

THE ITALIAN IN MODERNITY

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ROBERT CASILLO and JOHN PAUL RUSSO

The Italian in Modernity

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Preface

The title of this book presents a paradox. Although much recent scholarship has questioned Burckhardt's characterization of Italy as the 'first-born' of the modern world, there can be little doubt that late medieval and Renaissance Italy made major contributions to modernity as evidenced by the commercial revolution, humanism, political theory, the scientific mentality, the language of the visual arts, and social refinement.¹ By the eighteenth century, however, Italy's fortunes had fallen so far that, having ceased to be in the vanguard of the West, it was nearly bringing up the rear, its place taken by England, France, and Germany. This book is less about reasons for the decline of Italy than its consequences for Italians, their image in the eyes of others, and the West at large.

We do not pretend to completeness in advancing arguments but instead offer longitudinal cross-sections of a vast historical and cultural terrain. Our assumption is that well-chosen themes and figures can be deployed and reticulated to illuminate the larger (though by no means seamless) totality. We have taken care to avoid overgeneralization, for instance by recognizing the degree to which northern and southern Italy differ with respect to the impact upon them of the Renaissance and other historical factors. Another special concern has been to keep in mind the sometimes questioned unity of Italian experience, whether in treating the relations between north and south or those between Italy itself and Italian Americans. As to foreign responses to Italy and Italian Americans, the perspective extends beyond the anglophone world to French, German, Swiss, and Spanish writers and artists. Nor have we neglected the views of the Italians and Italian Americans themselves in evaluating their historical condition.

Whig historians, trying to cut Italy down to size to fit their ideological imperatives, saw only torpor and degradation after the High Renaissance. In this Arthur James Whyte is typical: 'throughout the seventeenth century there was no sign of life in Italy.'² Even the far better known Arnold Toynbee, who regarded the Italians of the Roman period as well as those of the later Middle Ages and early Renaissance as having 'performed feats which have not been outdone by any other people in any other place or time,' thought Italy to have begun its decadence as early as 1475, followed by its 'comparative cultural sterility' over the next four centuries.³ Yet to argue that Italy had suffered a decline demands a definition of historical decline itself. In this book the term is understood to refer to a major falling off in morals, political power, economic clout and prosperity, creativity, and general cultural influence. By that standard, and conforming to the current consensus among historians, Italy can be said to have declined gradually from the early sixteenth into the later seventeenth century, with the decadence first manifest in politics and economics and then in the arts and culture. This decline proceeded in varying degrees of intensity within the many regions, including Sicily and Sardinia.⁴ Politically, by the mid-sixteenth century Italy no longer consisted of numerous self-governing states but was ruled by foreign powers in roughly half its territory, the remaining half being constrained by those powers. As late as the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Metternich referred famously and disparagingly to 'the word "Italy"' as only a 'geographical expression.'⁵ Besides its loss of self-determination, Italy, notwithstanding its role as the creator of humanism, underwent a serious decline in literacy from about 1600 onward, as both the Church and local governments neglected the education of their subjects.⁶ In 1861 illiteracy stood at 78 per cent, the lowest in Western Europe excepting Spain. These are among the reasons that Italy lacked a public sphere on a par with the leading European states, and that, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it failed to generate liberalizing revolutionary movements of the type to be seen in England, France, and the United States. At all events the political decline of Italy ends only with the Risorgimento leading to Unification in 1860.

Although some scholars argue that the Italian economy was already showing signs of fatigue in the later Middle Ages, Italian decline can be tied to the general crisis of the seventeenth-century economy that afflicted most of Western and Central Europe. Yet unlike northern nations, Italy rebounded slowly and with insufficient vigour to keep up with its main rivals.⁷ The relative weakening of Mediterranean commerce, in

combination with the challenge of northern industries, whose cheaply made and mass-produced goods undersold Italian luxury products, are just two of many indicators.⁸ Others include a shift from adventurous commercial enterprise to over-consumption,⁹ upper- and middle-class investment in rural estates so as to secure profits and capital,¹⁰ the so-called re-feudalization of economic and social relations in the countryside,¹¹ and the fragmentation of Italy, which had been tending towards economic integration in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, into regional and local markets.¹² Sicilian nobles who had invested in new towns and agriculture in the sixteenth century were now pouring their profits into lavish urban residences rather than reinvesting and improving their estates (*latifundia*); some two hundred palaces lined the streets of Palermo in 1700. The economist Ferdinando Galiani placed Sicily, the granary of ancient Rome, among the poorest lands in Europe along with Poland and the Balkan countries. In 1792 Paolo Balsamo, who had made a comparative study of national agrarian economies, journeyed into the Sicilian interior: 'a distinct gradation of property size may be observed in England and in other European countries,' he wrote; 'in Sicily one jumps at a bound from those who possess much to those who possess little or nothing.'¹³ Perhaps a third to a fourth of the island was under cultivation, producing only a third of what under proper management it might have produced (an acre yielded only twelve bushels of grain as against thirty in Great Britain). Unable to feed itself, Sicily had to import grain from Egypt and Russia. By 1700 even Genoa and Venice, the two great commercial and maritime cities, had become economic backwaters, like Italy itself.

Until recent decades, the Italian Renaissance was thought to be barren of science, but this one-sided judgment has been reversed with the recognition now accorded to the many scientists, philosophers, engineers, and artisans who contributed to the advance of theoretical, empirical, and practical knowledge. Humanism itself, with its emphasis on philology, the historicity of texts, and the objective analysis of subject matter, exerted broad influence on the sciences as elsewhere.¹⁴ Yet at least by around 1650 Italian science was weakening in large part as a result of Church interference, including the Holy Inquisition, the *Index of Prohibited Books* (1559), and reinforcement of Catholic mythology against the ascendant scientific world view. Because science and technology required large sums of money and steady governmental support that only major transalpine nations had the will and resources to offer, the small Italian states inevitably fell behind.¹⁵ In literature, Torquato Tasso, who

died in 1595, was the last great writer to have a European impact until Giacomo Leopardi in the mid-nineteenth century. As for the arts, the strength of Italian painting was ensured by a high level of average talent, yet apart from Caravaggio, Guido Reni, and Guercino, the Italians were being challenged by artists from other countries such as Velasquez, Rembrandt, Rubens, and Van Dyke. The last titanic genius in architecture and sculpture was Bernini. Though great artists continued to appear, the numbers dwindled to the point where, in the nineteenth century, Italy failed to produce a single major painter or architect for the first time in six hundred years.

In assessing the role of Roman Catholicism from the later Renaissance onward, one must bear in mind that the corruption of the Church during the High Renaissance (and even earlier) ranks as one of the first harbingers of the decline of Italy, and that the Counter-Reformation therefore deserves praise for its very thorough house cleaning. Burckhardt quite plausibly believed that, had it not been for the Reformation, the Church as an institution would have collapsed.¹⁶ Any fair estimate of the Counter-Reformation will acknowledge that it raised the tone of ritual and worship, introduced a high level of devotional discipline, improved the educational and moral qualifications of its clergy down to the parish level, fostered literacy (at least initially), and encouraged hundreds of Jesuit colleges from Cracow to Lima.¹⁷ The Counter-Reformation should also be seen as a major source of the stupendous baroque culture that pervaded continental Europe, England, and Central and South America, truly constituting an international style of Italian origin. Yet for all the achievements of the Counter-Reformation and the baroque, they ceased to remain vital and creative after their initial burst of energy. The Church condemned Italy's leading philosopher to be burnt at the stake (Bruno), acquiesced in the imprisonment for twenty-eight years of one of its finest poets and thinkers (Campanella), convicted its greatest scientist to prison and house arrest (Galileo), and hounded one of its major historians to his death (Giannone). Book publishing, especially in Florence and Venice, retreated from time to time across the border into Switzerland. Spectacle and formalist extravagance came to set the tone in religion as in culture. Supported by imperial Spain, the Catholic Church not only monitored thought but promoted a theatricalized worship marked by the externalization of religious feeling whereby affect counted more than reflection.¹⁸ In religion as in politics the advantage too often lay with the conformists, hypocrites, and dissimulators. As Italy never experienced a political revolution in which substantial numbers

of its population participated, so it lacked a Protestant Reformation as a catalyst of individualism and independent thinking.

There were other causes for the decline of Italy: the rise of the Turks and their obstruction of trade to the east, which wounded the Venetian and Genoese economies; the descent of better-equipped English and Dutch interlopers upon Mediterranean commerce during the 1600s;¹⁹ and the gradual marginalization of the Mediterranean itself, completed around 1700 if not earlier, and owing to the shift of major trade routes to the North Atlantic.²⁰ However, one especially potent and persistent cause stands out above all others: the inferior leadership the Italians have had to suffer at the hands of their upper classes. For the failure of leadership there is a virtual embarrassment of instances.

Contemptuous of the diplomatic skills of his northern European rivals, the Milanese ruler Ludovico Sforza invited them onto Italian soil with the expectation of manipulating them so as to serve his interests. Because of this arrogant miscalculation, not to mention his underestimation of the political skills of his rivals, Sforza visited countless atrocities upon his people and spent his final years in the solitary confinement of a French prison.²¹ His mistaken policy typifies the Italians' inveterate inclination, going as far back as the Donation of Pepin, to solve their problems not through their own direct efforts but by appeals to foreign intervention. Although Pope Julius II is famous for having roused the Italians' nationalistic sentiments with his call to expel foreign invaders, *fuori i barbari* (Out with the barbarians), he had previously allied opportunistically with these same invaders to recover papal territories from the Venetians.²² Like many predecessors, the Medici Pope Leo X not only ignored the frequent complaints of ecclesiastical corruption emanating from northern Europe, but antagonized the northerners still further by stepping up the sale of indulgences to pay for the building of St Peter's. His conduct affords perhaps the best example of the extent to which the Renaissance papacy, focused narrowly on its Italian political interests, had fallen out of touch with northern Europe.²³ The sack of Rome in 1527, in which thousands were killed or raped, and whose artistic losses could never be compensated, was largely the responsibility of the wayward, tricky diplomacy of another Medici pope, Clement VII, who needlessly brought down upon himself and his people the wrath of the Habsburg armies.²⁴

The failure of leadership extended throughout the peninsula and the islands. From 1500 onwards Italy's social structure underwent a pronounced rigidification and aristocratization as the bourgeoisie, rather

than fulfilling its potential as a class, attempted to entrench its position within the aristocracy, which itself increasingly claimed a legally exclusive and fixed hereditary status, in contrast with the relative social mobility that had characterized the later Middle Ages and early Renaissance.²⁵ The hegemony of Spain over many parts of Italy solidified by the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559 would probably not have been possible without the willing collaboration of the Italian aristocracy, which not only benefited from the support of Spain but provided it with military officers who in different circumstances might have served in an Italian national army.²⁶ During the period of refeudalization in southern Italy, landed aristocrats claimed a host of judicial rights and other proprietary privileges that enabled them to rule over their peasants as a law unto themselves. Characterized fatalistically by the peasants as having been 'sent by heaven along with clay soil and bad weather,' the barons were proverbial for remoteness and stinginess.²⁷ 'From the houses of the *signori*,' one peasant told Francesco Nitti, 'not even smoke comes out.'²⁸ Contrary to the longstanding honorific 'myth of Venice,' which paints the patriciate most laudatorily, as the fount of political harmony and social responsibility, that class, much more in keeping with the highly condemnatory though less popular 'black myth' with which the city came to be associated during the fifteenth century, is now widely regarded as having been venal and self-interested in many cases.²⁹ At the same time, the patriciate's increasing neglect of maritime trade for the sake of imperialistic expansion on the Italian mainland or *terra firma*, a costly and depleting enterprise that began in the fourteenth century and very much intensified over the next, and its subsequent refocusing of its attention away from the sea to a system of capitalized agriculture centred in its newly acquired mainland possessions, a development extending from the mid-sixteenth into the seventeenth century, have been faulted by some historians as misconceived or timid retreats from the potentially greater long-term advantages not only of the city's traditional commercial interests in the Mediterranean but of the defense of those interests against the expanding threat of the Ottoman Empire. In any event the abuse of the peasantry on the Venetian estates is well attested.³⁰ Although the Italian statesman Count Melzi d'Eril resented Napoleon's refusal to confer autonomy upon the Italians, his good intentions did not prevent him from envisioning the creation of the Italian nation entirely from the top down, an Italy formed 'without Italians,' as Giulio Bollati put it.³¹ Even during the Risorgimento, Cavour did not conceive of peninsular Italy as a complete unity, and indeed it might have remained divided

had not Garibaldi's courageous intervention guaranteed unification of its northern and southern regions, including Sicily. The decades following the Risorgimento were a let-down, as time-servers, opportunists, unimaginative bureaucrats, and rhetoricians of nationalism descended upon the new capital, the enduring symbol of this period being the Victor Emmanuel II monument, whose gigantism usurps and desecrates half of Rome's Capitoline Hill. Instead of building up Italy's human and material potential, Prime Minister Francesco Crispi entangled his immature nation in overseas ventures that ended catastrophically in Italy's defeat by Ethiopia at Adua in 1896, one of the greatest losses ever suffered by a European imperial army at the hands of a non-European power. With complete disregard for the legal norms of international politics, Gabriele D'Annunzio in the aftermath of World War I took over the Yugoslav city of Fiume with what amounted to a private army, thus providing a dangerous model for Italian Fascism.³² Mussolini's reputation as a master of bluff and bombast needs no introduction, yet what is one to say of the king of Italy who in 1922 was in a position to order the Italian army to prevent the Fascists' unconstitutional takeover of Rome yet chose to do nothing? It has remained an axiom of Italian politics in the post-war period that, with rare exceptions such as Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, political leaders do not hold themselves accountable for their actions, but specialize in denying blame and shunting it to others.

In his quest for the 'reason of reasons' for the decline of Italy, the nineteenth-century literary historian Francesco De Sanctis composed one of the greatest of Italian essays, 'L'uomo del Guicciardini' (Guicciardinian Man), which exposes the petty connivances that had resulted again and again in failed leadership by the ruling class. The essay thus identifies a powerful element of the Italian national character that has endured even into later modernity: a self-interest (*il particolare*) so narrowly focused that the individual finds it difficult if not impossible to enter fully, sincerely, and disinterestedly in a collective enterprise whether civic or patriotic.³³ De Sanctis named this type of person after Francesco Guicciardini, the Renaissance diplomat and historian, whose letters and *Ricordi* (Maxims) extolled the patriotism of his close friend Machiavelli, yet who in his own life often played the particularistic role he was perhaps the first to diagnose so acutely.³⁴ Assessing the Italians' inept response to their political crisis during the later fifteenth and early sixteenth century, when their inability to join in a common cause led to their surrender of autonomy to foreign powers, De Sanctis realized that Italy had then needed most urgently not its usual quotient of self-serving

collaborators and accommodationists but rather a host of patriots like Machiavelli – individuals who, placing their country above their *particolare* and throwing caution to the winds, were capable of sacrificing themselves for the sake of a larger social and national ideal. ‘Italy perished [*perì*],’ he said, ‘because the shrewd [*savvi*] were too many and the fools [*pazzi*] were too few.’³⁵

Decline does not mean collapse, however, and one should not over-emphasize the extent of Italian decline since the Renaissance. ‘Had the failure been total, Italy would have perished –,’ writes Benedetto Croce, ‘and Italy did not perish.’³⁶ According to H. Stuart Hughes, Mario Praz, and Croce himself, Italian decline is properly understood in relative terms; only when measured against the Renaissance, an unusually creative age, does it appear steeper than it actually was.³⁷ Although most of Italy had fallen under foreign political control or influence, Venice retained its autonomy into the late eighteenth century and enjoyed an at least somewhat deserved reputation as the last bastion of Italian liberty, where political refugees from despotism were often welcomed, and where toleration and freedom of the press were honoured as nowhere else on the peninsula.³⁸ Notwithstanding the emergence of the black myth of Venice as a nest of imperialistic, repressive, and clandestinely terroristic oligarchs, the city continued to be regarded in many parts of Europe, including England and Holland, as a model of republican government.³⁹ The Kingdom of Sardinia maintained its independence and, after building up its political and military strength, would provide the nucleus for what became the Italian nation during the Risorgimento.⁴⁰ In the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, the Bourbon dynasty that came to power in 1734 made a concerted and partly successful effort to strengthen the interventionist state and thus to weaken the hold of the feudal barons over the peasantry and economy. In this major reformist enterprise the monarchy was aided by such gifted ministers as Bernardo Tanucci and Domenico Caracciolo along with a cadre of intellectuals who hoped to infuse southern Italy and Sicily with the political and social ideals of the Enlightenment.⁴¹ Although a fully developed public sphere hardly existed at the national level, important steps were taken in this direction by Cesare Beccaria, Pietro and Alessandro Verri, Gaetano Filangieri, and other thinkers.⁴² Strictly speaking, Archduke Leopoldo of Tuscany cannot be regarded as an Italian ruler, as he belonged to the House of Lorraine and had close connections with the Habsburg dynasty (he ascended to the throne of the Austrian Empire in 1790), and yet the extensive reformist agenda he carried out in his Italian domains from 1770

onward was a major liberalizing effort, even if Leopoldo was often stymied by aristocratic and ecclesiastical opposition.⁴³ Whatever one thinks of the culture of the Counter-Reformation after its zenith, eighteenth-century Rome under enlightened popes such as Benedict XIV had one of the most developed and successful social welfare systems in Europe.⁴⁴ Even the period of the Napoleonic conquest of Italy, which was obviously undertaken to advance French interests, is seen by some historians as having helped lay the basis for subsequent national unification along with the formation of the Italian state, army, and bureaucracy.⁴⁵

Nor can it be said that Italy declined absolutely in either the arts or sciences following the Renaissance. During this period Italy produced mathematicians like Cardano, Tartaglia, and Cavalieri; physicists like Galileo, Castelli, Torricelli, and Borelli; chemists on the order of Avogadro; the astronomer Cassini; anatomists, biologists, and physiologists such as Falloppio, Colombo, Eustachio, Malpighi, Redi, Morgagni, Golgi, and Spallanzani. Volta discovered the electrical nature of the nervous system. Galvani invented the electric battery; Meucci, an immigrant to New York, the telephone; Marconi, the radio. Although the University of Padua gradually lost the reputation for pre-eminence in medical study that it had enjoyed in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance, it maintained its respectability as did other Italian universities such as Bologna, whose faculty included Volta, Galvani, and the physicist Laura Bassi, the first woman to occupy a chair in Europe (1732). Giannone, Vico, his student Antonio Genovesi who held the first chair of political economy in Europe (1754), Galiani, Giuseppe Maria Galanti, and other members of the Neapolitan Enlightenment brought special distinction to the University of Naples. In the arts, so overwhelming was the momentum of the Renaissance achievement that serious decline did not set in until the later seventeenth century, well after political and economic decline; at least up to that point, the Italians were regarded as pre-eminent in painting, sculpture, and architecture. As late as the eighteenth century Italy was still capable of producing Tiepolo, Canova, Piranesi, Canaletto, Guardi, Piazzetta, Longhi, Batoni, and Rosalba Carriera. As for architecture, the false notion of Italy as having fallen into immediate cultural decadence following the High Renaissance was encouraged by the pejorative view of Italian baroque architecture (and baroque art generally) widely popularized through the fulminations of Ruskin. However, the re-evaluation of the baroque accomplished by such scholars as Cornelius Gurlitt in Germany and Sacheverell Sitwell in England has led to its complete vindication as an architectural style; it is now understood that

Italian architecture was perhaps never more inventive than in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁴⁶ One recalls the achievements of Bernini, Borromini, Longhena, Pietro da Cortona, Guarini, and Juvarra, a dominance within this art equalled by no other European country before or after. The Italian theatrical tradition, including the *commedia dell'arte*, has been described as very much the basis of Western theatre.⁴⁷ Given the prominence of France and Russia in the ballet over the last two centuries, it is too often forgotten that the Italians not only invented the ballet but rivalled the French in this art form up to around 1900, when Italian creativity flagged. If the French were the acknowledged masters of ballet choreography, the Italians specialized in the physical technique of ballet, and gained an unequalled reputation for virtuoso dancing that extended from the eighteenth to the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁸ In chamber and orchestral music, Vivaldi, 'the main protagonist and establisher of the three-movement soloistic concerto,' stands in the front rank of Italian baroque composers from Arcangelo Corelli and Alessandro Scarlatti to Luigi Boccherini and Domenico Cimarosa.⁴⁹ Opera originated in seventeenth-century Italy with Monteverdi; by '1700–1720' Italian opera had become 'the regular and foremost entertainment of the upper classes in much of western and central Europe (but for France)';⁵⁰ Italy would produce major operatic composers well into the early twentieth century with Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Puccini.

Any judgment of Italian decline must also be qualified by a recognition of the enormous prestige and influence – the exemplary status – that classical, Renaissance, and baroque culture maintained in Europe into the early nineteenth century. Fernand Braudel revised his estimate of the beginning of decline of Italian influence no fewer than three times, initially placing it in 1620, then 1650, and finally 'even 1680.' According to Braudel, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italians spread their culture through all parts of Europe, including the Slavic world, and even beyond it, and thus maintained the tradition of 'Italians out of Italy.'⁵¹ Working for Ivan III of Russia in the fifteenth century, Aristotele Fioravanti built the Cathedral of the Dormition in the Kremlin. Alevisio Novi was contracted by the same ruler to design the Cathedral of St Michael the Archangel, also in the Kremlin, in the early sixteenth century, not long before Domenico da Cortona designed Chambord on the Loire for François I. In the seventeenth century Agostino Barelli built the Theatinerkirche and Nymphenburg in Munich, and Francesco Caratti, the Nostitz, Michna, and Cernin palaces in Prague. In the eighteenth century, Juvarra and Giovanni Battista Sacchetti constructed the Royal Palace

in Madrid, and Bartolomeo Rastrelli designed many of the most famous palaces in St Petersburg, including the Winter Palace. Giovanni Battista di Lulli, who changed his name to Lully, established the French operatic tradition at the court of Louis XIV. Domenico Scarlatti was court composer in Madrid, as was Boccherini in Berlin. Metastasio (1698–1782), who was summoned to the Viennese court in 1730, would be its official poet until his death.⁵² Following in the footsteps of Marco Polo as an emissary from Europe, Matteo Ricci laid the foundations for intellectual and cultural commerce between Western civilization and China. Together with his fellow Jesuit Michele Ruggieri, who has been called the first European sinologist, he devised a notational system for transcribing Chinese characters and compiled the first Chinese dictionary in a European language.⁵³

While these Italians were disseminating their native culture through their commissions and restless wanderings, so the aristocratic Grand Tour, culminating in northern and central Italy in its initial phase, then widening to include Naples and Sicily, with Rome figuring always as the climactic destination, continued to keep alive the cultural prestige of Italy even as its political, economic, and social fortunes languished.⁵⁴ Richard Lassels, the English travel writer, extolled the civilizing influence of the Renaissance upon the rest of Europe, by which he meant Italy's achievements not in art and culture alone but in civility and social refinement, or the arts of life. During this period Samuel Johnson declared that most things of value in his civilization had derived from Mediterranean shores, and that a person 'who has not been in Italy, is always conscious of an inferiority.'⁵⁵

However one may qualify the Italian decline, it would be equally misleading to minimize it. During the Renaissance the Italians set a standard of conduct and refinement that, taken up by the absolutist court of France and thence spread to the salons and drawing rooms of northern Europe, established a social standard for its most progressive nations. Yet because post-Renaissance Italy was fragmented into small states and a multiplicity of courts, it was unable to achieve a nationally accepted code of social behaviour. This goes far to explain the complaints of travellers and even the Italians themselves regarding the sometimes rough manners and lack of polish among the common people and even the middle classes and aristocracy, although some travellers charitably read such behaviour as sincere and unaffected, and delighted in the 'natural' politeness of the peasantry. One thinks of Victor Emmanuel II's brusquely honest rusticity at the French and British courts as late as the 1850s.

Described by Charles Greville as 'frightful in person' and appearing at Windsor 'more like a chief of the Heruli or Longobardi than a modern Italian prince,' the tough, thick-set king brandished his sword before the Prince of Wales, boasting he could cut an ox in half with one stroke; the Duchess of Sutherland remarked that he was the only Knight of the Garter she had known who 'seemed as if he would have the best of it with the Dragon.'⁵⁶ The worst consequence of Italy's lack of approved social norms was that some Italians claimed for themselves the license to give vent to all kinds of antisocial behaviour.

The decline of Italy was apparent not in manners alone but in morals, as the Italian character underwent a subtle deformation in no small degree resulting from foreign control of the nation's politics, economics, and society. In this widespread climate of oppression, in which freedom of thought and speech was inhibited by political and ecclesiastical surveillance, Italians came to develop those habits of dissimulation and hypocrisy often noted by travellers.⁵⁷ It was during the later phases of decline that Leopardi characterized his fellow Italians as the 'most cynical' of peoples, mistrustful of their neighbours, diffident before authority, incapable of joining in common enterprises, and so suspicious of others that the civic virtue and social consciousness then flourishing in the northern European countries were typically derided as no more than the mask of private interest.⁵⁸ An essential feature of this dissembling atmosphere was the cult of public spectacle ranging from quotidian *bella figura* to the extremes of carnivalistic costume and masquerade. *Bella figura* may be defined as cutting a good figure or making a good impression in public, though, by contrast with the increasingly socialized and pacified north of Europe and America, it could in some instances allow the prepotent individual a disturbing margin in which to display insulting bellicosity and open sexual effrontery. As emissaries from a more inhibited social world, some northern European travellers were charmed and captivated by the ebullient, extroverted, gestural life of the Italian *fiesta* and *piazza*, but others criticized it as no more than a seductive façade concealing dangerous intentions and wanton impulses.

Viewed by outsiders and rare critical insiders like Leopardi, the Italian character of the post-Renaissance made for a study in social pathology. Not Machiavelli the philosopher and patriot but the back-stabbing Machiavel became a chief stereotype of the Italian in northern writing. There were others: the fawning courtier, the mountebank, the clown and buffoon, the Gothic seducer, the gigolo, the brigand and the bravo, the

scoundrel, the servile *cicisbeo*, the adventurer and libertine (Casanova, Cagliostro), the swaggering military coward, the beggar, the corrupt priest, the courtesan, the vagabond, the idler or *lazzarone*, the sycophantic *cicerone*, and the primitive in varying degrees of squalor and even nobility. No other European country offered such a deep and varied rogues' gallery, a testimony to the continued importance of Italy within the European imaginary. Italy seemed to embody the childhood of the West, now grown old, or in a still more extreme interpretation, the land of the dead, hauntingly beautiful even in death. For many northern European and American observers, present-day Italians were out of date, their cities a museum, while the country that produced Castiglione's *The Courtier*, the most popular conduct book of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was seen as strangely uncivilized.

Because of their prolonged period of provincialism and absence from the world stage, the Italians of the new nation state found it difficult to play the game of European and world politics. Their economy was not up to it, nor was their military, but most importantly, their character had to undergo a reschooling in those international behavioural norms that had developed over the centuries, whether in private, social, or diplomatic circles. Unfortunately, a recurrent problem encountered by the Italians has been their failure to grasp not only the nature and scope of many of the persistent negative stereotypes assigned to them by northern Europeans and Americans, but the consequent necessity of correcting such negatives over the long run by means of improved standards of behaviour. As for why the Italians, who invented the art of diplomacy in the Renaissance,⁵⁹ and who have traditionally cultivated their own notions of *bella figura* on their native soil, remain so heedless of the impression they create on the international stage, the ultimate reason remains mysterious, but surely self-absorption and lack of national pride have contributed their share. Their inability to gauge the impression they make helps to explain why, whatever the injustices of the Treaty of Versailles, the Italians left the negotiating table with virtually nothing as compared to France and England, despite roughly commensurable losses. This fiasco is largely traceable to the confused and undignified conduct of the Italian negotiators, Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando, whom Clemenceau dubbed 'The Weeper' for his tedious emotional outbursts, and Foreign Minister Sidney Sonnino, who not only disagreed with Orlando on Italy's diplomatic goals, but even quarrelled with him in the presence of foreign statesmen, thus placing Italy in a position of irremediable weakness. Whereas Orlando knew no English, a grave disadvantage in negotiations,

the half-Welsh Sonnino exploited his fluency in the language in conversing with British prime minister Lloyd George, a Welshman. Upon learning from the other members of the Big Four that Italy would not be allowed to annex Fiume and the Dalmatian coast, Orlando wept openly; then, after storming out of the conference, he sheepishly returned from Italy for fear of losing the diplomatic crumbs allotted him. At no point did the Italians realize that president Woodrow Wilson brought to Versailles an abundance of anti-Italian nativist prejudices of the worst sort, including supposed Italian propensities to hypocrisy and shady dealing. Sad to say, as Wilson sat at the table in the Hall of Mirrors he saw the very incarnation of those stereotypes in the spectacle of Vittorio Orlando.⁶⁰

The Italians' weak hold on democracy and republican institutions left them a prey to Fascism after World War I, which was devastating to their national reputation and one of the lowest points in their history. After World War II the rapid turnover of Italian governments caused by reshufflings of alliances and power sharing was less a sign of real instability than a strategy of quick-witted politicians to fashion short-term realignments that over the long term amounted to a basically equilibrated national political system. However, such seemingly anarchic behaviour unfortunately has played in the media-driven world culture as another example of at best disorder and at worst buffoonery. Though in the 1980s and 1990s it seemed as if there might be an end to 'politics as usual' with the Vatican and P2 scandals, the Mafia maxi-trial, *Mani pulite*, and a long series of state corruption trials, the improvements have been marginal. To give the most glaring example, organized crime is as strong as ever, though the epicentre has shifted from Sicily to Calabria and Naples.

Even now, the effects of Italy's decline inhibit improvement, most tellingly in the form of the ossified gerontocracies that control the professions, the academy, the government, the Church, and other institutions. This host of impediments makes it extremely difficult for young people to leave home, begin a career, and even start a family in that crucial phase of their lives when they ought to be most hopeful and energetic. Notwithstanding that, with the growing power of China and India and other countries in a now globalized world, the twenty-first century promises to be one of increasingly intense competition, and also notwithstanding that top-notch scientific and technological education is regarded as an essential means to meet the challenge of that world, especially for relatively small nations such as Italy, it may be argued that at the highest levels of education the Italians are not facing up to the seriousness of this

challenge. Such is the impression created by the 2006 report published by Shanghai Jiao Tong University. England claims two of the top ten and four of the top thirty world universities, and Italy none; the University of Rome 'La Sapienza' ranks exactly last in the list of the top one hundred.

As discouraging as such rankings may be, a more troubling statistic reveals the Italian birth rate to be one of the lowest not only in Western Europe but in the world. What does this say about Italy's faith in its future? If one views the Italians from the perspective not of national character but of national identity – the former referring to the attitudes and values of a people and the latter to historical and cultural forces that have gone into their formation – then one must acknowledge that, historically and culturally, the Italian constitutes a unique entity compounded in more or less equal amounts of classicism, paganism, Western Christianity, and modernity. Could this entity be fated to disappear?

The decline of Italy was accompanied almost inevitably by the gradual decline in the prestige and influence of Italian culture as a whole, to the point where not just the Renaissance and baroque but the classics themselves came to require apologists in the ongoing modern cultural sweepstakes. Undoubtedly a key factor in Italy's waning influence was the Scientific Revolution, for though it included Galileo as a main figure, it also intensified the struggle between science and humanism that in the twentieth century would be decided in favour of the former. Italy's cultural prestige could hardly benefit from the steady depreciation of what had been acknowledged as one of its chief endowments to modernity. Another factor was the impetus given to modern culture by the French Revolution and all its associated ideologies and 'isms.' Romanticism remains the most prominent of those 'isms,' so much so that in recent decades attempts have been made to claim the French Revolution and Romanticism as the origin of modernity, thus usurping the position of the Renaissance in Burckhardt's path-breaking and widely influential (though by no means uncontested) interpretation of the period.⁶¹ In any case, the ideals and values of the Grand Tour were of decreasing importance amid such relentless competition. Another tendency in scholarship has been to de-emphasize and in some cases even to deny the very modernity of the Renaissance, on the grounds of its medieval and feudal residues, technological underdevelopment, comparative lack of scientific emphasis, Catholic traditionalism, limited capitalism, familism, and other features, so that its relevance to modern experience seems much diminished.⁶² Other factors contributing to the growing sense of the cultural remoteness of the Renaissance include the ever-dwindling

knowledge of both classical culture and Christian iconography as well as the diminishing attraction of modern artists to Renaissance modes of perception, including mimesis and single-point perspective, such loss of interest coinciding with the rise of modernist painting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁶³ One recalls Virginia Woolf's well-known reference to the cultural consequences of the London Post-Impressionist exhibition: 'on or about December 1910 human character changed.'⁶⁴ The date coincides neatly with Toynbee's terminus for the third (and final) 'Italistic Age' in 1914.⁶⁵

Although Italy did not perish, it had lagged behind when other countries were on the march. In a patriotic poem Alessandro Manzoni's personified Italy laments her fate: 'io non c'era' (I was not there).⁶⁶ 'There' means the making of modernity or what might be called 'second modernity' (post-1650), in which the Italians had participated in lessening degrees, whereas they had been the chief architect of first modernity in the form of the Renaissance. After Unification, Italy still struggled to catch up with northern Europe and the United States. Illiteracy was almost totally eradicated by 1914, a tribute to Unification. If in the period before World War I Italy was disparaged as 'the least of the great powers,' nonetheless it was being ranked with them.⁶⁷ Only after its 'economic miracle' of the 1950s and 1960s did Italy stand industrially on a par with France and England, two countries with nearly the same population. It reaped the advantages of being one of the original partners in the Common Market and has steadfastly been a major proponent of the European Union. This is yet another proof of Italy's enduring and paradoxical combination of tendencies: on the one hand, a traditional internationalism as reflected in its frequent origination of and participation in major universalistic institutions and movements, including the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church, the Renaissance, and the baroque; and on the other hand, its lack of national spirit for much of its post-Renaissance history, as can yet be seen in the intense regional, local, and even village loyalties (*campanilismo*) of many Italians.

Any serious study of the Italian in modernity cannot remain content to examine Italians only in their native land. By necessity it must treat Italy as it has come to be represented by '*altre Italie*,' the other Italies, the largest being in the United States. The Italian Americans include not only the millions of Italians who emigrated from Italy to America but their millions of descendants in the adoptive country. Nearly five million Italians entered the United States between 1884 and 1914 in one of the largest mass migrations in modern times, amounting to almost a sixth

of Italy's national population. That such vast numbers of immigrants arrived on American soil around the turn of the last century in itself implies their lack of commitment to the Italian national enterprise after Unification. The majority of immigrants were impoverished, illiterate southern Italian peasants in search of a livelihood as well as other decencies and comforts of life that their native country had denied them. Despite the efforts of concerned participants in the 'Southern Question' (the so-called *meridionalisti*), the Italian government did little to stop immigration; it did not, for example, provide incentives for southern Italians to remain at home so as to help propel an economy that was industrializing in the 1890s, nor, except in rare instances such as the murder of eleven jailed Sicilians in New Orleans in 1891, did it address the immigrants' often troubled existence abroad. Whole towns emptied out in the Veneto and Piedmont as well as the south and Sicily.⁶⁸ In 1902 the sympathetic Prime Minister Giuseppe Zanardelli toured the south, paying particular attention to Basilicata – the first time a sitting northern prime minister had ventured to visit what was Italy's poorest region. Though seventy-six and ill at the time, he went part of the way by mule. When he stopped at the town of Moliterno, he was greeted publicly by the mayor: 'I welcome you in the name of the 8000 Moliternes, of whom 3000 have emigrated to America, and 5000 are preparing to follow!'⁶⁹

The deplorable social, economic, and political conditions in their homeland (*la miseria*, as the southern Italians called it) burdened the immigrants with many disadvantages as they attempted to settle abroad. As a mainly agricultural people ill-adapted to a predominantly urban environment, they were often relegated to low-paying unskilled employment, which in turn confined them to crowded ethnic neighbourhoods.⁷⁰ Nor was it, apart from improved employment opportunities, a propitious time for the immigrants. In the thirty years prior to World War I, the cultural prestige of Italy had reached a low ebb, not to rise until after World War II. In the eyes of mainstream Americans the new Italian arrivals only confirmed the dominant stereotypes of Italians that had accumulated over the previous centuries – in travel books, gothic novels, opera, memoirs, and soon enough in ghetto dramas and gangster films. As for their co-religionists, the Italians were looked down upon by the Irish-dominated American Catholic Church, which, with its Jansenist strain and emphasis on transcendence, Church discipline, and education, had no use for popular southern Italian Catholicism and its pagan residues. Until the immigrants acquired their own parishes and parish churches, they often celebrated mass at odd hours or in church base-

ments. Cleaving to their popular, immanentist Catholicism, embodied in front yard shrines, religious processions and festivals, and 'strange' devotional practices, Italian immigrants clashed again and again with the Church hierarchy. Some of their anger and frustration would have been wrongly directed at the official Church, which, in responding to the immigrants, was only trying to hasten the modernization process based on rules, rationalized procedures, emotional neutrality, and instruction.⁷¹

Strong cultural ties to the Italian past made it difficult for the immigrants to escape Italy even when on American soil. As the persistence of southern Italian attitudes hampered the group's effort to discard the impeding elements of its ancestral legacy, so it found American values that much harder to embrace. Devoted chiefly to their nuclear (and in fewer cases extended) families, and ill at ease in a foreign and often inhospitable environment, many immigrants had little if any desire to remain in the United States, as is shown by their work schedules carrying them back and forth between the two countries, sometimes yearly.⁷² Statistics fail to indicate where these so-called 'birds of passage' finally settled, but their suffering was expressed by the Italian-American poet Emanuel Carnevali. Of the immigrants he writes: 'I have come back with a great burden, / With the experience of America in my head - / My head which now no longer beats the stars'; he ends by apostrophizing, 'O Italy, O great shoe, do not / Kick me away again!'⁷³ Among all immigrant ethnic groups, the 'birds of passage' syndrome was most frequent among Italians. For those who remained in the United States, educational disadvantages and familial distrust of schools as agents of both assimilation and external authority led to poor academic performance, low graduation rates, and a general disesteem of higher education, especially up to World War II and the G.I. Bill. It did not help that Italian American immigrant parents, who preferred short-term to long-term goals, often required their school-age children to work as contributors to the family income, thus denying them the opportunity to finish high school, much less college. Such factors explain why, for the immigrants and their children, substantial assimilation was delayed for more than a generation and in many cases longer. Well into the 1950s, a significant percentage of Italian Americans remained confined to blue-collar jobs and traditional ethnic neighbourhoods of the kind described by Herbert J. Gans in his oxymoronically titled *The Urban Villagers*.⁷⁴

Beyond economic survival, the immigrants' most critical struggle was to come to terms with their newly acquired ethnic identity. Arriving in the United States from different regions of an only recently unified coun-

try, they identified primarily with a village, sometimes a province, rarely a region, and almost never the national government. In short, they did not think of themselves as 'Italians.' By means of what is termed 'chain migration,' people from the same towns and villages often regrouped in close proximity within a neighbourhood, even on the same street or in one or two tenements, and continued to worship their household and local saints among other ancestral traditions. Prejudices against other Italian provinces or regions persisted in the United States: northerners versus southerners, Sicilians versus Neapolitans, Calabrians versus Sicilians.⁷⁵ However, Americans viewed the new arrivals collectively as 'Italians' and called them as such. It was not long before the immigrants found in the designation 'Italian' their common denominator, as they applied it to themselves. Thus, ironically, the first-generation immigrants discovered their national identity on American soil. Yet even as the immigrants were acknowledging their Italianness, that identity was being modified in the second generation, with the result that, through the process of acculturation to America, an Italian American ethnic identity came to be formed, made up in more or less equal parts of Italian and American elements. This process had been proceeding in all sectors, as a necessary prelude to the group's assimilation.⁷⁶ Schools were a chief agent of Americanization, having an enormous impact on second-generation Italian Americans. It was largely through the schools that Italians as well as American-born children came to learn not only about American values, such as capitalist individualism, upward mobility, civic responsibility, democratic politics, and sexual independence, but other religious and ethnic groups. Predictably, conflicts often arose between members of the first and second generations over issues of value and life-style, such as respect for parental authority, economic and sexual autonomy, use of the Italian language, and even the consumption of Italian cuisine.⁷⁷ Only with the coming of World War II, fought against the Axis Alliance that included Italy, did Italian Americans turn decisively towards the American side, and indeed they comprised the largest ethnic group in the wartime army.⁷⁸

The immigrants, whose primary social unit was the inward-looking family, brought with them a clannishness and deep-rooted suspicion not only of strangers but of government and other institutions, including even in some cases the Catholic Church. Although Edward C. Banfield's concept of amoral familism has now been seriously qualified, sociologists from Leonard Covello to Joseph Lopreato and Richard Alba have shown the extent to which the immigrants failed to involve themselves in civic and political life both in the larger American community and in their

own.⁷⁹ Suspicion of authority made them an easy target for exploitation by mainstream Americans or other ethnics who understood much better how to manipulate the political system. Too few Italian Americans willingly embraced the open-ended, rough-and-tumble American political process, falling back on clientelism, personalism, and the family. In the U.S. Congress, state legislatures, and judiciary, Italian Americans were not represented in any way proportional to their numbers. Even in districts where they constituted an overwhelming majority, the successful candidate was often of another ethnic identity – the most famous example being John F. Kennedy, whose congressional district in the 1946 election was heavily Italian American. There is good reason to believe that the absence of strong representation cost Italian Americans some of their own Little Italies, for example, in Boston and Chicago, when the axe of urban renewal fell upon American cities after World War II. In these instances, the ground was cut quite literally from under their feet.⁸⁰ Notwithstanding that Italian American immigrants formed an abundance of mutual aid societies on the southern Italian model, these usually remained of local and temporary significance rather than coalescing into larger associations, and so demonstrated the group's relative difficulty in cooperating both impersonally and at higher degrees of organization. To be sure, a possible exception to the widespread view of Italian Americans' comparative political detachment is provided by what has been termed the 'lost history of Italian American radicalism,' which includes the syndicalists, anarchists, and labour radicals of the early twentieth century. Its unquestioned high point is represented by the famous 1912 'Bread and Roses' strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in which many Italian American workers participated, as they did in other strikes of that period. Its major figures include not only Arturo Giovannitti, Joseph Ettor, and Carlo Tresca, all of whom took a leading role in the Lawrence strike, but Sacco and Vanzetti who, leaving aside the still vexed question of their innocence, have been shown by Paul Avrich to have been dyed-in-the-wool anarchists by no means lacking in violent designs against mainstream society. Yet the fact remains that Italian American labour radicalism largely died out in the early 1920s as a result of the Red Scare and the already ongoing tendency of Italian American workers, after an initial period of hesitation during which they rejected unions and even acted as strike-breakers, to choose unionization as their chief means of advancing their political interests – a choice reinforced by the successes of labour unions during the New Deal and the immediate post-war period, when a substantial percentage of Italian Americans

remained at the blue-collar level. Apart from unions, Italian Americans have tended not to participate in grass-roots movements, political clubs, or voluntary associations. On the whole, their record remains one of political under-representation for at least two-thirds of their experience.⁸¹

And in those relatively rare instances in which Italian Americans rose to public office, they did not always distinguish themselves. Mario Cuomo wobbled so often over whether to become the Democratic standard-bearer in the 1980s and 1990s that his party sickened of him. One recalls his notorious description of the U.S. Supreme Court when at the last minute he withdrew his name from what would have been a likely nomination: 'They slam this mahogany door shut. And you're ... entombed.'⁸² Rarely have words and actions by an Italian American better illustrated both the group's traditional suspicion of political power and its failure to comprehend the enormous advantages of that power. Various reasons have been proposed for Cuomo's behaviour, which some see mistakenly as Hamlet-like indecision. Yet does not the real reason lie in southern Italian vanity and fear of loss of respect in the event of failure? This was not Caesar's way when, standing at the Rubicon, he flung himself at destiny – *alea iacta est*, 'let the dice fly high.'⁸³

As an outcome of slowed assimilation, the Italian American contribution to American culture was seriously compromised. There were, most obviously, few Italian American political figures and jurists on the national stage, which can perhaps best be explained by the legacy of political mistrust and absenteeism transmitted to the United States from southern Italy. Well into the second half of the twentieth century there are few Italian Americans in science and scholarship relative to their percentage of the national population, shown statistically in surveys of the major scientific and literary academies. Nor did Italian departments, guardians of Italian high culture, seek out Italian Americans or even bother to understand them, thereby losing a source of both moral and financial support for themselves, not to mention students. The main intellectual organization, the American Italian Historical Association, was established in 1966, a remarkably late date in the history of the group. The National Italian American Foundation – which proudly announces that it is 'dedicated to preserving and promoting the heritage and culture of Americans of Italian descent, the nation's fifth largest ethnic group' – was founded only in 1975 when the first generation was mostly dead. One questions why it took Italian Americans so long to make such fundamental assertions of group-awareness? Italian American poets and novelists who write on Italian American experience are minor figures, to

the point where it remains difficult to form a canon. They were unable to universalize their ethnic experience in the manner of Saul Bellow. The one major novelist, Don DeLillo, finally broke his silence on Italian America with his eleventh novel, *Underworld*, which appeared in 1997, before returning to non-ethnic subjects.⁸⁴ In sum, Italian Americans were very slow to assert themselves politically and culturally within what might be termed their ethnic 'window' of opportunity, that is, the period in which their identity retained some degree of strength. By the time the Italian Americans had begun to do so, however, they were already entering as a result of assimilation what Richard Alba terms the 'twilight' of their ethnicity.⁸⁵ This is not to deny that, ever since the 1960s, American ethnic groups have sought to assert and justify their ethnicity in the present age of identity politics, by contrast to the previous era in which ethnicity was regarded as a guilty secret. Yet despite the fanfare that ethnicity now elicits, a prudent realism requires one to accept the characterization of such behaviour as for the most part 'symbolic' or low-cost ethnicity, performed incidentally on special occasions and without serious commitment or risk.⁸⁶ The truth is that, once Italian Americans had entered their asymptotic twilight, it was already too late for them to make a specifically Italian American cultural and political contribution at once deeply reflective of the group's values and experience and at the same time commensurate in its impact to the percentage of Italian Americans within the American population. The patient was no longer there.

Yet it would be wrong to think that Italian Americans have not made significant contributions to American life in the era of assimilation, or that Italian and Italian American culture have been left by the wayside. Italian Americans have been especially visible in the performing arts, painting, classical and popular music, gastronomy, and fashion. Their cinematic achievement is of international scope, from Capra and Minnelli to Coppola and Scorsese. The prominence of Italian American celebrities in the media and advertising has given their group cachet, as may also be said for the ongoing appeal of Italian and Italian-encoded items in the mass-consumption economy. One has only to think of pizza (the most popular food in the United States), the pasta craze and the obsession with the so-called Mediterranean diet, cappuccino and espresso and espresso machines, Italian cafes and crooners from Sinatra to Bennett, international pop icons such as Madonna, Lady Gaga, and Sylvester Stallone, the mystique of the Mafia as an entertainment staple, and Italian luxury goods, including high-priced designer cloth-

ing, handbags, shoes, jewelry, and cars. The tourist trade to Italy, which is as old as the Caesars, never flags. As an index of the commonplace identification of the Italian with pleasure, energy, and liberation, it may be mentioned that over twenty-five recent automobile models have received Italian or Italian-sounding names, for instance Acura, Allegro, Altima, Avanti, Brava, Capri, Corolla, Diamante, Fiero, Forenza, Integra, Largo, Maxima, Murano, Omni, Optima, Pacifica, Piazza, Previa, Scirocco, Sentra, Sienna (*sic*), Sonata, Sorento (*sic*), Stanza, Supra, Volare, and Xterra. So frequently and variously has the 'Italian' served as a selling point in contemporary economy and culture (which amount virtually to the same thing) that some Italian American observers reject the idea of the 'twilight of ethnicity,' arguing instead that American civilization is itself undergoing Italianization, 'becoming Italian.' Apart from its blatant rooting for the home team, such a judgment fails to distinguish Italianization of a essentially superficial and consumerist type from those several extended periods of profound Italianization experienced by the West earlier in its history. Of these one may instance the Roman Republic and Empire, the Catholic Church and its dissemination of Christianity through the monastic system and other institutions, and the Renaissance and baroque periods with their major artistic, scientific, and social impact. By such a standard the current alleged 'Italianization' of American culture must appear as a minor phenomenon destined for quick replacement by some equally ephemeral fashion.

To return to the paradoxical title of the book, the characteristic experience of the Italian in modernity is one of belatedness, whether socially, politically, culturally, or, above all, historically. Italy helped to initiate modernity, then fell behind, and spent the last three centuries trying to recover its status among European nations. Having at last reached parity with its competitors in the Western industrial-technological world, it now faces a double difficulty: to maintain or improve its international position, and to preserve its own distinctive cultural and national identity at an adverse moment marked by European unification on the one hand and globalization on the other. As the planet becomes increasingly globalized, it is likely that the pressure of adaptation to technological society will intensify, with a corresponding flattening of differences among peoples and cultures; indeed, this is already becoming apparent in the highly technicized younger generations. The question thus arises whether an Italian identity can survive in such an environment. Italy's difficulties are compounded by the fact not only that it faces a new array of international competitors outside the European arena, but that, as a

smaller nation, it may think it too late to exert upon the modern world a significant and specifically Italian influence on a grand scale.

To this sense of belatedness in the immediate present is added the Italian's larger awareness of the straitened historical possibilities of the present as against those previous epochs in which the world felt Italy's influence in a multitude of ways. Admittedly consciousness of dwindling prestige and visibility has been part of the experience of other European nations over the last century: England with its loss of empire, France with the waning of its cultural and linguistic authority. However, in view of the greater scope and variety of the Italian achievement over twenty-seven hundred centuries, there can be no doubt that the belatedness felt by Italians exceeds that of their competitor nations. This is not to deny that France enjoyed cultural hegemony in Europe during several historical periods, as did Italy during Imperial Rome, early Christianity, the Renaissance, and the Baroque. However, not even with Charlemagne, Louis XIV, and Napoleon to its credit can France claim to have created political and spiritual empires such as the Roman Empire and Roman Catholicism, nor can it show a period of economic predominance over the advanced parts of Europe such as the Italians achieved in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. By the same token, while the British have exerted economic hegemony in modern times, they have never held political or spiritual dominion in Europe, nor is there a single period of European history, not even the Victorian, in which they have dominated European culture as a whole. Comparisons aside, the special task of the Italian in modernity is to recognize the cultural paradox of double belatedness so as better to comprehend the limits within which he or she can act, the ultimate goal being to shape a credible future. We hope that, as the Italian past throws the shadow of its magnitude upon the national present, the Italians and Italian Americans themselves will continue to learn from its historical examples, draw inspiration from its artists, thinkers, scholars, clerics, and statesmen, preserve the living elements of humanism, classicism, and Christianity, and in so doing prove themselves worthy of their inheritance.

Robert Casillo
John Paul Russo

The ultimate truth with respect to the character, the conscience and the guilt of a people remains for ever a secret; if only for the reason that its defects have another side, where they reappear as peculiarities or even as virtues. We must leave those who find pleasure in passing sweeping censures on whole nations to do so as they like. The people of Europe can maltreat, but happily not judge, one another. A great nation, interwoven by its civilization, its achievements and its fortunes with the whole life of the modern world, can afford to ignore both its advocates and its accusers. It lives on with or without the approval of theorists.

– Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*,
Part VI, 1860

Setting out again in 1614, he [the British traveller William Lithgow, as reported in his *Totall Discourse*, 1632] this time ventured into the mountain-country of Calabria, famous for tarantulas and brigands. Here his peregrinations would have come to a painful end, had he not produced for the ruffians who were threatening his life, the best of all passports – the certificate of a visit to the Holy Places. On seeing this, *on lui fit fête*: the whole company made merry with him. He then passed over into Sicily ... Faring across the island he discovered the bodies of two gentlemen who had killed each other in a solitary duel. As no one was about he rifled their purses, took their diamond rings, and then coolly announced his discovery.

– A. Lytton Sells, *The Paradise of Travellers: The Italian Influence on Englishmen in the Seventeenth Century*, 1964

It is a sign of arrogance and of insolence, even of ingratitude, to limit oneself to a knowledge of Italy when she was victorious and triumphant, and to turn away from her, when she is defeated and subjected to foreign nations. Italy remains our mother whether victorious or defeated, and it is the duty of her sons to acknowledge the obligation which they owe her, in good and in evil times.

– Ludovico Antonio Muratori, Preface to *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*,
1723–1751

... a new standard for thousands of things ...

– Jacob Burckhardt on Italy, *Letters*, 1846

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Stendhal and Italy

ROBERT CASILLO

... this cooling planet ...
– Stendhal

PART ONE Is Italy Civilized?

I

If Stendhal were not internationally famous for his fiction, he would probably be best known as an incomparable Italophile, for whom Italy was virtually synonymous with happiness. ‘All the characteristics of the Italians,’ he wrote in 1813, ‘... are pleasing to me.’ On 4 July 1814 he proclaimed: ‘Rome, Rome is my mother country, I’m burning to be on my way.’¹ So intense was Stendhal’s identification with Italy that he made it his adoptive homeland and, in his fictionalized autobiography *The Life of Henri Brulard* claimed for himself a partly Italian genealogy. He mentions in the same work his youthful interest in things Italian, especially Tasso and Ariosto, whose heroic narratives and landscapes influenced his fiction.² ‘I daily perceive that at heart I am Italian,’ Stendhal wrote to his sister Pauline on 10 September 1811. Two years later he remarked in a diary entry that ‘my trips to Italy caused me to become more original, more *myself*.’³ Anticipating a brief visit to Italy in 1813, he told Pauline that he was ‘destined once again to see my beloved land of Italy ... my true home ... It is simply that the country as a whole *matches my temperament*.’⁴ As much as Stendhal delighted in Rome, Naples, Florence, and other Italian cities, none awakened in him so deep a passion as Milan,

his city *par excellence* of gaiety and music, whose residents had mastered as nowhere else the art of serenely enjoying life. Of the Milanese he said that 'I have never encountered a race of men that were so closely fashioned after my own heart,' adding that, if he had the choice, he would never leave the city. The best known example of Stendhal's *italianità* is his proposed inscription for his tombstone: *Arrigo Beyle Milanese*.⁵

Having first visited Italy in 1800–01, as a soldier in Napoleon's armies, Stendhal returned in 1811 for a stay of three months, during which he saw Rome for the first time, and again in 1813. He lived mainly in Milan from 1814 to 1821, when the Austrians permanently expelled him from their Italian possessions because of his liberal sympathies. After a nine-year absence from Italy, except for a five-month visit to Florence and Rome in 1823–4, he wrangled a minor consular post at Civitavecchia that, from 1830 up to his death in 1842, gave him intermittent access to Rome. Stendhal's knowledge of southern Italy was (it appears) mainly confined to Naples, but he was well-acquainted with the rest of the peninsula – its history, local traditions, architecture, music, painting, literature, sculpture, politics, and society. Apart from *The Charterhouse of Parma*, his greatest masterpiece, and *Chroniques italiennes*, a collection of stories inspired by Renaissance manuscripts, Stendhal devoted a very large portion of his voluminous non-fictional writings to Italian culture, politics, and society during the Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic age. Taken together, these works form a sustained meditation on the relation of Italy to Europe during the period of modernization and also on the failings and virtues of Italy itself. By his own testimony Stendhal visited the peninsula with the aim of elucidating what he claims previous travellers had missed in their one-sided pursuit of art. This unknown element is the Italian character, or '*l'Italie morale*.'⁶

Not a few critics complain that Stendhal idealizes Italy to the point of mythification. He is alleged to have confabulated a romantic nowhere-land populated by beautiful ladies, handsome worldly aristocrats, impassioned musicians and painters, swashbuckling bandits and assassins, canny clerics, and naturally vivacious peasants. When these uncompromising individualists are not engaged in tender love affairs, reckless heroics, or subtle intrigues, they devote themselves to leisurely aesthetic delectation. Critics also remain skeptical of what they see as Stendhal's counter-myth of northern Europe and especially France as the realm of emotional aridity and conformist routine. They claim that he does justice neither to France nor to modern European civilization, as if his love of Italy were founded on a hatred of France. Ironically, Stendhal's

Italophilism would then exemplify the *ressentiment* he had diagnosed in Romanticism.⁷

In 1818, shortly after the publication of *Rome, Naples et Florence en 1817*, Stendhal's friend the Baron de Maresté accused him of having snobbishly focused on the Italian upper classes. A century later Paul Hazard described Stendhal's response to Italy as exemplifying the 'crystallization' – the lover's overestimation of the beloved – that Stendhal had analysed in *Love*. Supposedly purging the country of the commonplace, Stendhal had portrayed an 'Italy *de luxe*.'⁸ To be sure, although Stendhal criticized foreigners (especially the English) for not mixing with Italians, as he himself did, he usually treats the middle as well as the lower classes or *popolo* from a distance.⁹ Notwithstanding Francesco Novati's defense of the at least partial truth of Stendhal's portrayal of Italy, Luigi Foscolo Benedetto takes the opposing view in *Arrigo Beyle Milanese*, and even Novati admits that Stendhal sometimes turns Italian faults into virtues. René Dollot contends that Stendhal's judgments of Milanese society are unreliable owing to his having been denied access to the Italian social elite – a complaint that perhaps applies as well to his critique of French society, whose best salons he could not enter.¹⁰ Although appreciative of Stendhal, Harry Levin borrows Benedetto Croce's reference to Stendhal's 'dream of Italy in Italian disguise,' suggesting that his Italian cult is mainly a 'criticism of France.' Richard N. Coe calls Stendhal's Italy a 'dream-fantasy' or 'Utopia'; for Robert Alter it is an 'imagined sphere'; for Victor Brombert a 'private myth.' In the view of Charles Dédéyan, Stendhal remained a bourgeois for whom Italy and the Renaissance were a romantic '*rêve de compensation*.'¹¹ Implicit in many of these judgments is that Stendhal falsely imagines nineteenth-century Italy to have preserved the vitality of the Renaissance, a criticism repeated by Italo Calvino.¹²

Admittedly Stendhal sometimes idealizes Italy, and makes basic errors. His claim in *Rome, Naples and Florence* that the family is stronger as an institution in Scotland than in Rome reveals his unfamiliarity with the common people, and Bernard Wall rightly questions his notion that Italians are less vain than other nations.¹³ Yet despite such defects Stendhal's Italian writings contain a wealth of acute cultural, political, and historical observations, some speculative, many others based on close knowledge and personal experience. Even Hazard admits that these works hold a measure of truth and penetration.¹⁴ Their virtues justify Jules Bertaut's evaluation of Stendhal as probably unequalled among French travel writers, and Paul Arbelet's observation that, although Stendhal's Italian writings may seem prosaic by comparison with those of other French travellers, it

is because Stendhal portrays an Italy 'vivante et réelle.' Victor Brombert describes him as the French writer of his time who 'knew and understood Italy best.' In Charles Eliot Norton's view, Stendhal surpassed all other foreigners in his knowledge of Italy. For Luigi Barzini, there remains among foreign writers on Italy 'only one real authority, Stendhal.'¹⁵

Nonetheless, William M. Johnston questions Stendhal's penetration as a travel writer. He faults him for errors of fact, limited geographical range, inability to characterize sites and works of art, and a supposedly one-sided devotion to opera, local gossip, shallow eroticism, and other ephemera dear to the *bon vivant*. Contending that Stendhal relied more on chatter than on books, Johnston refuses to rank him among the finest French travel writers, placing him below the brothers Goncourt, Rémusat, and Maurel. Such an evaluation ignores Stendhal's strong suit, which is neither description nor atmospheric evocation nor impressionism – apparently for Johnston the essence of travel writing – but an analysis of Italian society and politics as well as of the psychology and behaviour of the Italians.¹⁶

Cesar Graña's criticism of Stendhal goes deeper.¹⁷ For Graña, Stendhal is a literary Bohemian and hence anti-bourgeois; and, while Graña ignores Stendhal's writings on Italy, his anti-Bohemian argument encompasses Stendhal's Italophilism. Indeed, Stendhal identifies Italians with Bohemians if not of the artistic then of the gypsy variety: 'Les mœurs nationales du pays de Naples sont exactement les mœurs des bohémiens.'¹⁸ Graña shows that the French Bohemians hated modernity for the very qualities Karl Marx and Max Weber had welcomed. Notwithstanding his radicalism, Marx admired the bourgeoisie for introducing discipline, regularity, and system into social life and thus for banishing the erratic rhythms of medieval production and behaviour. Weber identified modernity with the emergence of bureaucracy, which rationalizes law, politics, and society and thus eliminates the subjective, the unreasonable, and the incalculable. The Bohemians by contrast opposed such bourgeois values as discipline, self-renunciation, emotional neutrality, thrift, steady production, and utilitarian efficiency. They identified civil society, its laws, bureaucracies, and republican institutions, with dull routinization, impersonal communications, levelling conformity, and the banishment of 'superior' though subjective value judgments, all of which, they feared, meant the closure of spontaneity, novelty, and creativity. Typifying the Bohemians' political standpoint in Stendhal's description of republicanism as the 'real *cholera-morbus*,' Graña describes them as irresponsible, for they were unconcerned with the general welfare

and pursued only private utopias.¹⁹ Profoundly attracted to earlier social hierarchies, and rejecting the work ethic for an aesthetic and histrionic way of life coloured by erotic hedonism, the Bohemians embraced the conspicuous consumption and 'predatory efficiency' that Veblen later condemned as typical of the 'high barbarism' of pre-industrial societies. The Bohemians' preference for such models, as opposed to disciplined production, reflects their assumption that the constant oscillation from sloth to prowess, as in the Middle Ages, is intrinsically human. Their cult of the artistic genius, ruthless bandit, and social outcast – all Italian stereotypes – expresses their values. Hence too their glorification of only partially modernized cultures, such as Stendhal's Italy.

Although Stendhal often mocks the bourgeoisie and their values, there are reasons for viewing him as other than a Bohemian, not least his artistic dedication and productivity. True Bohemians are not so much artists as devotees of the 'artistic' lifestyle.²⁰ It is equally mistaken to suppose, as does Graña, that Stendhal is always hostile to modernity or excessively indulgent towards Italy. Rather, his love of the Italy of his own day and even of the Renaissance is never absolute but heavily qualified. Far from rejecting modernity for the sake of Bohemian or aristocratic rebelliousness, Stendhal is drawn to liberalism, utilitarianism, and certain socialist values. Despite his intermittent disgust with republicanism, Stendhal shares de Tocqueville's view that, whatever its failings, democracy defines the main tendency of modern politics after the French Revolution, and must be accepted. No reactionary defender of the *ancien régime*, Stendhal like Tocqueville condemns the oppression and injustice of the old order and shows no desire to undo the French Revolution, which he regards as impossible in any case. For both writers, the French Revolution and its democratic repercussions hold potential for good as well as evil.²¹ At the same time, Stendhal often acknowledges the superiority of France and England, the two leading modern nations, to nineteenth-century Italy, which he never wholly confuses with the Renaissance. If anything his consciousness of Italy is deeply divided because he both accepts and challenges modernity.²² Not only does this ideological conflict repeat the typically Stendhalian antithesis between analysis on the one hand and passion and personality on the other,²³ but its very ground is Italy itself.

Graña is further mistaken in implying that Italy's attraction to Stendhal fully resembles the *nostalgie de la boue* often motivating the Bohemians' fascination with primitive, non-European societies. Dennis Porter notes that whereas Byron, Hugo, Delacroix, and Flaubert were drawn

to the Orient and the primitive, Stendhal's single-minded love of Italy reveals him as a 'champion of traditional Eurocentric cultural values' and especially as the heir of the eighteenth century, when Italy was the climax of the Grand Tour. 'We are traveling in order to see new things,' writes Stendhal, 'not barbarian tribes, like the fearless adventurer who penetrates the mountain fastnesses of Tibet or who alights upon the shores of the South Sea isles. We seek more subtle shades; we wish to see manners of acting closer to our perfected [French] civilization.'²⁴ Nor could all the cultural relativism of the present day ever succeed in elevating Chateaubriand's Louisiana, Gauguin's Tahiti, and Lawrence's Mexico to the level of Italy, which, by virtue of its historical significance, and as the chief repository of the West's older, traditional culture, has immeasurably greater interest and value. Stendhal recognizes as much when, with amusing indifference to American geography, he refuses to compare Italy to 'Cochin-China or to the State of Cincinnati.'²⁵ Unlike the peripheral and backward settings favoured by many Bohemians, Italy's cultural legacy renders it far more substantial as the counterweight by which Stendhal measures modernity's strengths and shortcomings.²⁶ And if Stendhal sometimes idealizes his adopted homeland, critics often fail to realize that the value of his mythical Italy, like all utopias, ultimately derives less from correspondence to actualities than from the critical and imaginative truth it contains. More than simply protesting the dominant forces in modernity, Stendhal's Italian utopia envisions their transcendence – not, however, in one country, Italy, privileged and reified as the sole possible realm of *bonheur*, but in the larger social world.

II

In the broadest sense Stendhal defines Italy's inferiority to modern France and England as a deficiency of *civilization*. For though he sometimes praises Italy's 'civilization' for its historical influence, precocity, variety, and 'many-sided *completeness*,' he more frequently asserts the superiority of contemporary French civilization and all that it implies of political, social, and cultural progress. Complaining of Italy's 'less advanced' civilization, he finds that it gives him 'little annoyances in detail' and will cause him to 'return to Paris with pleasure,' for there society has become 'perfected.' Not only does Italy lack the 'decorum of civilization,' but the Ischians, among some other Italians, have 'scarcely a trace' of it.²⁷ When one recalls Italy's distinguished cultural record since ancient times, such an evaluation may seem insulting. However, Stendhal

measures Italy by the standard of civilization as defined in the West since the Enlightenment, and by this definition, which overlaps with the ideas of modernization and progress, he justly estimates Italy's shortcomings. He also understands the historical and social conditions that form the basis of civilization, and the reasons for their relative absence in Italy.

According to Raymond Williams, 'civilization' as a word and concept 'has behind it the general spirit of the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on secular and progressive human self-development. Civilization expressed this sense of historical process, but also celebrated the associated sense of modernity: an achieved condition of refinement and order.' Sheldon Rothblatt characterizes civilization as a 'comprehensive and even ethical term, designating all those material and institutional, but particularly those religious, moral, or intellectual, changes that separated the tame European from the wild barbarian.' Not only does the term encompass the substitution of 'instinct or unconscious controls such as custom' by 'conscious obligations and specified freedoms,' but it refers to 'control over oneself through the use of reason, judgment, and understanding.' The civilized person exhibits 'self-restraint' and 'self-repression,' acting 'defensively against provocation, and in deference to the wishes of others,' so as to reduce 'violence and cruelty.' Civilization thus demands a 'higher state' of human social response along with an 'improved and higher state of human conduct.' As a concept civilization had been preceded by the ideas of *politesse*, refinement, and civility (*civilité*), but whereas the word 'civility' applies chiefly to good manners, civilization stresses both mannerly behaviour and the higher value of reason.²⁸

Descending from the eighteenth century, the concept of civilization refers to a gradual and decisive movement away from medieval to courtly and bourgeois behavioural norms. As Norbert Elias observes, the people of the Middle Ages failed to achieve a high level of 'drive control.'²⁹ Not only did they feel intense passions, they were often controlled by them. Like Stendhal's Italians, they yielded to their spontaneous impulses and freely discharged their emotions, often violently. Having a short emotional fuse, they responded impatiently to events and failed to calculate the long-term consequences of their actions. With their extraordinary freedom of affect, they lacked a dispassionate, matter-of-fact, and objective evaluation of the world. And because their drives were unchecked, medieval people often shifted abruptly from one extreme to another, from asceticism to luxury, love to violent hatred, bellicosity to religiosity, sin to penance, retribution to forgiveness. Yet they showed little differentiation in their ordinary behaviour, since they felt little in-

ternal or external pressure to modify it significantly from one situation to another.

The 'civilized' observer often finds something appealing in primitive or comparatively uncivilized societies, which seem to promise intensity of experience, and whose inhabitants appear to have retained the simple and immediate joys of childhood. Thus in the Middle Ages both pleasure and pain were felt with great force. Less attractively, perhaps, the directness and undifferentiation of social experience implies lack of nuance, while volatile individuals often behave in an incalculable and disorderly manner. According to Johann Huizinga, who influenced Elias, the 'primitive' and 'ingenuous' character of medieval behaviour testifies to comparative underdevelopment in law and civility. In the absence of legal and social restraints, medieval people found further encouragement to succumb to the most intense and contradictory passions. Fueled by the code of vengeance, violent tempers created a social climate of 'chronic insecurity'.³⁰

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, argues Elias, the idea of civility emerged as essential to civilization. Civilized life implies a softening and refinement of manners and a suppression of those powerful impulses that gave the Renaissance and Middle Ages their dramatic and unpredictable character.³¹ As people attained greater drive control, they yielded less to first impulses. As their emotional fuses lengthened, they responded more patiently to events while calculating the long-term consequences of their actions over extended social chains. Their behaviour also achieved a much higher level of affective neutrality. Learning to conceal subjective responses beneath a mask of public reserve, people developed a less emotional, more objective, and hence patient and matter-of-fact approach to life. With the moderation of responses, they went to extremes less frequently, while the increasing differentiation of social and economic life lessened behavioural 'diffuseness.' Instead of acting in basically the same way on all occasions, people learned the social codes each occasion required. As experience became less immediate, it acquired nuances and life gained in sophistication. With the division of public from private, existence became psychologized and perhaps more interesting. In its orderliness and uniformity, social life permitted (and demanded) greater calculation of behaviour. On the negative side, these changes diminished emotion, spontaneity, and the intensity and unexpectedness of pleasure.

According to Elias, the ascendancy of civilization in the West resulted from a combination of forces, all of which Stendhal explicitly or implic-

itly recognizes. Of these, perhaps the most important is the absolutist court of Versailles, where Louis XIV subjected his courtiers to social rituals of gallantry, politeness, and reserve. In France the aristocratic ideal of *civilité* was adopted by the rising bourgeoisie, who found it both prestigious and consistent with their own habits of orderliness, and thence transmitted to France as a whole. In other northern European nations the Protestant middle class helped to create the modern idea of civility by exemplifying for the general population the values of self-control, self-examination, privacy, good manners, a matter-of-fact attitude, business discipline, and the idea of respectability as defined by the elimination of the eccentric and unseemly. French and English society thus rejected anything abrupt or savage, all displays of intensity or of extreme or obsessive behaviour.

The civilizing process reflects profound political and economic differences between the pre-modern and modern worlds. Because the Middle Ages lacked a modern centralized state, force and law were often in the hands of private individuals, who applied them capriciously and without restraint. The failure of the Middle Ages to create complex societies and economies integrated within national boundaries, as well as to achieve political and social interdependence on a large territorial scale, goes far to explain the comparative inability of pre-modern individuals not only to cooperate with each other but to calculate the long-term consequences of their actions. In the absence of a national government and economy along with nationally accepted behavioural norms, people felt little pressure to moderate their impulses or to organize their lives in accordance with a strict schedule.

Elias observes that 'self-restraint in its highly regulated form' requires 'relatively stable monopolies' of force and law. Defined as a monopoly of force, and buttressed by an impartial legal system, the modern state compels individuals to moderate their behaviour and thus increases drive control throughout society. In the absolutist court especially, force yields to nuance and restraint of affect. As behaviour becomes less extreme and more predictable, the modern state can plan and administer its affairs rationally and objectively. A further requirement is that citizens observe the law, lest civic order require constant use of force. On the whole, civilization implies some political and social liberalization, although the range varies considerably.

Integrated under the state, the modern economy grows more complex and productive, with increasing division of labour and interdependence over great distances. In turn, society shows a greater differentiation of

functions and a wider range of interdependences. Civility is thus promoted through social differentiation and integration, for with the division of labour the social code becomes more complex, and more self-control is needed to read social signs. Likewise, as the chains of social interdependence are extended in time and space, there is greater need for behavioural discipline, regularity, and predictability, and less room for oscillations of impulse. Teamwork becomes the modern social norm, and the expanding interdependences are sustained by newspapers and general literacy.³²

Civilization marks a shift from particularity to universality, from intimate local communities to comparatively impersonal and anonymous large societies. In requiring objectivity and rationality, civilization shapes an ever more systematic and matter-of-fact existence. If ascriptive status, favouritism, traditionalism, familism, emotionalism, and other subjective factors had formerly figured in political and legal decisions, now politics and society aim for impersonal calculation and bureaucratic regularity. Such rationalization implies secularization, including the separation of church and state. The objective standards and steady rhythms of law and bureaucracy favour other systematic activities typical of civilization such as industry, commerce, science, and technology, all of which depend on large-scale cooperative and administrative structures based on rational principles. As life becomes more organized, people abandon the undisciplined rhythms of medieval times, when, to quote Marx, 'brutal' outbursts of energy were succeeded by the 'most slothful indolence.' For Marx, it was the bourgeoisie who had first employed human energy in a 'rational,' 'consistent,' and productive fashion.³³

Many Enlightenment thinkers regarded civilization as a universal standard not only of refinement and politeness but of political and social organization, to which all nations should aspire. From this perspective, human societies were to be conceived on the analogy not of a branching tree, whereby each society would possess its own unique characteristics and path of development, but of a ladder, each nation being judged by its competence in attaining civilization as humanity's universal goal. Thus, though Hume and the Scottish school somewhat appreciated distinct national characters, they placed their faith in the final triumph of universal qualities, with civilization absorbing all national differences. It was thus expected that Italy would correct its deficiencies of civilization so as to imitate the more advanced European nations. And yet, in a major development extending from the later eighteenth into the nineteenth century, and possibly because of disillusionment with the French

Revolution, the universal ideal of civilization came to be challenged during the Romantic period and subsequently lost most of its cultural authority. It is within this critique of civilization that Stendhal's writings on Italy should be situated.³⁴

Nonetheless, Elias overemphasizes the post-Renaissance French contribution to civility and civilization. Bram Kempers notes that already in Renaissance Italy new codes of conduct as well as of the pictorial arts determined decorous behaviour. He holds that, in general, the Italian republics imposed much stricter controls on behaviour than did the courts, where aristocratic ostentation and extravagant expense prevailed. Peter Burke similarly observes that the Renaissance conduct books of Castiglione, della Casa, and Guazzo exalted conformity to a code of good manners over the expression of personal styles of behaviour. Citing the ideal of dominance over the passions in Alberti and Guicciardini, Burke insists that if self-control is civilization, as Elias contends, then these Italians were civilized. Well before Louis XIV, the Italian courts perfected manners and conversation under the influence of intelligent, educated women. In dissociating themselves culturally from the lower classes, the Italian aristocracy and bourgeoisie anticipated later trends. Nor was Stendhal unaware of these developments, remarking that Italy had civilized Europe in the century of Pope Leo X.³⁵

Other features that Elias identifies with civilization Marvin Becker finds to have originated in northern Italy, especially Florence, between 1300 and 1600. Besides noting the new emphasis on good manners, patience, reserve, inwardness, privacy, and the art of conversation, Becker remarks the fluid, expanding economies of the Italian states, the decline of violence and the cult of honour through the extension of legality, the supercession of factionalism by voting in urban politics, substantial literacy, the rise of individual and familial values over those of the corporate group and clan, the emergence of state bureaucracy and other secular institutions, the substitution of contractualism for traditional mutualities, and the capacity to conceive of society universalistically rather than personalistically. Peter Burke similarly observes that, up to a point, the Italian Renaissance achieved bureaucratic states in the modern, Weberian sense. However, Daniel Waley and J.K. Hyde argue that Italy had achieved the basis for civilization before the Renaissance, specifically the last half of the thirteenth century, the time of the northern Italian republican communes. Waley finds in these cities not only a high degree of *étatisme* and complex administrative arrangements but liberty, citizen participation, trust, and cooperation. Because citizens willingly acted in

the common interest, and respected universal rules, the communes attained the *civitas* upon which civic culture depends. Education was fairly widespread, streets were kept clean, and impartial laws punished irresponsible behaviour. Undoubtedly these civic virtues contributed to the commercial prosperity of these city-states. Hyde likewise stresses increasing civic participation and responsibility, the rule of law, impersonal bureaucratic administration, and education – key elements in the creation of *la vita civile*, or civil life.³⁶ Robert D. Putnam builds upon Waley's and Hyde's studies in arguing for the enormous long-term influence within northern Italy of its communal and democratic legacy of civic virtue. This tradition encompasses a sense of community, public-spiritedness, adherence to universal laws and rules, and the ability to foster social and economic welfare through civic associations linked not hierarchically but horizontally. What makes northern Italian civic culture work, contends Putnam, is a spirit of trust and cooperation diffused throughout society, as in the later medieval Italian communes.³⁷

Thanks to della Casa, Castiglione, and other writers of courtesy manuals, Italy enjoyed in sixteenth-century England an unsurpassed reputation for civility that lasted into the late 1600s.³⁸ The British travellers Thomas Coryate (*Coryate's Crudities*, 1611) and Fynes Moryson (*An Itinerary*, 1617) both noted that forks, spoons, and knives were regularly provided at the dinner table in Italian houses and inns; by contrast, the Italian scientist Lorenzo Magalotti, who visited England in 1669, found no evidence of the use of the fork. John Raymond, in *An Itinerary containing a Voyage, Made through Italy, in the year 1646, and 1647* (1648), writes of Italy: 'To her we owe our civility,' to which A. Lytton Sells adds, 'that is, our Civilization (the word was not invented until the eighteenth century).' Richard Lassells (*An Italian Voyage, or a Compleat Journey through Italy*, 1670) recommends the educational value of Italy, 'that nation which hath civilized the whole world, and taught Mankind what it is to be a Man.'³⁹ Fernand Braudel defines the Baroque period as the height of Italy's (modern) influence on France, when Italian manners were widely imitated notwithstanding the reluctance of the French to acknowledge their social indebtedness to Italy. Describing the civilizing function of the late seventeenth-century salon of the Marquise de Rambouillet, who was of partly Italian origin, Braudel writes: 'French aristocrats and literati learned good taste, distinction, politeness in female company, and the affectations of refined language – all in the name of Italian elegance and under the aegis of Ariosto and Tasso.'⁴⁰ Yet as Giuseppe Baretta noted in the 1760s, the 'lively French [soon] rivalled their ultramontane

masters in many things; nay, they ... attained so quickly to ... civility and eloquence ... that French politeness soon became a kind of universal pattern' for the whole of Europe.⁴¹

In referring to the 'tilt toward civility' in Italy and describing its progress as 'glacially' slow, Becker implies its only partial success. He mentions the primitive customs of rural districts and excludes southern Italy from the 'fragile' growth of *civiltà*.⁴² Perhaps most damaging to civility was the failure of the late medieval communes to maintain trust, cooperation, and the spirit of compromise, so that violent factionalism led to despotism as the only means of preserving order. Although the Renaissance despots retained the communes' pre-existing forms of administration, they annihilated communal republicanism. One-man rule undermined *civitas* and democracy not only by violating universal legal principles but by discouraging trust, cooperation, and personal initiative.⁴³ Since Renaissance bureaucracies were corrupted by personalism, they failed to achieve full rationalization. Just as political offices were often bought and sold, so personalism continued to infect social life through clientelism and patronage. Despite its incipient bourgeois individualism, Italian Renaissance society eradicated neither the blood tie and vendetta nor the outer-directed medieval cult of honour. After the later Renaissance Italy was largely subjected to foreign powers that imposed despotic and hierarchical rule. Much of the country was 're-feudalized,' to use a much debated term, while patron-client networks pervaded a political world dominated by the aristocracy. The Counter-Reformation strengthened Italy's ecclesiastical hierarchy, which, though it promoted literacy, also controlled intellectual life through indoctrination and censorship. Possibly by around 1650, and certainly by 1700, Italy's economic and cultural decline were manifest.⁴⁴ Nor had civility reached maturity during the Italian Renaissance, despite its conduct books. For though the Italian aristocracy and bourgeoisie preceded their northern European counterparts in detaching themselves culturally and socially from the lower classes, this separation remained incomplete. Ercole d'Este, lord of Ferrara in the late fifteenth century, liked to ride around the city streets throwing raw eggs at young women who looked down from their windows; in a similarly carnivalesque spirit he participated in the egg fight that lasted an hour in the piazza of Ferrara in February 1478. During a visit to Bologna Pope Julius II thrashed a prelate who tried to intervene in his dispute with Michelangelo. Castiglione mentions food-throwing and practical jokes among the courtiers of his day, and amusements of the latter type were often built into the Italian country houses such as

the sixteenth-century Medici villa of Pratolino, where, to quote Burke, the 'host was able to drench his guests as they strolled in his garden,' yet without the slightest imputation of bad taste.⁴⁵ Whereas the civilizing process was accelerating in northern Europe after 1650, it was being counteracted in Italy. Many Italian aristocrats continued to share popular culture and manners into the nineteenth century, by which point the northern European upper classes had established a definite division in taste and refinement between themselves and the lower orders.⁴⁶

Surveying the Italian Renaissance from the perspective of 'civilization,' nineteenth-century writers such as Hippolyte Taine found it wanting. He observes that Renaissance Italians failed to exercise self-control and that their erratic lives present a 'strange incongruity.' Thus, 'after a life of debauchery and violence, even at the height of his vices, man suddenly becomes changed.' The Duke of Ferrara, according to a contemporary chronicler, 'having been attacked with a grave malady which stopped his secretions for over forty-eight hours had recourse to God and ordered all back salaries to be paid.' Ercole d'Este, after leaving an orgy, 'went to sing divine service with his company of French musicians; he either put out an eye or cut off the hand of two hundred prisoners before selling them, and on Holy Thursday he is found washing the feet of the poor.' As for Pope Alexander VI, 'on learning the assassination of his son [Giovanni Borgia], [he] beat his breast and confessed his crimes to the assembled cardinals.'⁴⁷ Taine concludes that during the Renaissance 'people as yet are not very polished. Crudity frightens nobody ... What we call good taste is a product of the *salon*, and is only born into the world under Louis XIV.' For Taine, the Renaissance hung suspended in a 'transitional state' between medieval 'lack of culture' and modern 'over-culture.' Renaissance Italy, he says, was 'almost a modern country.'⁴⁸

In southern Italy, the centralized, rigidly hierarchical state had been the dominant political institution since the eleventh century. Unlike northern European monarchies after the Renaissance, which allied with the bourgeoisie against the aristocracy, southern Italian states never fostered the trust, cooperation, and entrepreneurship essential to *civitas* and economic prosperity. Nor did the feudal aristocratic South permit the formation of a responsible, active middle class, an educated public, the spirit of voluntary association, an efficient, rationalized political administration, and respect for universal legal principles. Instead, the personalism and favouritism of patron-client relations prevailed in a society riddled with suspicion and mistrust.⁴⁹ And because the weak states of the South have failed to win a monopoly of violence, they have been long

afflicted by anarchic criminality and exploitative criminal associations such as the Mafia, which have taken advantage of a power vacuum in becoming a law unto themselves.⁵⁰

The consequences of the retardation of the civilizing process are felt in Italy into the present. Although Dean Peabody characterizes northern Italy as a variant on the model of northern Europe, where *Gesellschaft* patterns prevail, he identifies Italy, alone among major Western European nations and the United States, with a *Gemeinschaft* pattern of society. Most Italians favour particularism or personalism over universalism, ascription over achievement, diffuseness over specificity in behaviour, and affectivity over emotional neutrality. Because private interests invade the public sphere, the modern Italian state is a 'pseudo-*Gesellschaft*.' Unlike northern Europeans, with their strong 'impulse-control,' Italians exhibit frequent 'impulse-expression' and emotional spontaneity even in public. Yet unlike the familiar identification of *Gemeinschaft* with warmth, mutual loyalty, and association, Italy is a 'negatively toned' *Gemeinschaft*, where community is limited to the family and its allies, while individuals and institutions are mistrusted. Imbued with private values, many Italians cannot imagine that an official could act disinterestedly. Civic spirit is therefore deficient in Italy, while in some parts of the South society approaches Hobbesian anarchy. So, too, some Italians have extreme difficulty in comprehending such capitalist values as trust, teamwork, fair play, and adherence to universal rules.⁵¹

III

Stendhal wrote in an age that largely accepted the idea of national character, of whose reality he has no doubt. In *Rossini* he refers to the 'French character,' and in *Love* he comments on the 'frightening change' that has 'overtaken it.' As for Italians, he says of Lorenzo de' Medici that though he 'bridled' Florentine republicanism he did not debase the 'national character.' Admittedly this statement refers to the Florentines rather than the Italians as a whole, and thus raises the question of the advisability of referring to Italians unitarily – an issue to which we shall return. Yet Stendhal also says that the personality of the Florentine artist Benevenuto Cellini affords unparalleled 'insight' into the Italian national character, and he elsewhere claims that Cellini's autobiography holds its secret.⁵² One could multiply similar examples.

In relying on the idea of national character, Stendhal is indebted to both the Enlightenment and Romanticism, the two main influences

upon his thought. Already in the seventeenth century an interest in national character and national genius was evident in the works of Shaftsbury and other writers, and by the middle of the eighteenth century these concepts were widely accepted. Colbert and Le Brun prophesied a revival of the *génie française*, Bolingbroke and Montesquieu followed up Shaftsbury's inquiry into the 'spirit' of nations; and in 1775 James Barry noted that national character figured usefully in the vocabulary of the day. Probably the most influential theorist of national character was Montesquieu, whose *The Spirit of the Laws* attributes national characteristics to two chief causes: politics on the one hand and environment, especially climate, on the other. Contrastingly, David Hume in his essay 'On National Characters' (1748) stressed the role of morals and government over physical causes, whose influence he deemed negligible. The writer most responsible for politicizing national character was probably Rousseau, who saw it as an essential element in political life and who linked it to programs of national preservation and restoration. Rousseau had a powerful impact on Romantic thinking, as witness Madame de Staël, Stendhal's precursor in the interpretation of Italy, who in *Corinne* as in *L'Allemagne* attempted to interpret the Italian and German characters respectively. Linked closely to Romantic historicist culture, national character was coming to be seen as a growing entity with deep historical roots. The attractiveness of the concept of national character in the Romantic period is owed to an increasing dissatisfaction with Enlightenment universalism as well as disillusionment with the French Revolution as an enactment of Enlightenment values. Insofar as the concept of national character could be used to justify the preservation of the distinctive national identities and traits, it had the potential of undermining the Enlightenment concept of civilization as a universal standard of politics, society, and behaviour to which all nations should aspire, even at the cost of their distinctiveness. Some nations, such as Germany from the late eighteenth into the twentieth century, challenged the concept of universal civilization by preserving and cultivating their own national characteristics. For many German thinkers, civilization represented the artificial, mechanical, and material as against the deeper, non-material values they associated with their own ideal of *Kultur*. In France, as in the writings of Guizot, the concept of civilization maintained considerable prestige, as it did in England, where John Stuart Mill, despite his appreciation of national characters, still conceived of civilization as ultimately absorbing national differences. On all these issues Stendhal remains divided in his allegiances, and that division mirrors his conflicted judgments of Italy in his own time.⁵³

The idea of a national character has inspired various definitions, some overlapping, others contradictory. Whereas Benedetto Croce regards national character as nothing but the history of a people, which would make it an object of conscious awareness, Alessandro Cavalli draws upon Norbert Elias's studies of German identity in defining it in terms of the 'traces' history has deposited in the 'inner depths' of a people. Since these are acquired unintentionally, they are not part of a nation's historical memory or tradition. Such a definition seems to contradict Croce's identification of national character with a nation's history. For Peter Mandler, national character refers to the common psychological or cultural characteristics that make a people distinctive. He stresses the relative permanence and continuity of national character, referring to a 'single personality type' rooted in 'stable, deep-seated structures.' Adapting and modifying an earlier formulation of Sir Ernest Barker's, Mihály Szegedy-Maszák's definition of national character apparently relies on Montesquieu while including perhaps unmanageable behavioural elements drawn from history and culture. According to Szegedy-Maszák, national character is a 'complex of socially transmitted traditions, consisting mainly of ethnic, geographic, economic, political, religious, linguistic, and multinational components.' Such a definition would not satisfy Alex Inkeles, who subjects the concept of national character to close methodological scrutiny. Like other scholars, Inkeles believes that national character must refer to relatively enduring features within a population, and he has no doubt that it results from sociocultural forces, especially social structure, though he prefers that it be studied apart from them. Inkeles notes that scholars have sought to derive it from political and social institutions, public and collective action, and high and low culture. It has been studied as an institutional pattern, as a reflection of culture in the anthropological sense, and as action or behaviour. Yet Inkeles rejects the view that national character consists of the sum of the values, institutions, cultural traditions, ways of acting, and history of a people – a complex mix incapable of being measured. Nor should it be identified as a behavioural trait. Instead, Inkeles derives his definition from Tocqueville, whose study of what he calls American 'manners' focuses on personal and individual attitudes, values, opinions, beliefs, and personality dispositions. What Tocqueville is talking about, argues Inkeles, is national character in its properly restricted, manageable sense. As Inkeles defines it, national character is a property of persons, and consists of the dispositions built into the personalities of those who make up a society. These dispositions are the 'relatively enduring personality

characteristics' within a nation. Thus national character is revealed in yet not identical with behaviour; rather, its source lies in the individual personality, which determines behaviour. This definition is much narrower than that of Clark R. McCauley and his colleagues, whose studies of group stereotypes bear upon questions of national character, which inevitably involves stereotyping. In their view, stereotypes have to do with the traits, behaviours, and values of individuals, the first two elements standing outside Inkeles's definition. Finally, in a biological interpretation, Richard Lynn defines national character in terms of personality or temperament and attempts to test national groups for their degree of 'anxiety' or emotionality. Although Lynn regards parental nurture and class as the chief recent influences on national character, he sees heredity or genetics as the long-term underlying factor. He further contends that national stereotypes are often confirmed by ordinary observation.⁵⁴

Stendhal's unsystematic meditations on the Italian national character cover many phenomena. Under the implicit assumption that national characteristics are enduring or at least relatively permanent, he often traces to the Middle Ages the attitudes and behaviour of modern Italians. Culture, in the sense of literature, music, and the arts, he also takes as evidence of the Italian character. In his view, Italy's social structure, its political arrangements, and not least its religion, shape and express the character of its people. Generally, however, Stendhal's interest in the Italian character centres on what he terms *Italie morale*, meaning the personality traits of the Italians, their psychology, temperament, values, emotions, and orientation towards the world – traits reflected in behaviour but irreducible to it, being its determinants.

Nonetheless any attempt to define or write in terms of an Italian national character raises difficulties, especially for the period in which Stendhal lived, which was decades before Italian national unification in 1861. Notwithstanding Stendhal's references to an Italian national character rooted in the Middle Ages, historians have tended to regard the concept of national character as having been hindered in its development as a result of the masses' long exclusion from political and hence national life. From this point of view, the concept emerges only in the modern period of the nation states, when people first became sufficiently conscious of their national groupings to identify with them personally, out of a sense of shared identity. Yet Anthony Smith, in posing the question of whether nations existed before nationalism (and finding only fleeting expressions of national sentiment before 1789), acknowledges that an ethnic identity, conscious or unconscious, can exist prior to the

formation of a nation. Raymond Grew argues that, though a state typically seeks to foster a national identity (of which national character is often seen as an important part), such an identity and character may pre-exist state formation. Indeed, nation-building aims to give national identity stability and institutional expression, as in the Risorgimento. Also worth noting is Ruggiero Romano's point that, though Italy failed to unify politically until the nineteenth century, foreign observers and the Italians themselves had long attributed to Italy a common culture and ethnic identity. This took the form of conscious and articulate awareness in the educated class, for instance Dante, Petrarch, and Machiavelli, and unconscious attitudes and shared traits among the common people.⁵⁵

Another difficulty in speaking of the Italian national character is that, owing to geography and even more so to Italy's failure to achieve national unity before 1861, it had long been fragmented into highly distinctive regions and city-states. More than a century after unification, the peninsula remains diverse culturally and to some extent divided by regional loyalties and particularisms. Because of this lack of homogeneity within Italy the eighteenth-century writer Giuseppe Baretti hesitated to generalize about the Italian character in *The Manners and Customs of Italy* (1769), in which he sought to acquaint his English hosts with his much-maligned countrymen. As Baretti noted, for centuries the regions of Italy have had their own characteristic dialects, customs, behaviours, and even temperaments. This persistent heterogeneity has led twentieth-century observers such as Giulio Bollati and especially Pellegrino d'Acierno to suggest boldly that generalizations concerning an Italian national character are futile owing to its multitude of local differences. For D'Acierno, Italy beyond any other country embodies the Foucauldian *heterotopia*, where difference and diversity triumph over totalizing uniformity. Yet the majority of commentators have approached the problem in less extreme fashion, neither exaggerating the regional variations within Italy nor attempting to define its character in terms of a single homogenizing essence or trait. Instead, they have acknowledged Italy's regional diversity but at the same time stressed the many similarities within the nation as a whole. Notwithstanding his awareness of regional peculiarities, Baretti repeatedly generalizes on the Italian national character, one of his main intentions being to overturn negative stereotypes. The same willingness to think in terms of a national character typifies many of the most important writers on this theme, including Pietro Calepio, Madame de Staël, Sismondi, Giacomo Leopardi, Carlo Sforza, Silvio Guarnieri, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, Luigi

Barzini, Dean Peabody, Michael Carroll, Carlo Tullio-Altan, Loredana Sciolla, Alessandro Cavalli, and Stendhal.⁵⁶

Few foreign observers are as sensitive as Stendhal to the distinctive regional cultures and characters of Italy, in which he takes unending delight, and he is likewise aware of the problem of Italy's many dialects, which he rightly sees as a major obstacle not only to state formation but to the establishment within Italy of a public sphere and national culture. In *Rome, Naples and Florence* he assigns to an Italian speaker the observation that 'You do not need telling that these different peoples are very far from forming a homogenous nation ... each city detests its neighbors, and is mortally detested in return.' In *Love* he observes that 'language or manners' in Italy change from region to region, and in another instance he goes so far as to describe the Milanese as having their own 'national character.'⁵⁷ Yet for all his awareness of Italian diversity, Stendhal sees no contradiction in referring to the Italian national character. He realizes that, when all is said and done, the resemblance is likely to be much greater between a Sicilian and a Milanese than between a Sicilian and a Scot.

A further objection to the idea of national character perhaps originates with David Hume's essay 'Of National Characters.' For though Hume generalizes about national traits when they appear with high frequency, he warns against overgeneralizing. It is a mistake, he argues, to ascribe a trait to a national group without admitting exceptions. What Hume objects to, although he lacks a word for it, is what in the twentieth century would come to be criticized as stereotyping. In its narrowest yet most widely accepted definition, stereotypes are rigid behavioural and temperamental attributes applied to all members of a group. In an extreme example of stereotyping, Daniel Defoe in 'The True-Born Englishman' (1700) claims that each nation fits a single characterological type, the Italians being uniformly lustful. Although Madame de Staël in *On Literature* seeks to disprove national stereotypes, she too assumes that each national group can be characterized by a single national trait; fortunately, she avoids such simplistic thinking in *Corinne*. In 1824 James Morier introduced the word 'stereotype' into English, though without pejorative implications, yet by the early twentieth century Walter Lippmann and others were complaining of the prejudicially harmful stereotypes of national characters. National and other forms of stereotyping came to be condemned by social scientists as thoroughly false conceptions whereby individual traits and behaviours are forced without exception into a rigidly uniform and distorting pattern. Although Gordon Allport

held that all stereotypes need not be false, he regarded the majority as crude exaggerations, and most recent studies of stereotypes have sought to demonstrate their inaccuracy. In common parlance 'stereotype' implies the exaggeration of group traits to the point of caricature. As for national character, it has been largely ignored by social scientists since the 1950s, apparently for fear of unscientific stereotyping.⁵⁸

Perhaps because of the withdrawal of the concept of national character, and also because of the desire to replace it, the period following World War II has witnessed an increasing reliance on the newer concept of national identity, a less rigid formulation that encompasses the combination of political ideals and institutions, common culture and territory, and shared symbolic values that hold a nation together.⁵⁹ Yet is national character bankrupt as a category? Does it inevitably produce stereotypes in the sense of reductive, unreliable, overly generalizing caricatures of group traits? Insofar as anthropology depends on the assumption that real differences exist between human groups, some generalization – and stereotyping – seems built into the enterprise. Moreover, over the last two decades many social scientists have arrived at a less one-sidedly negative view of stereotypes. For though stereotypes continue to be condemned for admitting no exceptions, it has been shown that many people who rely on them neither ignore exceptions nor rush to judgment, but instead rightly comprehend them as probabilistic predictions combining truth and falsehood. As stereotypes have been shown to conform to objective fact in some cases, and to exhibit degrees of accuracy in many others, it is understandable that the 'kernel of truth' theory of stereotypes has come back, and that studies of stereotype accuracy proliferate. It has also been noted that stereotypes are mutable, for as the characteristics of national groups change, so do the stereotypes by which observers interpret them – a phenomenon of which the northern European response to Italy affords many examples.⁶⁰

Similarly, the concept of national character makes sense if one limits it carefully. As Alex Inkeles argues, not only is it to be identified with the personality traits of adult individuals within a national population, but it should be conceptualized in multimodal terms, as the sum of such traits across that population. The major error is to assume the existence of a single personality mode, or one set of characteristics, within a society. Rather, one should study the range and distinctiveness of modal personalities, so as to isolate characteristics that appear with the greatest frequency, and in varying patterns. National character thus refers to the modes of distribution of personality variants within a society. Yet

Inkeles' conception of national character also takes history into account, for though it consists by definition in relatively permanent traits, it may change to the point where it no longer resembles itself.⁶¹

Although Stendhal does not write systematically on national character, he avoids subjecting the Italians to a rigidly static profile based on a single characterological category. The Italian types depicted in his writings remain various. Despite his identification of Italians with grand passions and absence of vanity, he acknowledges that the former are rare even in Italy, and that some Italians are quite vain. Nor does he confuse the rough and somber ferocity of the Calabrians, or the sensualism and largely corporeal eroticism of the Neapolitans, with the elegance, sociability, and emotional delicacy of Milanese high society, whatever the resemblances among these groups. Far from supposing the Italian national character to have remained historically fixed, Stendhal often gives the impression of believing it to have altered since the Middle Ages and Renaissance, under the domination of foreign rulers in alliance with the Counter-Reformation. As Stendhal finds the French to have been transformed in his own time by British models, so the Italians are changing under French influence, and seem less and less what they were in the days of Cellini. Yet he believes that some Italians of his own day closely resemble their Renaissance and medieval ancestors, and that the traits of the Italians are sufficiently persistent historically to justify a substantial belief in their characterological continuity with their ancient past.

IV

A reader of Montesquieu, Helvétius, Volney, and Cabanis, Stendhal holds that a nation's climate, and more especially its government, largely determine its character and hence its way of life.⁶² Italy's hot and dry yet caressing climate has thus supposedly shaped the Italians' bilious and choleric temperament, which is variously passionate, sensuous, aesthetic, nervous, irritable, impulsive, restless, fiery, and easily offended. Under the same climatic influence the Italians exhibit extreme sensitivity to stimuli, intense corporeal engagement with their total physical environment, and an explosive energy that, though it often issues in dangerous discharges of violence, has its paradoxical counterpart in a propensity for deep meditation upon personal feelings. Taken together, the Italians' erratic behaviour stands in a virtually antithetical relationship with the phlegmatic and insensitive yet steadily productive northern European.⁶³ In *Literature in its Relation to Social Institutions*, as in her novel *Corinne*, Ma-

dame de Staël had preceded Stendhal in giving climatic explanations of the Italian character, which she borrows from Montesquieu.⁶⁴ Like Staël, Stendhal links Italy's geography and its national character, noting the similarity between the volcanic landscapes of Rome and Naples and the fiery temperament of the inhabitants.⁶⁵ He further resembles Staël in portraying Italy as the 'garden of Europe,' where natural abundance and an indulgent climate foster sensuality and indolent reverie as opposed to the melancholy labours required in the inclement North. Actually, much of Italy is marginally fertile, and its inhabitants have survived only through hard effort against the environment.⁶⁶

For Stendhal, not climate but government has chiefly determined Italian national character. Nowhere is this more evident than in the medieval Italian republics, which have 'moulded the primal Italian character as we know it today,' and whose role in forming Italy Stendhal came to realize partly through the Swiss historian Sismondi. Defiant of monarchical and papal control, the citizens of these merchant republics demanded freedom in defense of their property and thus preferred to be honoured for their 'useful occupations' rather than hungering for the vain and chimerical honours bestowed by monarchical courts. Or as Stendhal puts it, the medieval republics gave Italy its 'foundation of good sense.' The virtue they displayed in defense of their freedom was inspired by the turbulent factionalism of urban politics, as the democracy and liberty pursued in these republics had only a '*precarious existence*' and was of the 'stormy [*orageuse*]' kind. A premium thus being placed on will and character, the period issued in those prodigies of love and hate that inspire Stendhal's confession that he is '*in love with medieval Italy*.' He has in mind the medieval republics when, projecting his never-written *History of Milan*, he notes that the 'gigantic passions of the Middle Ages break through ... in the undimmed effulgence of their ferocious energy.'⁶⁷ A further advantage Italy gained from the republics was that their '*liberty*' and 'heroic' way of life 'first touched off' the 'divine spark' of what came to be known as the Renaissance.⁶⁸

Like Sismondi, who helped to clarify his thinking on this point, Stendhal distinguishes between medieval Italian republicanism and the constitutional type that, through England, France, and the United States, has shaped modern politics. Not only was citizenship in the medieval Italian republics reserved for a small percentage of the population, but the state guaranteed neither personal security nor freedom of industry, opinion, or conscience. Instead, citizens were expected to sacrifice their own private interests to participation in public affairs, which were virtually all-

demanding, and which often involved them in violent political rivalries. Yet though the Italian tyrants never bestowed constitutions upon their domains, they compensated for their private lawlessness with a wealth of public virtues. Contrastingly, modern constitutional republics aim for peace, security, and the undisturbed privacy of the domestic sphere, including the legal protection of property. Being much more concerned with citizens' rights and equality under the law, such governments are expected to guarantee freedom of industry, religion, and the press. And so the 'liberty' of the Italian republics 'is not that which one finds in Philadelphia or that is dreamed of on the banks of the Thames.'⁶⁹

All of Stendhal's writings on Italy implicate two facts: first, its failure to achieve political unity during the Renaissance, and second, its centuries-long submission to foreign despotisms, which Stendhal sees as having begun in 1530 when Spain extinguished the Florentine Republic. The loss of Italian liberty had been anticipated in fifteenth-century Florence, when the Medici had ruled the city behind the scenes while using money to corrupt its citizens' republican virtues. Over the next three centuries Italy suffered enslavement under 'cruel,' 'suspicious,' 'execrable,' 'predatory,' 'vexatious,' 'plundering,' 'probing,' 'meticulous,' 'infamous,' 'implacable,' 'jealous,' 'debasement,' 'enfeebling,' 'petty,' 'weak,' and 'timid' governments.⁷⁰ The Italians' moral character and passionate energy were degraded, as were their republican virtue and communal pride. In sixteenth-century Florence Cosimo I de' Medici replaced republican virtue with that 'cruel' honour Stendhal regards as the form of vanity fostered by courtly societies. Whereas republican liberty had helped to inspire Renaissance art, with few exceptions foreign despotisms caused Italian art and literature to deteriorate. Fervent in his hope for Italian unity and freedom in the nineteenth century, Stendhal often contends that the revival of Italian art and literature requires Italy to become a constitutional monarchy with two legislative chambers, on the analogy of England and post-Napoleonic France.⁷¹ Having been centuries ahead of Europe during the Renaissance, nineteenth-century Italians are two centuries behind England, whose success demonstrates the link between liberalism, order, and prosperity. Or as Stendhal puts it: '*Rien sans la liberté, tout avec la liberté.*'⁷²

Despite his admiration of individualism, Stendhal is neither personally nor ideologically antisocial but accepts several distinctly social values as indispensable to civilization. Not only does he espouse the modern cooperative ideal of 'association' set forth by Fourier and others,⁷³ but he believes that proper relations between government and society require

their mediation through an independent public sphere within which free and informed citizens can express openly their political and other opinions in an atmosphere of mutual trust and good will. Stendhal also appreciates the rule of law and impartial application of justice as a means of limiting antisocial behaviour and of promoting the trust of the citizenry in both each other and their government. From this perspective, the anarchic individualism that signals the absence of civilization in Italy is rooted in at least two long-standing historical causes.

First is the legacy of the Middle Ages, when a politically disunified Italy was wracked by violent antagonisms between and within its individual states, and a public sphere thus failed to develop at a national level. Second is the more recent presence of a 'multitude of petty tyrants' who besides maintaining the political fragmentation of the peninsula have deliberately promoted fear and mistrust among its people, so as to reduce them to 'utter degradation.' Every Italian city since medieval times, writes Stendhal, 'has pursued its neighbor with unabated loathing; and the ingrained habit of such civic discord cannot but sound an echo of mistrust between one individual and the next.' If Italy is the 'native home' of love, it is also the land of '*hatred*,' where people fear strangers and regard their neighbours' opinions with suspicion and disdain. What Stendhal says of medieval despotisms, that they never established impartial justice or reasonable laws, applies equally to the foreign regimes succeeding them. In the absence of political liberty, and because mutual suspicion poisons the relation between the despot and his people, there is no real public and no public sphere, which only adds to the general mistrust. A further liability is that despotic injustice encourages people to yield to impulse and to take the law into their own hands. Without a responsible government, how could the Italians develop the social cooperativeness so productive in the law-abiding North? For more than four centuries the 'life' of Italy had been 'choked' by the 'strangling crop of anti-social practices.'⁷⁴

However, Stendhal sometimes exaggerates the deficiencies of the public sphere in post-Renaissance Italy, for as Brendan Dooley has shown, and as Stendhal realizes, an educated public of some extent existed in the eighteenth century. This was partly attributable to the state, which in the late eighteenth century came to appreciate the role of education in shaping public opinion, and also to the resurgence of Italian universities in the same period. Nonetheless, this public sphere remained underdeveloped from the eighteenth into the nineteenth century, taking a local rather than national form.⁷⁵

For Stendhal, the concept of civilization is inextricable from forms of social behaviour that qualify as civilized and that thrive within a certain type of society of which France affords the best example. Demanding self-control, deference, and respect for one's neighbour's opinion, French high society raises refined manners or politeness to a universal standard for the entire nation. As Stendhal realizes, the ideal of *civilité* originates at the court of Louis XIV, who imposed upon his courtiers new and non-violent codes of honour, politeness, and good taste. Thanks to the prestige of the capital, these social values spread throughout France and were further developed in aristocratic salons and in the drawing rooms of the bourgeois emulators of courtly and aristocratic society. Hence the 'living law' of Louis XIV 'still governs' nineteenth-century Parisians.⁷⁶ Yet the French social ideal rests not simply on good manners or the proprieties. Rather, society fulfils itself in sophisticated conversation, the object being not simply to observe social conventions but to extract a high degree of pleasure through the enjoyment of oneself and others. One might describe conversation as the chief adornment of such a society, that for which it exists.⁷⁷

It would be an exaggeration to claim that Stendhal failed to encounter good manners or engaging conversation within Italian society, which at some points he praises over its Parisian rival. Not only does he admire the high society of Bologna, which he finds 'a little more colorful' than that of Paris, and whose leading luminary, Madame Martinetti, could easily hold her own in that milieu, but he claims to prefer Paduan society to the most brilliant Parisian salons, which seem arid by comparison with the charms of Madame Benzoni. Rome in the 1820s supposedly has the most 'preferable' salons in Europe, those of Paris having become dry and serious as compared to the wit and variety of Roman conversation. Regarding Naples, Stendhal reports having been 'treated with ... impeccable courtesy,' adding that 'there is nothing save the rarest *nuances* to distinguish the tone which reigns in such company from that of polite society in Paris.' In Florence, he finds 'unforced politeness' in addition to 'civilized urbanity' and 'worldly wisdom.' Naples with its 'fifty fascinating salons' is 'livelier' than Paris, and nowhere in Italy is Stendhal more delighted than amid the liveliness of Milanese repartee in the salon-like boxes at La Scala.⁷⁸

Yet on the whole Stendhal finds Italian society to exhibit many shortcomings in both politeness and conversation, a judgment that seems quite credible and for which the most likely historical explanation lies in the fact that, having been politically disunited from Roman times into the mid-nineteenth century, the Italians unlike the French have never

followed a single courtly model of behaviour. Even during the Renaissance, notes Richard Goldthwaite, Italy's political fragmentation resulted in a variety of court models. Nor were the local nobility of the larger capitals necessarily absorbed in court, as witness those sixteenth-century Florentine aristocrats who hardly involved themselves in the social life of the city's first grand dukes, despite the antiquity of their Medici pedigree.⁷⁹ Although the various states and regions within the peninsula possessed their own distinctive social traditions and conventions, these were not necessarily binding on the individual, while the antisocial climate under the later Italian despotisms led to disrespect for common behavioural ideals and standards. The result was that the typical Italian often acted as he or she pleased, in disregard of society at large.

Although Stendhal acknowledges that 'naturalness' may flourish in the absence of a standardizing 'decorum of civilization,' he also knows that a 'riotous luxuriance of foolishness may grow unchecked,' and where does one draw the line between agreeable spontaneity and merely crude behaviour? His claim that the Italians are 'far from being polished' is supported by the evidence of rudeness in their salons, where overbearing people dominate the meek and timid. Similarly, the lack of refinement in Goldoni's characters reflects Italy's social situation, that of a 'less advanced' civilization.⁸⁰ At points Stendhal implies that civilization exists only in small pockets of Italian society, such as Bologna. Typifying the absence of 'good form' and '*savoir-vivre*' in Italy, which falls below the 'enormously perfected' standard of French salons, Signor Casati on his visit to a box at a theater showed bad breeding by talking for ten minutes without knowing the ladies. As in the Renaissance, Italians tell jokes of 'excellent indecency' and feel free to accost pretty women in the street.⁸¹ Rome is filled with migrant peasants wearing sheepskins. In small towns disputes over party walls lead to bloodshed, which, however fascinating aesthetically, bespeaks the rule of force over both manners and law. Whereas in France the *honnête homme* conceals the unseemly,⁸² Stendhal tells of a man who, in the eyes of an Italian, appeared '*honest and kindly*' while proposing an assassination. Having never been at court, an Italian *marchese* will mouth 'foul indecencies' and express his anger 'in more or less the same language' as his lackey. In scholarly debate Italians reveal the 'urbanity of the fourteenth century,' referring to one another politely as 'ass' and 'animal.' In their academies, should one scholar contradict another, he makes of him a mortal enemy.⁸³

Stendhal traces the relative absence of refined and sophisticated conversation in Italy to a lack of sites necessary to its cultivation and refine-

ment: on the one hand, the monarchical court; on the other, the national capital where the upper-class salon and its wits define verbal and social models for the nation. Unlike Italy, the French and more especially the Parisians continued to benefit from the influence of the Bourbon court of the eighteenth century, where politeness had reached unprecedented levels of refinement, and where nuanced conversation had become the 'art *par excellence*,' the 'key to everything.'⁸⁴ Another factor impeding the development of conversation in Italy is its despotic governments, whose spies and other forms of surveillance discourage not only a public sphere but free conversation. Other causes include poverty and the long-standing antisocial, self-isolating habits of the Italians, as witness that in nineteenth-century Rome Stendhal finds almost no society to speak of in the sense of dinner parties, balls, and other social invitations, while in Milan, were it not for the boxes of La Scala, society would barely exist. Turning their backs on epigrams, witty anecdotes, and piquant incidents, the Italians treat conversation as 'nothing but a *vehicle* for emotional expression,' with the result that, unlike in France, it is very rarely valued 'for its own sake.' Italians prefer to talk all at once, being impatient of give-and-take, while the Calabrians are ignorant of the art of conversation altogether. The 'rapier-like displays of wit' delightful to the French only 'embarrass' the Italians, who lack the French talent for ready repartee and among whom such brilliance is 'heartily despised.' Yet should the Italians find themselves 'bereft of a riposte to fling back at their interlocutors,' they 'go pale with fury,' which testifies to their 'intolerance in argument.'⁸⁵ In the judgment of a fictional Frenchman in Stendhal's *Roman Journal*, personal relations among Italians are immediate and direct, yet their passion and sincerity cause them to reveal too much of themselves too quickly, so that their experience lacks wit, subtlety, and interest. Stendhal also finds the typical Italian to lack irony and brevity in wit, which is why Voltaire and La Bruyère leave him cold and why 'hints and insinuations mean nothing to him, in a book.'⁸⁶ Contrastingly, in the French salons all is irony and implication, as verbal nuances register the ever-shifting gradations of social distance and intimacy, irony and sincerity. In short, the Italians' political fragmentation and social habits had deprived them of a highly refined verbal culture and its accompanying social sophistication.

Writing in the 1780s, William Beckford remarked the Italians' lack of 'politeness, refinement of manners, and the true spirit of society,' although he noted many exceptions. The same judgment figures in the writing of numerous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travellers.⁸⁷

Stendhal's contention that Italian scholars often substituted personal insult for reasoned argument may seem exaggerated, yet during the 1760s Giuseppe Baretti opposed free speech in Italy on the grounds that it would unleash a host of scribblers specializing in *ad hominem* invective and scurrilous defamations.⁸⁸ If what Stendhal reports of Italian scholars is true, they resembled their Renaissance (and medieval) predecessors. Becker refers to the '[high] temperature of polemical and fiery civic prose so prevalent in Quattrocento Italian humanist court circles,' and Kerrigan and Braden note that scholars Poggio Bracciolini and George of Trebizond 'slugged it out publicly' over translations of Xenophon and Diodorus Siculus.⁸⁹

Just as Stendhal found good manners and conversation in some parts of Italy, so eighteenth-century Italy was not altogether without a refined society comparable to that of France. Geneviève Gennari notes that Pietro Verri displayed his wit and intelligence in the late eighteenth-century Milanese salons of Paola Castiglione and Mme Serbelloni, and there were other approximations of the Parisian standard.⁹⁰ Yet though Vaussard notes that salons became 'all the rage' in eighteenth-century Italy, where 'civilized behavior had spread to new classes and women of high birth in particular were freed from a mass of restrictions,' these salons were largely devoted to parlour games and gambling, substitutes for the outdoor games of the previous century.⁹¹ The English Italophobe Dr Samuel Sharpe, a visitor in the 1760s, found Italian *conversazioni* less diversified and interesting than those of London, since Italians dared not speak on liberty, politics, or religion. According to the late eighteenth-century traveller Patrick Brydone, the Sicilian nobility had informed conversations, but their counterparts elsewhere in Italy attended *conversazioni* only for the 'frivolity and nothingness' of playing cards and eating ices.⁹² During his Italian visit of 1780 Beckford complained of the dearth of interesting conversation in Venetian aristocratic drawing rooms, where it had been driven out by mindless gambling and indolence resulting from feverishly erratic debauchery. The poverty of conversation among other Italians he attributed to their love of secrecy and dissimulation, which prevented them from speaking their thoughts, and to their vanity, which led to chatter, pretension, and 'pompous insipidity.'⁹³ Although Hester Thrale Piozzi praised literary discussions in Venice and Verona, where ladies participated, she concluded that no Italian 'dreams of cultivating conversation at all – *as an art*.' She attributed Italy's lack of novels and sophisticated comedies to the Italians' immediate self-revelation or sincerity, which obviated the need for the psychological

exploration of character. Germaine de Staël would make the same point in *Corinne*. Even Baretti, an indefatigable apologist for Italy, found Italian drawing room society boring, since, unlike in France, discussions of literature, trade, and economics were off-limits in feminine company.⁹⁴ According to Sismondi, the platitudinousness and lack of moral awareness in Italian conversation stemmed partly from political repression, which had prevented a public sphere while making mind and conscience torpid.⁹⁵ Similar criticism of Italian conversation appears in the writings of nineteenth-century travellers such as Lady Morgan, Charlotte Eaton, A.W. Power, Henry James, and Byron.⁹⁶

Another feature of Italian society that Stendhal criticizes for its failure to meet the civilized standard is its comparative lack of hygiene and high tolerance of domestic and public filth. As he observes on more than one occasion, dirtiness is a predominant characteristic of Italy. In contrast with Parisian buildings, with their customary 'cleanliness on the interior,' Rome's newly built Palazzo Ercolani, however magnificent, 'already looks all dirty.' 'I didn't see a single room where I'd be able to work with pleasure,' writes Stendhal, adding: 'the dirtiness shocked me wherever I turned.' The first floor of the 'finest cafe in Rome,' though housed in the Palazzo Ruspoli, strikes one 'by the magnificence of the rooms and by their lack of cleanliness.' It is hardly surprising that Rome, like Italy generally, abounds in nasty smells. Stendhal complains of the odor of rotten cabbages in the market of the Corso, of the stench emanating from the church of San Lorenzo in Lucina, and of the 'affreuse saleté' of the Roman streets, which so nauseate him that that he needs smelling salts.⁹⁷

Stendhal's objections to Italy's dirt and smells are confirmed by both historians and travellers. During the eighteenth century, notes Andrieux, Romans customarily threw not only garbage but human waste into the streets, where it was collected at long, irregular intervals. Imbued with bourgeois ideals of public hygiene and orderliness, eighteenth-century travellers such as Goethe, Grosley, Joseph Spence, Hester Thrale Piozzi, and Marianna Starke were scandalized that Italians of all classes, in the absence of public lavatories and, for many, domestic sanitation, relieved themselves in the porticoes, colonnades, and courtyards of their cities. Similar complaints persisted in the nineteenth century among British and American visitors,⁹⁸ and, like Stendhal's annoyance with Roman odours, they indicate rising standards of civilization. As Alain Corbin remarks, in France from the eighteenth century onward the olfactory environment 'became increasingly muted and deodorized' thanks to

hygienists and sanitation experts. Relating this to Elias's theory of the 'civilizing process,' Corbin notes that, if public hygiene implies social order, the presence of smells connotes bad manners and proximity to animals.⁹⁹

V

Contrary to what Graña suggests, Stendhal respects rational and orderly behaviour as well as social responsibility. One side of his personality is drawn to the idea that reason can systematize all human behaviour, even the passions. He is also indebted to Helvétius's and Bentham's utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number, which entails an appeal to the state as the minister of social benefits.¹⁰⁰ Broadly speaking, Stendhal views politics as the reconciliation of private and general interests. For him, civilization requires a modern centralized state and all that it implies – efficient, impartial administration, uniform laws, a reliable police force, and a cooperative, literate, and intelligent public. These values underly his harsh criticism of Italian politics and society in the 1800s. The Italians, he finds, are unjustified in their 'backstairs patriotism' (*patriotisme d'anté-chambre*), whereby they refuse to allow anything Italian (or local) to be disparaged.¹⁰¹ This is mere vanity in a land so deficient in civilization.

In *Pages d'Italie* Stendhal asserts that the more a people esteems force, the less civilized it is, and that the force which antiquity admired means almost 'nothing' in modernity. The most dramatic evidence of Italy's uncivilized condition is thus its lawless violence as seen in the vendetta – a social evil often noted from the late sixteenth century onward. As Stendhal puts it, '*insecurity ... is a chronic malady to be endured*' in Italy.¹⁰² Michel Crouzet describes Stendhal's Italy as '*la terre classique de l'assassinat, ou de la vengeance*,' where people side with assassins, and where the language of criminality is as nuanced as that of love, to which Italian violence is linked inseparably. Yet though Crouzet emphasizes Stendhal's fascination with Italian criminality, he notes his demand for political justice, and indeed, Stendhal's interest in Italian bandits is largely literary.¹⁰³ Not only does he support the abolition of duelling, but in *A Roman Journal* he describes himself as a 'peace-loving and law-abiding' man, thus revealing his bourgeois sympathies, and adds that, 'especially when I find myself exposed to the vexations of the [corrupt] Italian police, I wish that the entire earth should obtain the legal government of New York.'¹⁰⁴

Maurice Vaussard gives the impression that crime, including murder, occurred frequently in eighteenth-century Italy.¹⁰⁵ According to Andrieux, Rome was largely free of theft and burglary, since the people were supplied gratis by the government, and there were no riots; yet several murders were committed daily in Rome, and on feast days roughly five and six. Eighteen thousand people are claimed to have been murdered in Rome between 1795 and 1800. Normally accomplished with the knife, the duelling weapon of the lower class, these crimes usually resulted from quarrels over women and personal honour among a people for whom vendetta was an obligation. The Romans also took the law into their own hands as the alternative to an unreliable judiciary as well as a corrupt police force (the *sbirri*), which the people refused to help.¹⁰⁶ Martin Clark observes that in nineteenth-century Italy known murders averaged three thousand per year, and were often motivated by love, vengeance, hatred, and anger. Under the modernizing post-Risorgimento Italian state, however, such acts were defined as criminal.¹⁰⁷

Of all Italian governments Stendhal is most critical of the papal 'pure despotism' that, except for the Napoleonic occupation of 1810–1814, ruled Rome from the Counter-Reformation to the Italian unification and which he, like Machiavelli, Guicciardini, Giannone, Sismondi, Burckhardt, and Symonds, views as a major cause of Italy's internal conflicts and ultimate decline. Indeed, Stendhal blames the papacy for Italy's political fragmentation, the 'greatest crime of modern times.' He would have had less cause to complain of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Rome, which, thanks to Pope Sixtus V, Bernini, and Borromini, was then the most modern, best administered city in Europe.¹⁰⁸ However, by the early nineteenth century, Rome's backwardness had long been a topos of travel writers. When in 1780 Martin Sherlock described Rome as the 'worst lighted city in Europe,' he evoked the absence of enlightenment in a nation where 'they love obscurity in every thing.' In 1814 John Mayne cited an Italian who, commenting on Rome's lack of street-lighting, described it as nearly a century behind the major European capitals.¹⁰⁹ Andrieux claims that the Romans preferred dark streets, which provided nocturnal immunity from surveillance by the public and police.¹¹⁰

In Stendhal's judgment the political, social, and economic decline of the Papal States began as early as 1595. His criticism of the papal government reflects his preference for a rationalistic, tolerant, sensuous paganism over a putatively sadistic Christianity, but it is more deeply grounded in his disapproval of a system in which the Church is the state.

He contends that freedom of thought lasted in Italy until the reign of Pope Paul IV, who reacted to the Reformation by indoctrinating Italian children with superstition; indeed, the 'art of thinking has always been discouraged' in Rome, and, 'when necessary, persecuted.' As priestly education discourages mind and body, so papal hierarchism promotes obsequiousness while crushing character.¹¹¹ The papal theocracy is for Stendhal what Imbert calls a 'gigantic machine of political exploitation' which imposes heavy taxes, ruinous monopolies on the grain trade, and needlessly intricate regulations yet fails to reward or encourage 'patient industry.' Not only does the Roman government have 'a hand in everything,' so that private economic initiatives require permission, but its meddling in the grain trade had led to famine on some occasions. Under these conditions work is thrown in disrepute, the Romans are condemned to laziness and impoverishment, and banditry flourishes as the best alternative to an honest livelihood. Like many travellers, Stendhal remarks that, at the frontier between Tuscany and the Papal States, 'wild and suspicious barbarity suddenly replaces the most exquisite politeness.'¹¹² He calls to mind other travellers in deploring the uncultivated Campagna outside Rome, where absentee aristocratic landlords maintain large holdings, and where, from 1550 to 1826, the feuds of noble families and the depredations of bandits helped in the steady process of depopulation. The Campagna, writes Stendhal, is the 'sublimest tragedy that ever was conceived.' Within Rome itself murders by the knife remain a chronic problem, for the government provides no security and every man is his own master, living in heroic solitude. Yet because the people hate the government and its corrupt police, they sympathize with murderers rather than their victims. As late as the 1820s the papacy granted ecclesiastical asylum to assassins and other criminals – a long-standing custom that shocked northern European observers, including Stendhal.¹¹³ Given so much violence in Rome, he concludes that Italian civilization stops at Florence, and that the Romans are more savage than American Indians.¹¹⁴

If Stendhal finds the papal government 'doux et timide' rather than vexatious and cruel, this partly reflects its gerontocratic incompetence, as when Pope Leo XII taxed heavily the *vetturini* who transported travellers to Rome, thus endangering its economy. Save for a brief period of reformism under Napoleon, the Papal States continue to sacrifice rational and objective administrative standards to preferment and clientelism, earning a reputation for capriciousness and unreliability. Papal elections amount to a series of political manoeuvres following which the aged vic-

tor hastens to enrich his relatives. The laity are excluded from important posts, and what few careers this backward society affords are closed to talented lay people. Instead, most prelates derive from noble families, and the least qualified among them receive coveted offices. In politics, as in economics, the middle class encounters a multitude of obstacles. Although the Pope needs a banker rather than a monsignor as minister of finance, he makes due with cardinals of 'superlative ignorance.' At the same time, bureaucratic redundancy and special interests confuse and impede the workings of the government. Not only are 'very few people removed from office in this part of the world,' but positions are granted as favours without regard for ability, and the decisions of 'dignified priests' are determined by their mistresses. Rather than fulfilling one's potential through hard effort, one is better off having a priestly patron or bribing the mistress of a prelate. If for three hundred years the Papal States have been riddled with 'suspicion and mistrust,' it is partly because the majority of the acts of the papal government are a 'departure from a rule.' Nor does there exist within its boundaries anything even remotely resembling public opinion as understood in northern Europe.¹¹⁵

As for the judicial system: there is an excess of courts, cases are fraught with all kinds of abuses and legal delays, and people so despise the law and police that they regard property rights as based upon violence. For a Sabine peasant, the 'ideas of *order* and of *justice*, which have been rooted in the heart of the Champagne or the Burgundy peasant since the parceling out of national property [after the French Revolution], would seem the height of absurdity.'¹¹⁶ Like the residents of other Italian regions, those of the Papal States cannot identify with a government that neither helps nor protects them, and they thus serve it all too reluctantly as soldiers. Here is one explanation for the familiar charge of Italian military cowardice that, as Stendhal notes, Murat and General Carlo Filangieri found confirmed in the Neapolitans and Calabrians but that failed to account for the customary courage of Italians in asserting their private interests.¹¹⁷ Supposedly originating in Charles V's destruction of Roman liberty in 1530, the bandits were in Stendhal's view the 'only *opposition*' to the Roman ecclesiastical state, but after 1600 their essentially apolitical revolt proved futile as Rome descended into 'chronic *stagnation*.' Although the bandits remained heroes to the Roman common people into the nineteenth century, Stendhal praises the efforts of Cola di Rienzi, Sixtus VI, Napoleon, and, in his own time, Cardinal Ettore Consalvi to put down these desperadoes, who typify a low state of civilization. Napoleon having extirpated the banditti in the Papal States, they flourished

again in 1817, because industry once more went unrewarded; yet thanks to Cardinal Benvenuti, organized banditry had disappeared in the region of Rome since 1826.¹¹⁸

Attempting to assess Rome's future during the Restoration, Stendhal was initially encouraged by the reformism of Pope Pius VII's prime minister, Cardinal Consalvi, a man of honesty and intellect. Not only did Consalvi introduce laymen into the administration of the Papal States, so as to develop a civic sense among the people, but, immediately following the Pope's return to power in 1815, he had strenuously opposed those many *zelanti* within the Church who had sought to abolish Napoleon's reforms in a return to the *status quo ante*. Instead, Consalvi had preferred to maintain French methods of civil justice as well as to adhere to such Napoleonic reforms as the abolition of feudal rights and the establishment of a centralized and uniform administration. If Stendhal's esteem for Consalvi diminished somewhat, it was because of his opposition not only to Italian national unity but to the introduction of a constitutional government into Rome; for as Stendhal knew, a constitution could never be reconciled with the monarchical and ecclesiastical character of the Roman state, which feared to combine priests with lay people. As Imbert puts it, a priestly government is inherently outside the rhythm of modern life. Having thus settled for a paternalistic despotism, Consalvi was drawn increasingly to political repression, partly because the carbonarist movement threatened the papal government, but also because he was increasingly pressured by the *zelanti* and feared to lose his position. When Consalvi finally had to leave office in 1823, upon the election of Pope Leo XII, Rome became a scene of intensifying political repression, or what Stendhal calls a 'regime of fear.' Political crimes no longer received clemency, but instead the death penalty was announced for *carbonari*. The Papal States swarmed with civilian spies, while their prisons were crowded increasingly with political dissidents.¹¹⁹

According to Maurice Andrieux, in late eighteenth-century Rome patronage and clientelism were a fact of life for the upper and lower classes; one needed a patron – best of all a cardinal – to get ahead or merely to protect oneself. Nepotism was also prevalent, especially among the popes, who, because they were normally elected at a ripe age, wanted to advance their relatives as fast as possible. The election of every pope was followed by a great redistribution of offices, benefices, and employments. Yet one should not exaggerate such clientelism, for then as now the Catholic Church was a meritocracy, and, as Stendhal acknowledges, an intelligent young man of whatever class was often encouraged to take

holy orders. Andrieux finds the problem of the Roman legal system to have been not so much corruption as the inadequate codification of laws as well as an excess of courts, a defect Stendhal also mentions. This resulted in conflicting decisions, and many cases were decided only after long delays. Being priests, the judges lacked legal training and often made arbitrary decisions while thinking themselves guided by divine wisdom.¹²⁰

Banditry, which has long afflicted the Mediterranean world, plagued Italy in the Middle Ages and Renaissance and persisted in parts of the peninsula into the early twentieth century.¹²¹ Stendhal's view of the Roman banditti is confirmed by Andrieux, who observes that the impoverished peasantry, although often exploited and victimized by banditti, admired them as Robin Hoods. The papal soldiery whose task was to pursue them were detested as representatives of an oppressive government.¹²² Charles MacFarlane, a Britisher who lived in Italy in the 1820s, found bandits rampant in many parts of the peninsula, especially the Papal States and the south. Besides citing Stendhal, MacFarlane refers to such bandits as Marco Sciarra, who, as Stendhal notes, operated in the Abruzzi and the Papal States in the late sixteenth century; Benedetto Mangone of Eboli, of the same period; and such nineteenth-century southern Italian bandits as Don Ciro Anicchiarico and the Vardarelli brothers, the 'very Coryphaei of modern banditti,' as MacFarlane calls them, whose exploits Stendhal discusses in *Rome, Naples and Florence*. Not only does MacFarlane, like Stendhal, associate Italian eroticism and banditry, he identifies the latter with Italy's lack of 'civilization.'¹²³ Although Fernand Braudel laments that historians generally leave the topic of banditry to essayists and novelists, he praises Stendhal's observations on the subject, especially his view of Italian bandits as rebels against political and social oppression. In some ways Stendhal's portrayal of the banditti anticipates E.J. Hobsbawm's now challenged theory of 'social banditry.'¹²⁴

The anti-curialism underlying Stendhal's hatred of what he sees as the morally lax Jesuits also motivates his sympathy towards Gallicanism and Jansenism, two French Catholic Reform movements that had entered Italy in the eighteenth century. 'Based ... on a certain idea of ancient ecclesiastical organization as opposed to the Roman Curia,' as Luigi Salvatorelli remarks, 'Gallicanism was a political-ecclesiastical movement that leaned toward the national autonomy of the Church while favoring close association with the state.' Despite its pre-modern dogmatic and ascetic morality, Jansenism emphasized reason and the inwardness of the moral conscience while combating the absolutist intolerance and temporal power of the Roman Church. For the Jansenists, who sought a more

intimate and sincere religious experience than they found in Catholicism, the primitive Christian Church afforded the only authentic form of worship, the current church being but a simulacrum. Highly influential in Lombardy under Maria Teresa and Joseph II, and in Tuscany under Pietro Leopoldo and Scipione Ricci, bishop of Pistoia and Prato, these movements supported the jurisdictional claims of governments over the Church while providing them with what Salvatorelli terms a 'widened theoretical base and moral impulse.' Indeed, the 'limitation of the power of the Curia became identified with the independence of governments from the Curia and with the abolition of ecclesiastical privileges,' such as exemptions of persons and properties from state control. Gallicanism and Jansenism were thus agents of secular and civil society in attempting simultaneously to extend the power of the state and to limit ecclesiastical authority.¹²⁵

Desiring a return to what he regards as the virtue and simplicity of the primitive church, Stendhal claims that between 400 and 1200 the popes were elected by bishops in a popular assembly in which they represented the mass of Christians. In his view, Catholicism in Rome should abandon its authoritarian practices and adopt the more egalitarian ways of the French national church. This is not to suggest that Stendhal is close to being a Jansenist, as religious controversy bores him, while some elements of Jansenism ill consort with his philosophical orientation, often referred to as 'Beylism' or 'idéologie.' These elements include asceticism, an emphasis on original sin and holy terror, and a basic otherworldliness. Yet Stendhal is drawn to Jansenism because of its anti-Jesuitism, its goal of replacing Catholicism with a new ecclesiastical organization based on the primitive church, its insistence on spiritual examination of the self as opposed to the externals of religion, the relative mildness of its teaching methods (despite stress on original sin and holy terror), its interest in history as a source of truth, its fusion of morality and religion, its demand for justice and utility, its goal of promoting civic responsibility through the Church, its clarity and simplicity in verbal expression, and its general rebellion against the political repression and injustice of the *ancien régime*. By the same token, Jansenism's quest for the authentic parallels Stendhal's pursuit of the *naturel* and *vivant*, while the Jansenist discipline of soul and spirit resembles his ideal of self-mastery in accordance with scientific method.¹²⁶

The papacy holds no monopoly over misrule in Italy. Despite Stendhal's admiration for the Medici as cultural patrons, he denounces what he sees as their unofficial tyranny over Florence in the fifteenth century,

and he is even less fond of the Medici who, with the support of Spain, ruled the city after 1530. Marking the extinction of Florentine liberty, that year also initiates what Stendhal sees as a disastrous period of Spanish dominance over much of the peninsula. In 1559, the year of the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis, Lombardy, Naples, and Sicily fell to Spain. In 1714, at the conclusion of the War of the Spanish Succession, Lombardy along with the Kingdom of Naples passed from Spain to the Habsburgs of Austria; by 1720 Sicily was in their hands. In 1734, however, Charles of Bourbon defeated the Austrians and established in the Mezzogiorno an autonomous kingdom closely linked to Spain dynastically and culturally; indeed, the Bourbon monarch's 'independence from Madrid was more formal than real.'¹²⁷

Stendhal believes Spain to bear the chief responsibility for the miseries of Italy following the end of the Florentine Republic. The Spanish presence, he remarks, 'has been harmful to Italy in every way, and Charles V ... has been most fatal to the human race,' for 'his despotism subdued the bold genius engendered by the Middle Ages.' Thanks to Spain, the energetic and meritocratic spirit of the medieval Italian republics – and with it the national character – has been 'debased,' 'degraded,' and 'enfeebled.'¹²⁸ Like Sismondi and many other observers, Stendhal has some justification for accusing Italy's Spanish and Bourbon regimes of having deprived the people of political, social, and economic freedom through heavy taxes, tariffs, political censorship, clerical education, and centralized control. In an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust, fed by Spanish fears of revolt, the gaiety of the Milanese fled, and they became as taciturn as their masters.¹²⁹ Stendhal complains that Spanish rule had been supported by the Church, and that, in serving tyranny and religion, Saint Carlo Borromeo had 'annihilated whatever *strength* had hitherto resided in the character of the Milanese' by imbuing them with ascetic rather than military values. If Bologna maintains 'far closer ties with medieval Italy than does Milan,' it is because it has not had a Borromeo to 'tame its native character and harness it to a *monarchy*.'¹³⁰ The Spanish brought into Italy an 'infamous' administration, the demoralizing custom of the *cavalier sirvente* or *cicisbeo*, and chimerical ideas of aristocratic honour, which fostered vanity and jealousy. Jacob Burckhardt holds similarly that Spanish predominance in Italy had resulted in 'obedience to Spanish ideas,' such as 'contempt for work' and a 'passion for titles'; indeed, everyone in Naples and Florence wanted to be or seem an aristocrat.¹³¹ Although Stendhal realizes that a comparatively enlightened Bourbon despotism ruled over the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily during the eigh-

teenth century, when reformist Neapolitan intellectuals contributed to the European Enlightenment, and although he also realizes that the period of the French occupation witnessed a number of lasting social and economic reforms, including the abolition of feudalism, he regards post-Napoleonic Naples as a repressive monarchy in which aristocrats stand upon their privileges and continue to lord it over the middle and lower classes. Hence his strong sympathy for the Neapolitans' several failed attempts from 1799 onward to establish their own constitutional republic.¹³²

Stendhal's judgments of the Spanish presence in Italy remain questionable nonetheless. Braudel faults him for referring to Italy's 'invasion' by Spanish despotism, when in reality Italian society was 'holding the levers of power' beneath 'the veneer of Spanish rule.' Without the Italians' complicity, Spanish authority would have 'collapsed like a house of cards.' Despite the familiar view that Spain had a largely negative impact upon Italy in this period, scholars now stress its benefits for many parts of Italy and Sicily, and even for Naples into the early 1600s. Besides being needed for military reasons, including protection against Islam, Spain not only kept its Italian possessions out of European wars but poured much money into the country, thus helping the Italians to enjoy a favourable balance of payments and even to maintain cultural and other expenditures at a relatively high level.¹³³

Stendhal's condemnation of the Spanish cult of honour was perhaps influenced by Sismondi's view that, having received it from the Arabs, the Spanish introduced it to sixteenth-century Italy. The result was exaggerated 'delicacy' over female chastity, along with punctiliousness regarding masculine bravery, so that bravos, poignards, and poisons multiplied. Like Stendhal, Sismondi distinguishes between the Italian Middle Ages, when republicanism led to factional hatred and violence, and when the sense of both personal and public utility prevented such vain notions of honour as came to prevail in the monarchical courts of Europe, and the later, Spanish-dominated Italy, when private vengeance promoted social decay. However, masculine honour and feminine chastity have long typified Mediterranean societies, and it seems doubtful that Spain brought them to Italy. The Renaissance duel, a main feature of the aristocratic code of honour, does not seem to have come to Italy from Spain, although the code was apparently individualistic, as Sismondi holds, and although it conforms to Stendhal's conception of vanity as an obsession with one's public image. Not only did the Renaissance duel originate among Italian soldiers, but the Spanish yielded to Italians in punctilio,

duelling technique, and the dissemination of the duelling ethos through manuals such as Girolamo Muzio's *Il Duello* (1550). Spain outlawed duels in 1480 and may have allied with the Counter-Reformation in a failed attempt to suppress them in Italy.¹³⁴

Long defunct, the Italian custom of the *cicisbeo* has been claimed to originate in the Spanish practice of requiring a married woman to appear in public with her husband or a male chaperone, the *cavalier sirvente* (or *cicisbeo*). Vaussard contends that *cicisbeismo* was invented to protect married women from unseemly attentions, and 'was always kept within the bounds of decency,' so that the *cicisbeo* was never a lover. He adds that, though deriving from Spain, the custom was more common in northern Italy than in Naples.¹³⁵ Commenting on eighteenth-century Rome, Andrieux asserts that *cicisbeismo* had first arrived there with Cesare Borgia's Spanish retainers, and that it was practised not only by the aristocracy, as is often assumed, but by all classes. According to Andrieux, the custom of the *cicisbeo* arose because upper-class marriages were often arranged and hence loveless, and because divorce was impossible. A neglected wife thus needed a servant and escort on social occasions. Yet despite the profligacy of eighteenth-century Roman society, in which the Church tolerated adultery, and in which even loving marriages faded into infidelity, Andrieux accepts the Italians' claims for the innocence of *cicisbeismo*. It was bad form for a husband to show jealousy toward a *cicisbeo*, and in any case his affection usually went elsewhere. Nonetheless, many travellers assumed possibly justifiably that the *cavalier sirvente* played the role of lover, the *cicisbeo* being in their censorious eyes the illicit version of the *cavalier sirvente*.¹³⁶

For Stendhal, the appeal of *cicisbeismo* is partly mythical, as the relationship between the lady and her devoted servant conforms to his idealized view of Italy as a 'feminine' country where women display queenly superiority over their male idolators. As he puts it: 'To an Italian woman the limited authority which a French woman can wield in her drawing room would seem quite absurd.'¹³⁷ Notwithstanding Andrieux's characterization of *cicisbeismo* as innocent, Stendhal believes passionate eroticism to typify the practice, with the participants often rejecting brief liaisons for relatively long term commitments. And whereas most foreign commentators deplored *cicisbeismo*, Stendhal calls to mind Byron's *Beppo* in regarding it as an attractive manifestation of Italian individualism and hedonism. Insofar as, according to Stendhal, the husband and *cavalier sirvente* are on the most friendly terms, the latter even being specified in the marriage contract, *cicisbeismo* lends support to his contention that

Italians normally lack vanity or amour-propre, of which jealousy is one type. Stendhal further realizes, as do some other northern European travellers, that in a country such as Italy, where marriages are often arranged, the custom enables people to find the love marriage denies them. *Cicisbeismo* thus exemplifies the preferability of voluntary fidelity over mere constraint.¹³⁸

On the negative side, Stendhal regards *cicisbeismo* as one of the vices brought to Italy from Spain, and as such, he blames it for marital and domestic corruption as well as for the waste of many youthful lives; moreover, the custom had degenerated in many cases into promiscuity and passionless flirtation.¹³⁹ In *The Charterhouse of Parma* *cicisbeismo* figures among the 'effeminate ways' of the Milanese during their political servitude under Austria, and contrasts with the civic seriousness and activism introduced by Napoleon's armies. Accordingly Stendhal apparently welcomes the suppression of *cicisbeismo* during Napoleon's occupation of Italy. Although *The Charterhouse*, which largely takes place after Waterloo, implies that this reform was temporary, as witness Gina Sanseverina's passing notion of taking young Fabrizio as her *cicisbeo*, Stendhal finds that by the 1820s Italian love affairs had become 'infinitely less scandalous' than before 1805, the bad examples being provided mainly by older women. Likewise, most liaisons lasted longer than previously, and *cicisbeismo* was found only in remote regions untouched by Napoleon.¹⁴⁰

Stendhal's comments on the social and political condition of southern Italy lack the ring of first-hand knowledge. The evidence suggests that, contrary to his claim to have visited Sicily and Calabria, he never entered southern Italy below Naples.¹⁴¹ Nor had he any excuse for avoiding the remoter south, as it had been visited by French and other northern European travellers during the Romantic period and even earlier. Leonardo Sciascia holds that Stendhal never saw Sicily, which, had he visited it, he would have fantasized as a land after his own heart, where life consists of violent and amorous exploits, and where the 'man plant,' to use Alfieri's phrase, grows more strongly than anywhere else in Italy. Indeed, Sciascia claims that, exulting in all that would cause a right-minded Sicilian anguish and distress, Stendhal would have glorified the Mafia, soon to arise in the area of Palermo following Italian unification.¹⁴²

In general, Stendhal resembles many other visitors in identifying the south, including Naples, with social and political oppression, poverty, and the constant potential for anarchic violence. Resorting to time-worn clichés, he holds that civilization stops at the Tiber or, at most, Naples; that Rome and Naples are barbarous cities masquerading in European

dress; that Neapolitans and southern Italians are African or Oriental; and that the indulgent southern Italian climate fosters idleness and cowardice. The social and material environment of the region having deprived its inhabitants of the capacity for thought, these savages live sensuously in the moment, which they seize with a violent, half-crazed impetuosity. So too, their easily kindled imaginations drive them nearly to madness. The 'barbaric' Calabrians embody '*impassioned childishness*' and far exceed northern Italians in their emotional intensity. Perhaps the most degraded of the southern Italians are the Neapolitan urban poor, the *lazzaroni*, who so lack refinement that they walk the streets nearly unclothed, and who like other Italians excel in cheating and dissimulation. Although southern Italians and especially the Neapolitans may have a special talent for sensuality and music, such traits are counterweighed by their violence, to which their family honour compels them. These superstitious idolators also practice the *jettatura* or evil eye, the belief in which pervades Neapolitan society. Like many visitors to Naples, Stendhal imagines that the Neapolitans' behaviour is largely determined by their climate and environment and that they thus possess a volcanic temperament reminiscent of Mount Vesuvius, the very symbol of southern Italy.¹⁴³

Although Austria was the dominant power in northern Italy during the Restoration, the region contained a number of other authoritarian states upon which Stendhal cast his critical eye. When Piedmont, which had felt the impact of liberalizing reforms during the Napoleonic occupation, was returned to the House of Savoy in 1815, King Victor Emmanuel I gave the impression that the Restoration would be accompanied by an ambitious modernizing program, including the abolition of taxes, support of agriculture and commerce, and elimination of torture. Actually the king wanted to bring back the *ancien régime* as much as possible, and to this end he implemented a paternal despotism marked by the employment of the Jesuits for educational purposes and a restoration of the feudal system from which the aristocracy had most to gain; what remained of the French system was its imposts, the most burdensome of Napoleon's policies.¹⁴⁴

If the situation in Tuscany was less discouraging than in Piedmont, this was owed partly to the fact that the former state had been returned to the House of Lorraine, which was closely affiliated with Austria's Habsburg monarchy, and which had a reputation for enlightened despotism in the eighteenth century. With the death of Gastone de' Medici and the extinction of his line in 1737, the Florentine state was received by Francesco

Stefano, husband of Queen Maria Teresa of Austria. Now Archduke of Tuscany, Francesco encountered many problems necessitating an extensive reform agenda initially suspected and resisted by the Tuscans. During the decadence of the Medici regime Tuscany had suffered legal and financial confusion, escalating public debt, enfeebled manufactures, agrarian depression, monopolization of land by a few individuals, unwillingness of the big landowners to improve their properties, widespread reliance on unproductive sharecropping (*mezzadria*), interference in commerce by guilds and other corporations, high imposts damaging to local trade and industry, paucity of exports and over-reliance on imports, and failure to reclaim marshlands for agrarian development. Instead of permitting free trade in grain and other goods, the state controlled the market. The continuing practice of primogeniture and *fedecommeso*, which restricted aristocratic inheritance, impeded the circulation of goods while concentrating large properties in a few hands. The aristocracy with its power and privileges still resisted the jurisdictional authority of the centralizing state. The law of entail or mortmain, guaranteeing perpetual ownership of real estate, and by which the Church extended and protected its properties, not only paralysed commerce but discouraged land improvement. There was also the problem of the relation of church and state, as the church often claimed the right to interfere in state affairs. Yet though Francesco Stefano and his administrators made some progress in solving these problems, they were tackled systematically and aggressively only under his successor, Pietro Leopoldo, who assumed the title of Archduke of Tuscany in 1765 and who ultimately succeeded his eldest brother, Joseph II, to the Austrian throne in 1790, two years before his own death.¹⁴⁵

Like Friedrich Johann Lorenz Meyer, whose *Darstellungen aus Italien* appeared in 1792, many foreign visitors praised Pietro Leopoldo's devotion to the public welfare.¹⁴⁶ Two of the Grand Duke's most important goals were interrelated: to limit the authority and wealth of the Church, and to promote the economy through land distribution and increased circulation of goods. Thus the Church was denied the right of mortmain and, partly through dissolution of monasteries and confiscation of ecclesiastical property, private land ownership and more especially agrarian holdings were encouraged. Besides restricting transfer of property to the Church, Pietro Leopoldo reduced classical exemptions while requiring monastic institutions to become more public-minded and charitable. The introduction of the Jansenist model to Tuscany challenged Catholic ideas of piety and authority. The state control of the grain market, to

which Pietro Leopoldo and his advisers attributed the failure of the Papal States, was replaced by a free trade policy that applied to other goods as well. Sharecropping gave way to tenancy of longer duration under conditions close to ownership, and in a further attempt to stimulate local industry, the number of feast days was reduced. Shorn of feudal privileges, including tax exemptions, the aristocracy yielded to state bureaucrats and a new directive class. Likewise the state broke the power of the guilds to interfere in the economy. Common lands were divided, and grand ducal estates were sold off. The national debt greatly diminished, partly through unpopular legal measures. Unlike the Medici, Pietro Leopoldo introduced a penal system consistent with the humane standards of the Enlightenment. Yet though he hoped to confer a new constitution upon Tuscany, his reforms were imposed from above and often unsuccessfully. Never was the constitution implemented, and it proved virtually impossible either to master the clergy or to place ecclesiastical property in secular hands.¹⁴⁷ Nor does Stendhal, though he acknowledges Pietro Leopoldo's reforms, share the commonly favourable judgment of his regime. Perhaps what he most deplores is the espionage the Grand Duke permitted within his dominions, as this 'piece of philosophical virtue' employed a 'spy in every family.' So too the anticlerical measures of Scipione Ricci, the Grand Duke's Gallican and Jansenist associate, bishop of Pistoia and Prato from 1780 to 1791, had foundered on the shoals of *pre-tismo*. Ultimately, Pietro Leopoldo's 'celebrated government' and 'mildly benevolent authorities' had transformed the Florentines into a 'race of holy-minded castrati,' among whom passion had become 'extinct.' This judgment consorts with Stendhal's view of the Florentines as a bourgeoisified and depassioned people different from typical Italians. Nor did it help Leopoldo's reputation in Stendhal's eyes that his reforms had 'robbed Italy for ever of its magnificent indigenous popular traditions,' the *commedia dell'arte*.¹⁴⁸

As for the Restoration in Tuscany, the people, being tired of Napoleonic imposts and conscription, welcomed the return of Duke Ferdinand III, whose state Stendhal initially regarded as the most liberal in Italy. Rather than restoring the *ancien régime*, Ferdinand had conserved the Napoleonic commercial code while continuing to outlaw feudalism, in keeping with the progressivism of Duke Leopold. It was equally to his credit that Ferdinand had chosen as his prime minister Count Vittorio Fossombroni, a likely model for Count Mosca in *The Charterhouse of Parma*, and whom Stendhal praises for 'sage moderation.' Ultimately, however, Stendhal's enthusiasm for the Tuscan regime dwindled, for though

possibly the best of absolute monarchies, its economy remained sluggish, poverty reigned among an indolent peasantry, and police spies were everywhere. Fossombroni had also equivocated on religion, on the one hand refusing to bring in the Jesuits, but on the other allowing the return of the religious orders – not *pretismo* but close to it.¹⁴⁹

Despite the failings of the Tuscan regime, Stendhal found it benign as compared with the small state of Modena, an absolutist despotism run for the pleasure of its Duke Francesco IV, the very symbol of the Restoration and the Holy Alliance. Regarding himself as the owner of his duchy, Francesco trampled on the political rights of his citizens, against whom he instituted a reign of terror to weed out dissidents. In his hands Modena became a bastion of Jesuitism, where religion served the state, and the Jesuits dominated their students morally and intellectually. So much did Stendhal detest this regime that he refused to sleep overnight in the city.¹⁵⁰

Since Austria expelled Stendhal from his adopted homeland of Lombardy in 1821, one might expect him to deplore the Austrian imperial presence in northern Italy. Having received Lombardy from Spain in 1714, the Austrians laid claim briefly to Venice before Napoleon drove them from Italy, but thanks to the Congress of Vienna in 1815 they regained their Lombard and Venetian territories. Yet rather than allow personal grievance to colour his judgment of Austrian rule, Stendhal acknowledges the superiority of the enlightened despotism of the eighteenth-century Habsburg monarchs Maria Theresa and Joseph II over the earlier Spanish absolutism, ally of the Counter-Reformation.

Not only was this government anti-curial, consistent with the intransigent rationalism of the Emperor Joseph, who sent the Jesuits packing, but it was dedicated to bureaucratic centralization and therefore anti-feudal as well. Since 1782 the opinions of the clergy and aristocracy counted for nothing. Typified by the minister Carlo Firmian (1759–1782), Austria's rational and competent administration achieved legal, educational, and economic reforms that helped to liberate trade and expand the middle classes. Of Firmian's twenty-year tenure Stendhal remarks that he had rooted out the *méchanceté* (wickedness) Machiavelli had seen as natural in Italy, with the result that great men were again possible among the Milanese. As the clergy lost its fiscal privileges, the aristocracy was required to pay taxes in proportion to its wealth. The great Milanese liberals Beccaria and Pietro Verri, both committed to utilitarianism, flourished under this regime and served it as ministers; the poet Parini, a keen critic of Milanese decadence, was patronized by the

Austrian government, which established a printing press in Lombardy around 1760. Thus, unlike many xenophobic Italian writers, Stendhal believes that Austria's enlightened absolutism helped to form modern Italy by supporting what Salvatorelli calls 'civil society.' As Stendhal writes of Milan, even before 1796, the year of Napoleon's descent upon northern Italy, 'there was *already* a dawning awareness of such concepts as *strict impartiality* and *justice*.' By contrast, the regime of Duke Pietro Leopoldo in Tuscany was hampered by *pretismo* despite its successful war against feudalism. This is not to imply, however, that Stendhal finds the Austrian regime ideal. *Il Caffè*, the Milanese journal founded by Beccaria and Verri in 1762, was shut down two years later because of excessive liberalism. Although Joseph II largely succeeded in 'de-Romanizing' Catholicism in northern Italy while making it more reasonable than anywhere else in the peninsula, he put nothing in its place. Since he and Firmian lacked humanity, they proceeded too slowly in their reformism, and missed the chance to give Lombardy a constitutional government. Amounting to an Austrian colony ruled from Vienna, Lombardy enjoyed at best a tolerant, 'bienheureuse inertie.'¹⁵¹

If Stendhal shows qualified admiration for the Austrian regime that the Restoration returned to power in Lombardy, it is partly because he realizes that it had preserved and built upon the comparatively wise and moderate Habsburg traditions. Giving the impression of what Walter Maturi describes as a continuation of the enlightened despotism of the previous century, the Restoration in Lombardy as elsewhere in Italy is for Stendhal the best guarantee of Italy's freedom in the long run, especially by contrast with what he sees as the hapless activities of the *carbonari*. The division between church and state, which Napoleon had enforced, persisted in Austrian policy; the influence of priests was limited while the Jesuits continued to be banished, at least initially; and Napoleon's system of conscription remained. As the Austrians had no intention to revive the *ancien régime*, they did not favour the aristocracy. The Austrian administrators, including Saurau and Bubna, were reasonably popular with the Lombards owing to their politeness and administrative talents, which they applied cautiously and carefully. As Austria supported Lombard agriculture, the region was better off than neighbouring Tuscany, and Milan enjoyed considerable prosperity. For Stendhal, who refers with a certain irony to 'le sage et très sage administration de la maison autriche,' the Austrians had grasped their temporary position in Italy, and expected that by around 1850 it would have returned to its '*position naturelle*.'¹⁵²

Yet the Austrian regime had many failings that only became more

offensive to Italians with the passing decades. Lombardy remained as before a colony of Austria, which held it by means of an army, and to which it sent enormous sums in taxes. The Lombard constitution was a pretence, as the Italians were subalterns. The laws in Lombardy were Germanized, a measure shocking to the locals, and its commerce was reoriented towards Vienna and Trieste, the latter an Austrian port city that eclipsed Venice. Because of the cumbersomeness of the Austrian bureaucracy, it often responded slowly to the Lombard's needs. Although Stendhal believes Lombardy to have enjoyed an 'easy' period between 1815 and 1820, during which, with lighthearted gaiety, he himself sampled the cultural, intellectual, and erotic attractions of Milan without fear of government interference, he is painfully aware that, after 1820, the Austrian prime minister Metternich out of a reasonable fear of political revolt not only brought back the Jesuits but instituted a reign of terror. His aim, Stendhal contends, was to return to the status quo of 1760. His victims included not only participants in the revolt of 1821, but Stendhal himself, who was forced to flee from Milan in that year, never to return under penalty of death.¹⁵³

VI

Italy's politically subject and fragmented condition during the Restoration might lead one to expect Stendhal to have been highly pessimistic regarding the possibility of national liberation and unification, which the Risorgimento took several decades to accomplish. Yet what most alleviates Stendhal's worries over the future of Italy is that the Italians had experienced if only briefly the liberating influence of the French Revolution and Napoleonic occupation – the ideals of reason, progress, civil administration, rule of law, republicanism, constitutional government, and the centralized state. This is not to forget his appreciation for the traditions of Enlightenment liberalism in northern Italy. The concept of impartial justice had been recognized in Milan before the French occupation of 1796, and, unlike Alfieri, Beccaria and Verri had understood that Italy's regeneration required institutional, judicial, and administrative reform, economic development, and social order. Becarria had also shared Stendhal's utilitarian faith in the greatest good for the greatest number. However, it was Napoleon who had provided the chief impetus for change when, in 1796 and again in 1800, the year he defeated the Austrians at Marengo, his armies had 'awaken[ed] Italy from her age-old slumbers.'¹⁵⁴

The Cisalpine Republic, which Napoleon established in northern Italy in 1797, was overturned by Austria in 1799 but restored by Napoleon a year later; after 1802 it was called the Italian Republic. Despite their constitutions and approximations to parliamentarianism, the Cisalpine and Italian Republics were a facade for a French virtual dictatorship. In 1804 Napoleon became emperor of France, and a year later he made himself monarch of the newly created Kingdom of Italy, which by 1808 included Milan, Venice, Bologna, and Ancona. In 1810 the Papal States became a part of the French Empire.¹⁵⁵ Admittedly Stendhal disapproves of Napoleon's despotism in France,¹⁵⁶ and, though rejecting the questionable view (later espoused by Luigi Salvatorelli) of the Napoleonic period as retrogressive, he acknowledges that the French exploited Italy. Napoleon, says Stendhal, acted 'in the interests of his own despotic authority.' Yet he also believes that fourteen years of such authority had given the Italians a 'glimpse of moral conscience.' In Italy, unlike France, Napoleon was the 'scourge of corruption' and 'protector of true merit.' Thanks to him, public opinion at last emerged in Milan in 1796. Because of Italy's many failings, only a temporary 'rational despotism' could foster liberty.¹⁵⁷

In Rome, remarks Stendhal, Napoleon's Civil Code 'began to civilize' the people and thus demonstrate that 'justice is the first necessity.' The period of French administration, between May 1809 and April 1814, gave Rome a 'glimpse of modern civilization,' so that for five years one could 'obtain something from a prefect without paying his mistress or his confessor.' Having proved a skilful administrator during Napoleon's Russian campaign, Stendhal admires the bureaucracies that Napoleon established for Italy. Chosen strictly by merit, Napoleon's civil servants were 'hand-picked ... *enlightened intellectuals*' whose '*systematic approach* and ... *tireless activity*' contrasted with the undisciplined rhythms of Italian behaviour. Introducing methods and accountability into politics, so as to reduce Italy's 'strangling crop of anti-social practices,' these rational administrators brought the 'luminous consequences of eighteenth-century civilization.' Thus the Italian civil service became reliable rather than vexatious, as formerly. Thanks to Napoleon, Italy escaped the 'void' and 'at one bound cleared three whole centuries of progress.'¹⁵⁸

A major achievement of the Napoleonic administration was to improve personal security in Italy through an effective police force and harsh legal punishments, including the death penalty, which Stendhal endorses. He contends that civil assassination declined in Naples after the 'civilizing wars of the French Revolution,' and that in Piedmont, through the

death penalty, 'five thousand persons lived who would otherwise have perished by the knife.' In Rome, where the murder rate had been staggeringly high during the reign of Pope Pius VI, the French all but eliminated assassinations, which increased immediately after their departure. Relentless opponents of feudalism, the French divided and distributed property so as to develop the economy; work was no longer disdained; and the gap narrowed between the classes. Money began to circulate more freely as the French not only introduced public works projects but supported agriculture and free enterprise. In Lombardy, aristocrats had to serve the government or else fade away. As *cicisbeismo* dwindled under Napoleon's influence, family life acquired a more elevated tone. Still more important, the Napoleonic Code divided property equally among male and female heirs, thus advancing women's rights while countering the idleness of younger sons. Yet this reform was weakly enforced, and after 1815 some regions reverted to past practice. Stendhal concludes that, had Napoleon's Italian regime lasted another twenty years, the Italians could have had a bicameral constitutional government equal to that of France and England. But the French had proceeded too cautiously in Italy, bestowing not 'ten' but only 'two degrees' of civilization. Southern Italy was hardly touched by liberalism, and much of Napoleon's legacy disappeared during the Restoration.¹⁵⁹

For Stendhal, Italy's political fragmentation has been a chief cause of its provincialism, sectional vanity, and proliferation of local dialects, all of which prevent a national society and culture. From this perspective, Napoleon's greatest achievement in Italy was to have created a native army that, open to all Italians and hence free of provincial rivalries, embodied the potential for peninsular unity and its patriotic defense. Within less than a decade Napoleon's Italian troops had equaled their French counterparts in courage and effectiveness and had thus helped to overturn the Italians' reputation for military cowardice, to which the charge of *cicisbeismo* had contributed. There had also emerged from this 'confusion of races and temperaments' a 'new language' as the indispensable basis for national consciousness and the spread of civilization.¹⁶⁰ Following Italian unification in 1861, many middle-class Italians similarly admired the national army for uniting men of different regions, providing them with the same language and values, and teaching them to read and write.¹⁶¹ Napoleon had thus perhaps unwittingly set Italy on the 'right road' to constitutional government, for Stendhal sees in this national army the germ of republican institutions enabling Italians to achieve the rights and responsibilities of representative democracy. He hopes for the

recovery of the *virtù* (but not the political divisiveness) of the republican Middle Ages, when freedom led to cultural efflorescence. Indeed, Italian culture and society will revive only when the Italians unite under a liberal constitution.¹⁶²

In the aftermath of the all too brief French occupation, with Napoleon having only partly completed his revolutionizing agenda, Stendhal remains convinced of Italy's insufficient civilization. The Italian economy was still feeling the effects of the crisis of the seventeenth century, when, in contrast with the national economic network developed in the Renaissance, the country was fragmented into regional and local markets. Despite some reforms, especially in the north, the interdependence of the peninsula was impeded by political divisions as well as feudal holdovers and tariffs. In Naples, Napoleon's abolition of feudalism and attempt to distribute aristocratic and ecclesiastical properties failed to benefit the poor but instead opened up a market for land speculation, most of these properties going to the rich. Around Rome, the enforced sale of ecclesiastical lands during the Napoleonic occupation had mainly benefited speculators and wealthy proprietors. Nonetheless, Stendhal hopes that Italian agriculture will follow the pattern of land distribution in France, where, after the Revolution, the sale of national property 'quadrupled' the peasants' well-being while giving them a sense of 'justice.' To revive the Campagna, one half of it must be brought under cultivation, and this requires the purchase of land by the state and its division among the people, so as to make them farmers. Similar reforms are likewise required in the Papal States generally, so as to enable money to circulate more freely.¹⁶³ Reformism of this type apparently appealed to French visitors to Italy. Even before Stendhal, a commentator on Joseph-Jérôme de Lalande's *Voyage d'un français en Italie* (1769) had recommended the division of land to remedy the stagnation of the Papal States. Charles-Victor de Bonstetten, in *Voyage sur la scène des six derniers livres de l'Énéide*, complained that agriculture in the Papal States enriched only a few farmers with large holdings. Later in the nineteenth century Alexis de Tocqueville, Francois Lenormant, and Georges Goyau proposed land division and distribution as the key to reviving southern Italian agriculture, long burdened by large holdings (*latifundia*). As Lenormant noted, during the Napoleonic occupation the French civil code had enforced the division of land, but when the Bourbons returned to power, agrarian reform weakened. Yet Goyau recognized that the division of land after Italian unification failed to remedy the ills of the Mezzogiorno, and Atanasio Mozzillo notes the error of regarding this reform as the one thing needful.¹⁶⁴

If, as Stendhal believes, Italian society remains as retarded as the economy, this is partly attributable to the absence of a large middle class, the presumed basis of economic initiative and rational political discussion. Instead, there remains an immeasurably wide 'gulf,' social and intellectual, between the upper classes and the mass of the people, sunk in 'primeval brutality.' Like Luigi Salvatorelli, Stendhal realizes that this division raises serious impediments to political revolution and genuine national unity.¹⁶⁵ Upper-class marriages are still arranged by agreement between families, so that the husband has a mistress and the wife a *cicisbeo*. To avoid the division of inheritance through the multiplication of dowries, usually only one daughter is given in marriage, the others being farmed out to convents in order to escape suitors; there they idle away their days or conduct clandestine affairs such as Stendhal portrays in *The Abbess of Castro*. Yet if a woman evades the convent and remains unmarried, she cannot live alone or own a home, as social prejudice is against it, and she will suffer ridicule should she try to advance in art or academics. For Stendhal, who harboured some feminist sympathies, these conditions are uncivilized. Upper-class families also want to keep their properties intact, which means that younger sons receive no inheritances; yet being too proud to work, they live in pleasurable idleness without the least civic responsibility.¹⁶⁶ The remedy, Stendhal suggests in *Lucien Leuwen*, is the elimination of primogeniture, a measure which, as Tocqueville notes, helps to distribute national wealth and thus to promote an equitable, responsible, interdependent society.¹⁶⁷

In view of Italy's comparatively backward governments and society, its sectionalism, its unreliable judiciary and police, and not least its underdeveloped economy and consequent disincentives to work, the Italian character falls short of those standards of drive control civilization demands. According to Stendhal, not only are Italians dominated by 'powerful and *disordered* currents of sensation,' but 'complete surrender to the sensation of the moment is no rarity' in Italy. Indeed, so little are the Italians concerned with the future that 'every waking thought is taken up with the present instant,' from which they seek to derive their full quotient of pleasure. For Stendhal, these traits are most strikingly manifest in the southern Italians, including the Calabrians and especially the Neapolitans, who resemble children in being slaves to their immediate pleasures and desires. Yet even the Milanese performs most actions '*solely because they appeal to him at a given instant.*' Like Montesquieu, Staël, Bonstetten and many other writers, Stendhal attributes such behaviour partly to Italy's warm and indulgent climate. Alternatively he notes so-

cial and political factors, including bad governments and the absence of a disciplined economy such as would force the Italians to control and exert themselves in an orderly fashion. Just as, in Rome, the absence of criminal justice encourages people to surrender to their first impulses, so it is easy to yield to present sensation and impulse in a city where industry goes unrewarded.¹⁶⁸ Thus, for all his personal enjoyment of the *dolce far niente*, Stendhal views indolence as a characteristic flaw of modern Italians. 'The laziness of the present-day Roman is so great,' he remarks, that 'it is ... a torture for him to go out of his way,' as witness those waiters who leave unwiped the tables at the cafe in the Palazzo Ruspoli. Not surprisingly, the 'passionate love of gambling,' the desire to get something for nothing, is 'one of the characteristics of the Italian imagination.'¹⁶⁹ The Calabrians similarly shrink from effort, while the Neapolitans, typically Italian in refusing to tolerate boredom, are reluctant to do what they find unpleasant, namely work. Except for the perhaps Frenchified Piedmontese, the Italians lack 'character,' which comes only from performing unpleasant tasks, whereas in the Protestant North such character-building values as duty and asceticism lead to constant application and productivity. Stendhal's observations call to mind those of Andrieux who, noting the indolence of eighteenth-century Romans, attributes it partly to the government's failure to promote industry and commerce but also to the fact that the Papal State, the recipient of funds from all over the Catholic world, provided its people with food, amusements, and tax exemptions. The Romans, he adds, loved to gamble.¹⁷⁰

This is not to deny that Italians concentrate their attention and energy when gripped by what Stendhal terms 'some overmastering passion.'¹⁷¹ Yet such behaviour, at once extreme and abrupt, lacks bourgeois steadiness and method. As he observes, both '*systematic approach* and ... *tireless activity* are markedly uncommon among so passionate a nation, ever slave to the sensation of the moment.' With a 'touch of the primitive savage in his make-up,' the Italian tends to 'alternate retreats of silence with outbursts of frenzy,' his character being 'utterly devoid of that steadfast patience and stability of temperament which flourish on the northern slopes of... [the] Alps, and which have enabled the Swiss to preserve at least the semblance of a republic.'¹⁷² Stendhal thus defines the characteristically irregular rhythm of Italian society before modernity, marked by sudden and intense explosions of energy followed by total exhaustion – the medieval rhythm Marx scorned.

It is easy to find parallels to Stendhal's characterizations of the Italians in travel writings of earlier and later periods.¹⁷³ According to Martin

Sherlock, who visited in the 1770s, the Roman is 'easily moved; and when he is moved, he is violent to an excess.' Hester Thrale Piozzi identifies the Italians and especially the Neapolitans with abruptly violent activity as well as with sudden shifts of ungovernable emotion, as from torpor to frenzy. The land of extremes, Italy lacks the mediocrity typical of England. Writing of his 1802 visit, Eustace notes the erratic, explosive behaviour of the Italians; John Mayne, a traveller in 1814, observes their excessive gestures and vehement feelings, often over trivial matters, as well as their childlike trait of becoming 'quickly irritated' and 'as quickly calmed.' In Hazlitt's view, Italians exhibit an 'infantilism and lack of control' resembling 'madness or insanity.' For the American George Stillman Hillard, a visitor in the late 1840s, the Italian temperament 'allows only a short transition from gentle courtesy to fiery excitement and the drawing of knives.' Hippolyte Taine says of the southern Italians: 'In all things with this people the first impression is too violent; scarcely is the trigger touched when the explosion takes place ... Two cabmen get into a quarrel and seem ready to burst: a minute after, and all is forgotten.'¹⁷⁴

What then of the Italian mind under these uncivilized conditions? The 'gross ignorance' Stendhal attributes to the Italians encompasses widespread illiteracy, dislike of reading, superstition, incapacity for or unwillingness to engage in logical, critical, self-reflective thought, and lack of objectivity in the sense of impartial judgment. Of these failings, it is the Italians' comparative indifference to the written word which Stendhal most often mentions. In the Vatican Library, for instance, 'no books are visible,' the emphasis being on its architectural and decorative grandeur. Although Stendhal realizes that most Italians are unable to read, he also knows that, even in a city with relatively high literacy such as Milan, they 'read but little.' As Italian women are little interested in novels, that genre cannot flourish in Italy – a telling example of how the absence of a reading public discourages Italian literature. In *Love* Stendhal says of Italy that 'Nobody reads anything.'¹⁷⁵ Even if one allows for his exaggeration, a public sphere could not prosper under these circumstances.

Stendhal was not the first northern European observer to note the deficiencies of the Italians' literacy and reading habits. As early as 1644–46 the English traveller John Evelyn observed the predominance of frescoes and ornamentation in the Piccolomini Library in Siena, commenting: 'When all is done, give me books in a *Library*, not pictures.' He was expressing the attitude of a more literary than visual culture. In the mid-1680s, Gilbert Burnet criticized the poor quality of Italian libraries, the Italians' general illiteracy and ignorance, the vast distance between

the educated and the common people, and censorship of the press, all marks of a dying civilization. Like Evelyn, Joseph Addison mentioned the Italians' love of ornamentation and comparative lack of interest in reading. Of the Ambrosian Library in Milan he observed that 'books are, indeed, the least part of the furniture that one ordinarily goes to see in an Italian library, which they generally set off with pictures, statues, and other ornaments, where they can afford them.'¹⁷⁶ In evaluating these comments one must recognize, as Burke notes, that travellers not only find the expected but copy each other, so that three successive generations of British travellers make identical objections to the Ambrosian Library. They also observe a cultural code identifying northern Europe with progress, literacy, enlightenment, and economy and Italy with their negatives. Yet Burke allows for some truth in these reports, adding that one might object similarly to Italian libraries of today.¹⁷⁷

To some extent Stendhal attributes the Italians' indifference to reading to their desire – supposedly inextricable from the influence of a pleasant climate – to immerse themselves in immediate and pleasant sensations. At the same time, he regards such hedonism as a cause of their unwillingness to subject themselves to the pains of hard, patient, reflective thought, which serious reading demands. As he puts it, '*abstraction is painful for their minds.*'¹⁷⁸ Nonetheless, the Italians are not wholly responsible for their illiteracy, ignorance, and other bad mental habits, as these also result from the system of clerical education that, supported by the state, then prevailed in Italy. Repeatedly Stendhal excoriates clerical teachers who have ruined their pupils' minds whether by giving them inadequate instruction, or by stifling their intellectual curiosity and independence, or by enslaving them to ritualism and superstition. According to Stendhal, Roman society up to 1750 believed in miracles, and superstition still reigns even among the Neapolitan upper classes, as witness the southern Italian belief in the *jettatura*. He satirizes Italian education in *The Charterhouse of Parma*, in which Fabrizio del Dongo discovers that his clerical teachers, enemies of the Enlightenment and Jansenism, had taught him 'nothing, not even Latin, not even how to spell.' Although Fabrizio is an aristocrat, his logical abilities are hardly better than those of illiterate peasants, who live according to superstitious prophecies. In his opinion, astrology is a respectable science like geometry. Yet Fabrizio's logical failings are also moral ones, since his inability to reason prevents that objective '*personal examination*' Stendhal admires in Protestantism. When Fabrizio visits a church to ask God to pardon his sins, it never occurs to him to mention the simony by which

he had benefited. Far from treating Fabrizio as evil, Stendhal views him as the innocent, pre-moral victim of Jesuitical casuistry, which had deprived him of the 'courage' to reflect on 'unfamiliar things.' In another instance, Fabrizio denounces a man who stole a horse Fabrizio had previously stolen.¹⁷⁹ For Stendhal, such moral irregularity, and the inability to recognize it, is Italian. There are, he notes, no greater devotees of the Virgin than the Italian bandits. In *The Abbess of Castro*, the hero passionately worships the Virgin yet helps to desecrate a convent under her protection.¹⁸⁰

While Stendhal's portrait of Fabrizio may seem like caricature, it is not necessarily exaggerated. Decades before Stendhal, Pietro Verri had attacked Italian clerical education, based upon what Salvatorelli terms 'blindly and uncritically accepted beliefs, and upon the external observance of rituals and practices without any inner moral life,' as a main reason for the present 'inferiority' of the Italians. Alfieri had similarly denounced an education that had provided him with neither logic, nor information, nor 'measures of self-control,' nor 'maxim[s] of conduct.'¹⁸¹ Noting that the withdrawal of the upper classes from popular culture was less pronounced in Italy than in England and France, Peter Burke asserts that even in the eighteenth century 'many educated Italians continued to share popular beliefs about magic and witchcraft.'¹⁸² Stendhal's characterization of the religious beliefs of Italian banditti receives confirmation in the writings of his contemporary Charles MacFarlane, who observes that they 'have a strong relish for religion, such as it is, and ... will send a knife into your bosom while a crucifix and reliquary repose upon their own.' MacFarlane quotes fellow traveller Maria Graham on the bandits' Madonna-worship, and her observation that 'this mixture of ferocity and superstition is one of the most terrific features in the character of the banditti of Italy.'¹⁸³

Such traits were apparently of long standing, for in 1614 the British traveller William Lithgow pacified banditti by producing what Sells calls the 'best of all passports – the certificate of a visit to the Holy Places,' after which they 'made merry' with Lithgow. James Jackson Jarves remarks of the early nineteenth-century bandit Gasparone, whom Stendhal mentions in *Pages d'Italie*, that he murdered his confessor for refusing to absolve him of a robbery, and yet refrained from bloodshed on Sundays and church festivals. William Dean Howells notes that the consciences of bandits were assuaged if a priest accompanied them, and that some banditti were priests themselves. The nineteenth-century brigand Don Ciro Annichiarico abandoned his original priestly vocation to become a

professional criminal, 'unholy wizard,' and 'devil in reality,' thus earning himself the title 'Priest-Robber.' Yet though he was driven by a libido that caused him repeatedly to break his vows of celibacy, he 'never wholly relinquished his sacerdotal character.' According to Stendhal, the notorious nineteenth-century bandit Fra Diavolo was an ex-monk, and another bandit who abandoned the priesthood for banditry returned to preach in his parish.¹⁸⁴

Sad to say, even Italian scholars and artists lack objectivity. Stendhal complains that the former typically exaggerate the merit of their discoveries, and that even the most erudite are in need of 'one vital quality,' namely the 'gentle art of not considering as already proven whatever fact is vital to the thesis in question; in this respect, the manner of argument employed defies belief!' In *Pages d'Italie* he notes 'an incredible lack of logic' among academics, who, vicious in attacking their rivals, respond to contradiction with mortal hatred and who, if enjoying a cardinal's favour, consider themselves intellectually invulnerable. Yet perhaps the most damning of Stendhal's allegations against Italian scholars is that they all too often plagiarize from each other's work. Although such a charge may seem ironic given Stendhal's many literary falsifications, including plagiarism from Giuseppe Carpani and other Italian writers, he may have had some justification in criticizing at least some Italian scholars of this period for a cavalier attitude towards facts.¹⁸⁵ In any case, even the great poet Alfieri showed 'more fury than intelligence,' for as Stendhal contends, Alfieri's politics were limited by his aristocratic bias, anarchic individualism, and excessive subjectivity. The 'noblest of intellects,' he 'never managed to realize that, in the field of politics, the *sine qua non* of tolerable writing is a careful act of *dissociation* from all the rubs and trifling personal vexations that the philosopher himself may have suffered.' According to Stendhal, Alfieri's lasting hostility to the French Revolution originates in his outrage over an incident mentioned in his *Autobiography*, namely his banishment from Paris during the revolution and confiscation of his belongings by the authorities.¹⁸⁶

Stendhal realizes, however, that the deficiencies of literacy and reading in Italy cannot be ascribed exclusively to the bad intellectual habits of the Italians and their education under clerical and other teachers. They also reflect the political condition of the peninsula, where despotic regimes impede active public life through censorship, surveillance, and other curtailments of free expression, whether in speech or print. Further inhibiting factors include not only ecclesiastical interference but the political and linguistic fragmentation of the peninsula, which inevita-

bly produces disincentives to authorship by limiting the size of the audience an author can hope to reach. To be sure, Stendhal acknowledges the existence of a publishing trade in Milan, where many original books are printed, and whose bookshops much surpass those of Florence, despite the fact that the Florentine ruler, Duke Ferdinand III, parades his liberalism. And yet there had been greater liberty of the press in Milan in 1783, when Verri published his *History*, than in 1818, when the writings of Beccaria were banned. The other Italian despotisms of the Restoration likewise censor books, newspapers, and discussion. With its spies and censorship, Rome remains essentially a police regime, while in Piedmont the mistreatment of professors and intellectuals is commonplace. Given the presence of police spies and informers, the most dangerous thing an Italian can do is to talk about forbidden literary subjects, and this is a chief cause of that mysterious, sullen silence into which, notes Stendhal, Italians sink when they consider it unsafe to express their thoughts and passions. Whether as a result of illiteracy or censorship, the discouragement of reading means that Italian writers, even a Vincenzo Monti, cannot earn a living by writing. Adding to these difficulties is the fact that inept legislation and legal irregularities among the Italian states have given rise to a heavy trade in pirated editions, so that even a writer of peninsular reputation is deprived of a large portion of his potential income. Taken together, these despotic inhibitions prevent 'popular democracy' and the literate, civic-minded public essential to civilization. Without a constitutional government, literature and culture are a hopeless sham, as great writers like Alfieri 'work blindly in the dark' and in 'despair of any guidance from a *real* public.' In the absence of public opinion such as exists among northern European nations, aspiring writers find themselves oppressed by the intellectual tyranny of culturally conservative pedants. By impeding the circulation of knowledge from state to state, the despotisms insure that Italy remains fragmented and provincial, with the individual states and regions continuing to view each other with hateful suspicion and misunderstanding.¹⁸⁷

The cultural retardation of Italy since the Renaissance, combined with the presence of foreign despotisms and local dialects reflecting the peninsula's political fragmentation, had in Stendhal's view left the Italian language in a state of crisis remediable only through national unity and constitutional government. Ever since the Latin revival of the later Middle Ages and Renaissance, written Latin had followed a Ciceronian model that had all too often tempted Italian writers to favour ponderous paragraphs stuffed with inflated, interminable sentences. Their love

of hypotaxis and luxuriant high-sounding phraseology made it virtually impossible for them to express themselves with the rapidity and precision the French had perfected in writing and speech. Whereas Dante had brilliantly expressed his poetic individuality, the Italian language was later codified by academic pedants for whom the dialect of Renaissance Florence represented the ideal and permanent norm for Italian writers and speakers. Under the censorious surveillance of the Accademia della Crusca, it was deemed essential to write in not a living but an artificial, frozen language. Instead of communicating simply and directly, writers would reach for the dictionary for fear of using a word rejected by the Della Cruscans. In the long run it became hard for Italians to write clearly on difficult topics, partly because simple things had acquired inflated and multiple names. Nor did the national preference for ornate superlatives and flattering hyperboles encourage linguistic precision. Even Alfieri failed to write in his own language, argues Stendhal, although he knows such a statement is likely to offend. He remains certain nonetheless that post-Renaissance life cannot be expressed satisfactorily in the language of fifteenth-century Florence – this being one reason for the retardation of both the Italian novel and a national comic theater. That Italians speak energetically only in local dialects is no consolation, for as Stendhal realizes, these prevent the development of a national literature and reading public. As Alfieri had complained, Italian authors in lacking an approved stylistic model can only write for restricted audiences.¹⁸⁸

An immigrant to England in the 1760s, Giuseppe Baretti lamented that, although Italian printers continually published new books, it was virtually impossible for writers to earn a living in Italy, for not only did Italy's dialects deprive them of a national audience, but state and ecclesiastical censors often interfered with publication. Curiously, Baretti said little about Italian illiteracy, which had fallen below the northern European standard, and which much reduced the number of readers.¹⁸⁹ The eighteenth-century reformers Ludovico Antonio Muratori and Gaetano Filangieri understood that civic development and political liberalism required a literate public, yet with the collapse of the Milanese journal *Il Caffè*, which ran from 1764 to 1766, Lombardy lost its chance to create a 'united and organized pressure group' capable of interpreting public opinion.¹⁹⁰ From a more favourable perspective, Vaussard, Hanlon, and others note of eighteenth-century Italy that the book market expanded along with printing and publishing, while many well-visited public libraries sprang up. Censors often lacked vigilance and diligence, and publishers deceived them through various tricks. In addition to