. Meanwhile Fascist historians such as Volpe refuted Croce's analysis by demonstrating how the Liberal state broke with Risorgimento ideals, which permitted the Blackshirts to appropriate the myth of the Redshirts for use in films such as Alessandro Blasetti's *1860* (1934), analyzed here by David Forgas.

In his analysis of the ceremonial celebrations of the fiftieth year of Garibaldi's death (1932), however, Claudio Fogu demonstrates that suggestions of a simple continuity between the Risorgimento volunteers and the Fascist squads were undermined by Mussolini himself. Utilizing the discourse of semiotics in ways that will stretch the comprehension of non-specialists, Fogu shows that the Duce repeatedly intervened to overturn the decisions of the official organizer of the celebrations, Ezio Garibaldi (the son of Giuseppe and Anita), with regards to the staging of the ceremonies which surrounded bringing Anita's body to Rome from Genoa, and its interment in a monument at the top of the Janiculum to be inaugurated by Mussolini. Fogu argues that rather than utilizing the past to legitimize the present, the purpose of the ceremonial was to produce precisely

the reverse effect. Thus the parade bearing Anita's coffin to the station at Genoa represented the Redshirts and others in historic costume, separating them from the present; conversely, when the coffin was received at Rome a roll-call ceremony was carried out solely in the presence of Blackshirts at which the name Anita Garibaldi was read out to be answered by the shout of "Presente"! Two days later it was Mussolini, giving a dynamic speech in front of the inert monument to Anita, who finally voiced the claim for continuity between the Redshirts and the Blackshirts, in effect rendering the past present and conferring legitimacy on Garibaldianism rather than vice versa. For Fogu these ceremonies made manifest the distinction between the treatment of the past as a historical subject under Liberalism and Fascism, encapsulated in Mussolini's attacks on Croce for writing--rather than making--history.

1860 was re-cycled in the early post-war years of the Republic as a reading of the Risorgimento from a leftist perspective, in a similar way as Visconti's *Senso* (1954), the subject of Millicent Marcus's chapter in this volume, would be some years later. This was made possible by the fact that both films approached their subject through a concern with "history from below," concentrating on characters who, as Lukacs would have it, were "maintaining" rather than "world-historical" individuals. Clearly it was the extra-textual context, rather than authorial intent, that allowed *1860*--whose leading characters are a Sicilian peasant couple who come into conflict with occupying forces represented by Swiss mercenaries--to now be read as a film about alliances between social classes and political groups against a German-speaking oppressor, which evokes the commonalities between the anti-Nazi struggle of a Popular Front Resistance and the Risorgimento's movement for rebirth fostered by a different conflict against another German-speaking enemy, the Austrians during World War I.

However, as Forgas argues, the success of the film (and its ability to bear multiple interpretations) was primarily due to its "articulations"--both between individual shots and sequences of shots within the film, and in suggesting links to images or concepts external to it--which utilized the codified language through which generic core notions of national identity can be communicated. A central theme that emerges from this volume is the necessity of developing cultural forms that can bear the content necessary to foster national identity, whether this be through the construction of popular operatic choruses, the development of written narratives that identify the possibility for change, or the creation of film texts that can arouse nationalistic sentiment amongst an audience. As Marcus points out, *Senso* was attacked by elements of the left for abandoning the tenets of neo-realism through its use of color, spectacle, and narrative progression as well as being condemned for its "retreat" into history. Yet Gramsci's analysis of Italy's ills was predicated on a reinterpretation of the Risorgimento that formed the basis of an agenda for change. It is only through such projects that pessimistic interpretations of national character which sustain an existing cultural hegemony can be effectively challenged.

Note

[1]. G. Bollati, "L'italiano," in R. Romano and C. Vivanti, eds., *Storia d'Italia*, vol. 1, *I caratteri originali* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), pp. 949-1022; reprinted as *L'italiano: Il carattere nazionale come storia e come invenzione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983).

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