

When worlds collide: mass culture representation of elite culture in Italy 1954-74

Introduction

From the economic boom of the late 50s and early 60s, through to the economic crisis in the early 70s, Italy experienced a range of economic, political and social changes that transformed the country and the lives of its citizens. Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s, Italians found themselves engaging in new and different types of work, attaining higher levels of pay and education, and acquiring new expectations about material consumption and leisure time.¹ In a few decades, large numbers of Italians had adopted a modern life that seemed remote from earlier values and aspirations. Italian design and manufacture offered affordable private transport through the production and sale of vehicles such as the FIAT 600 and the Vespa. American style mass consumption and mass culture, which had been filtering into Italy despite the autarkic approach of the Fascist era, became widely attainable for this newly industrialised and waged society. As De Grazia has argued, American culture became a core component of a new modern Italian identity, which touched everything from film stars and musicians to electric razors and toothpaste. For many, American culture was equated with being attractive and democratic.² For others, however, such as the intellectuals of the left and the right, mass-produced culture in general, and American culture in particular represented a debased and dangerous ideology.³

For centuries Italy had taken pride in its ancient and powerful humanist cultural tradition. Italian culture had made a significant contribution to European and international traditions of art, architecture and music. Italy's ancient relics, Dante, Renaissance masterpieces and nineteenth century operas formed the cornerstone of the accepted cultural canon and acme of refined artistic taste. The understanding of this culture was limited to a privileged few as Italy's regional and agricultural economy had not required high levels of education of the population, and the state had not enforced legislation for minimum elementary school education, let alone encouraged the dissemination of elite philosophy or art. Intellectuals also had a considerable vested interest in maintaining their position of authority within society as the custodians and

¹ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy 1943-1980*, (London: Penguin Books, 1990). In 1953 14% of Italian families had a refrigerator compared to 93% in 1975; in 1953 4% had a washing machine compared to 77% in 1975; and 0% had a television compared to 89% in 1975. Table 9: Consumer durables possessed by Italian families, 1953-85 p.432

² Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2005).

³ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Scritti Corsari*, (Milano: Garzanti, 2011).

creators of culture. Despite notable exceptions such as the development of opera as a popular entertainment across society, or, the post-war period neo-realists use of cinema as an art form, Italy's traditionally elite culture and the emerging mass culture were held separate and depicted as opposite extremes by the intellectuals who believed in art for art's sake and voiced strong views on the disastrous impact of commercial culture for the masses.

The Humanist tradition appeared to be under threat from the rapid changes taking place in Italian society and culture through the boom in Italian cinema, the introduction of television, the success of both home-grown and imported pop music and the pervasive influence of American film, music and consumer culture. The divisions between mass-produced cultural product and the Humanist railing elite seemed extreme. Yet, alongside, and even within this emerging mass culture, there was a deep strain of popular affection for, and continuity with, old elite cultural traditions, which became assimilated into the new modern Italian identity. Familiar faces of Verdi, Dante, Shakespeare and Ulysses were rendered into new forms within television or *fotoromanzi* — sometimes faithfully reproduced, and sometimes reinvented as hybrids, or merged with mass culture to promote vermouth or sell chocolate. Elements of elite culture continued to be relevant for multiple reasons: new interest in general education; aspirations of class mobility; state driven cultural initiatives for the *divulgation* of the populace; commercial concern to develop new markets of cultural consumption; and the desire of advertisers to associate their brands with quality and elite society. Popular access to art, literature and the classics became an important part of what it was to be modern.

This thesis explores the way in which high art and intellectual elites were represented in, and enjoyed by, audiences of Italian mass culture in television and the mass print media between 1954-74. I argue that, contrary to orthodox interpretations, traditionally elite culture was an important part of the new modern mass identity that developed in Italy at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century. The relationship between Italian intellectuals and mass culture has a turbulent history, and as Umberto Eco argued, it is a history characterised by intellectuals who regarded mass culture as the apocalypse of all culture, and those who could benefit from the system and tried to 'convert' the people to high culture through mass means.⁴ Intellectual perspectives on mass culture in Italy have of course received extensive analysis, since they have been seen as barometers of the shifting and, perhaps diminishing influence of the intelligentsia

⁴ Umberto Eco, *Apocalypse Postponed* (London: Flamingo, 1995).

and of the new channels of information that were opening up to the public, as well as of the survival of old world snobbery and the fears of new world philistinism.⁵ Historical research into the early years of television and the cultural objectives of *Radiotelevisione Italiana* (RAI) has revealed the cultural propagandist aspirations of the Christian Democrats and the RAI administration had for the Italian people and their belief in the need to restrict programs and advertising.⁶ Historical research on the Italian publishing industry and print advertising industries while less prevalent than on the areas of television and cinema, has examined the influence of new forms of visual print media and their importance in the construction of modern identities, particularly of women and of the growing lower-middle classes.⁷

My research will, however, examine this cultural debate and clash from the perspective of the mass culture audience and readers. I aim to identify what was popular and what was meaningful to Italian television mass audiences and mass print readers and assess the popular reception of elite culture; what was appreciated, what was rejected and what was mocked.

My approach to the study of popular forms of mass culture is influenced by the work of Lawrence Levine and his history of the development of culture hierarchy through the exploration of popular audiences for Shakespeare and opera in 19th century America and through audience agency and mass culture in America's Great Depression.⁸ In his examination of 19th century American cultural activity, Levine analysed how Americans across all levels of society participated in, and reacted to, a large spectrum of cultural activities, concluding that the

⁵ Eco, *Apocalypse Postponed*; Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow : The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-1991*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000); David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era 1880-1980. Cultural Industries, Politics and the Public* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); John M Foot, 'Mass Cultures, Popular Cultures and the Working Class in Milan, 1950-70', *Social History*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (May, 1999); Giovanni and Rositi Bechelloni, Franco, *Intellettuali E Industria Culturale*, (Rome: Società Gestioni Editoriali, 1973); Zygmunt. C and Lumley Barariski, Robert, *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy: Essays on Mass and Popular Culture* (London: MacMillan, 1990); David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Pasolini; Stephen Gundle, 'Feminine Beauty, National Identity and Political Conflict in Postwar Italy, 1945-1954', *Contemporary European History*, 8, 3 (1999); Aldo ed. Grasso, *Schermi D'autore: Intellettuali E Televisione (1954-1974)*, (Torino: RAI-ERI, 2002).

⁶ Aldo Grasso, *Storia Della Televisione Italiana*, (Milano: Garzanti Libri, 2008); Franco Monteleone, *Storia Della Radio E Della Televisione in Italia: Costume, Società E Politica*, (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1999).

⁷ Milly Buonanno, *Naturale Come Sei. Indagine Sulla Stampa Femminile in Italia*, (Florence: Guaraldi, 1975); Anna Bravo, *Il Fotoromanzo.*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003). Forgacs, David, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era 1880-1980. Cultural Industries, Politics and the Public* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

⁸ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow : The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988); Lawrence W. Levine, 'The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences', *The American Historical Review*, , Vol. 97, (1992). Erica and Grover Brown, Mary, eds., *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: The Battle of the Brows 1920-1960*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

emerging bourgeoisie had constructed and artificially split categories of high and low culture at the end of the 19th century. What had previously been an integrated approach to cultural participation now became 'lowbrow' and 'highbrow' according to class divisions. Lowbrow was 'entertainment' – such as vaudeville, musical variety and circus and was associated with the working classes. Highbrow was 'art' – such as Shakespeare, opera and museums and encompassed strict rules of conduct and appreciation and was for the upper and middle classes. More recently, Jim Collins has examined the increased popularity of high culture images in the early twenty-first century summarising and expanding Levine's cultural hierarchies thesis into a taxonomy of four general phases of division and cohesion of high and low culture during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

- (1) a nineteenth century co-existence of high and low ideas and audience members from across different social groups in a range of cultural activities and venues;
- (2) a 'sacralisation' of art with the division of audiences and activities into distinct categories with special qualities being attributed to elite culture and those who appreciated it. As John Storey has argued, in the context of popular appreciation of opera in the late nineteenth century in both Europe and America, 'opera was transformed from *entertainment* enjoyed by the many into *Culture* to be appreciated by the few.'⁹;
- (3) a mid-twentieth century Pop Art movement's appropriation of mass culture, mass production and consumer products by artists that transformed elite culture. For example, the work of Andy Warhol and his 'factory' led to the nineteen-eighties postmodern ironic appropriation of mass culture and blending of elite and popular culture in the same texts; and
- (4) a late twentieth and early twenty-first century challenge to cultural hierarchies through what Collins terms 'High-pop', the mass production and consumption of traditionally elite culture and high brand value of 'Shakespeare' and 'Pavarotti' and a 'new stage in the ever-shifting relationship between 'high-art' and popular culture'¹⁰

My thesis argues for the emergence of distinctly Italian variants of these Levine/Collins phases of modern cultural development with particular reference to the period of the economic miracle through to the early 1970s.

⁹ John Storey, "'Expecting Rain?" Opera as Popular Culture', in *High-Pop: Making Culture into Popular Entertainment*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002). p. 37.

¹⁰ Jim Collins, *High-Pop: Making Culture into Popular Entertainment*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002). p.3.

The ideas of Pierre Bourdieu on the establishment of cultural hierarchies, the differentiation of taste and the drawing of cultural boundaries and cultural capital also have broad application to the modern Italian situation, particularly in relation to television and the state's attempt to build culture capital with 'civilising' content.¹¹ The emerging field of middlebrow studies examine the cultural production and consumption of middlebrow culture and what it tells us about social transitions and aspirations.¹² Such work, though predominantly Anglo-American, provides valuable analogies with the Italian context where middlebrow cultural hybrids of compromised high culture were viewed as part of the broader category of mass culture or at most as a sub-category of mass culture – middle-class poor taste. The middlebrow Italian context differs from that of the Anglo and American experience because the expansion of the middle classes occurred later in the century and the mass culture focus was urban rather than suburban. Moreover, Italy arguable possessed a deeper and more popular attachment to humanist 'high culture' associations. However, the commercial emphasis on the acquisition of products and culture that reflect 'good taste' and the role of culture class aspirations is a shared theme. Middlebrow studies raises some potential limitations of the application of Bourdieu to mass culture in that it does not acknowledge the possible value of popular versions of traditionally elite works;

The use of Bourdieu's paradigm of the popular as the doomed imitation of elite culture has tended, in the last few years, to replace discussion of Marxist attitudes to the popular as serving only the interests of 'the culture industry'.¹³

The combination and appropriation of (a) elite and mass culture, and (b) the blending of Italian and American culture, while not without precedent in Italy, reached a level which marked it as a significant cultural development and new part of modern Italian culture.

In the following chapters I will examine two important elements of mass culture; (1) the programs produced by the state controlled television monopoly and the limited amount of advertising allowed; and (2) the print materials produced by the market controlled weekly news magazines and *fotoromanzi* and their advertisements. Both sectors experienced significant popular appeal and growth between 1954 and 1974. My focus is on the mass culture programs,

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1984); *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993)

¹² Middlebrow emerged in the 1920s as a pejorative term for culture that is perceived to be a middle class, bland and suburban appropriation or more commonly, abbreviation, of elite culture.

¹³ Brown and Grover (eds), *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: The Battle of the Brows 1920-1960* p.16.

articles and advertisements that represented literary classics, opera or even avant-garde art, for an audience that enjoyed it.

The example of the Italian state monopoly of television, although part of a broader European public service approach to broadcasting, provides a unique example of a state establishing a monopoly over a mass culture distribution channel, removing it from the influence of market forces for public benefit. The Italian case is notable because the state monopoly combined the humanist tradition with an Americanised mass culture of quiz and musical variety shows.

1. Watching television in Italy 1954-1964

CODICE GUALA

La Televisione costituisce un nuovo mezzo di diffusione e di espressione delle idee, dei sentimenti, dell'arte...

I - PRINCIPI GENERALI

Premesso che la Televisione italiana si propone di porre a disposizione dei nuclei familiari una sana ricreazione, deve rilevarsi che essa intende contribuire, in ogni occasione, alla educazione ed all'elevazione morale e cultural dei cittadini.

La televisione pertanto, non deve arrecare offesa ai principi di moralità generale e di moralità dei costumi, ma, per contro, ne deve divulgare ed esaltare il valore con tutti i più opportuni accorgimenti.

In ogni caso è necessario che i programmi siano informati al rispetto dei valori etici e sociali propri della nostra comunità nazionale.¹⁴

The introduction of television in the early to mid twentieth century provided many parts of the world with a whole new way to communicate, distribute information and deliver programs to audiences on a large scale. In the post-war period television viewing increased rapidly around the world, from fewer than 200,000 television sets in 1946 to 31 million sets in 1953 and 95 million sets world-wide by 1960.¹⁵ Italian television officially started broadcasting in 1954, in

¹⁴ RAI: Teche, *Dossier Rai: 3 Gennaio 1954 - Cinquanta Anni Di Televisione*, (Roma: RAI 2004). p.65 GUALA CODE: Television constitutes a new method of diffusion for the expression of ideas, feelings, art... GENERAL PRINCIPLES: Given that Italian television aims to offer families healthy recreation, it should be noted that it intends to contribute, at every opportunity, to the instruction and to the moral and cultural elevation of citizens. Television must not cause offence to the principles of general morality and the morality of customs, but, on the contrary, it must disseminate and enhance their value with all the most opportune means. In any case it is necessary that the programs are respectful of the ethical and social values of our national community.

¹⁵ Luciano Imbriani, *Sei Anni Di Pubblicità*, (Milano: Quaderni IMA, 1963)., p.1.

the north and centre of Italy, and by 1956, in the south.¹⁶ By 1955, although there were only 150,000 private television licences and 30,000 public licences for places like bars and clubs, 10 million Italians described themselves as regular television viewers. By 1964, this number had reached 24 million (or two thirds of the population) with more than five million private television licences, around one million of which had been acquired that year.¹⁷ In Italy, television, like radio before it, was established as a government monopoly with an educational, moral and cultural remit. Rather than leave television to market forces, television began with a single government channel in a controlled environment with national and social objectives that aimed to deliver public benefit in two ways; firstly, through broad access to a range of new programs and ideas, and secondly, through the restriction of content and access to perceived immoral ideas and advertising. At the end of 1961, a second channel was introduced and a third in 1979. Legislation excluded the option of commercial broadcasting for twenty years.

The values of early Italian television were defined by RAI in the 1954 *Codice di autodisciplina Televisiva - norme interne*, known as the Guala Code, an internal document of guidelines for acceptable and prohibited content. The code sought to uphold Christian values and avoid the potential for harm or bad influences on the Italian public, in particular young people. The code highlighted the RAI's perception of a 'grave responsibility' for their television audience; families in their homes, people of different ages, socio-economic groups and varying education levels. The code provided a range of high-level principles that outlined the moral and educational approach required of television and also very specific detail on topics and images not to be shown or to be shown with great care. The code specified that: violence in general was to be avoided, suicide and euthanasia were prohibited; rebellion against parents without ramifications or punishment was not allowed; sacrilege and blasphemy were prohibited; erotic scenes were prohibited, kissing and physical contact needed to be dealt with carefully; and - to illustrate the paternalistic code's level thoroughness in considering all possible avenues of harm - caution was to be shown in the representation of surgical procedures and, strangely enough, with hypnotism.¹⁸ As a result of these restrictions and other moral and political censorship, the programs of this era are often represented as conformist, mediocre and middlebrow. Yet despite

¹⁶ Experimental broadcasting occurred between January and July 1953 and a limited program of films was broadcast in the north and central Italy from September 1953 for 24 hours a week. RAI: Radiotelevisione Italiana, *Rai Annuario 1953-1955*, (Turin: ERI Edizioni RAI, 1958). Page XXII

¹⁷ RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana, *Rai Annuario 1958*, (Torino, 1958). p. 45 p.149.

¹⁸ RAI Teche. *Dossier Rai: 3 Gennaio 1954 - Cinquanta Anni Di Television* pp. 265-9

these imposed constraints, television programs emerged which resonated with the public, created new cultural behaviours and unique modern content.

Traditionally elite culture had an important role in the context of early television. RAI took the cultural education of Italian citizens very seriously and looked for ways to bring the classics to the population, indeed these classics had a special dispensation from the moral guidelines so that while adultery, illegitimacy or suicide would not be shown in television serials, an exception was made for the trusted classics such as Shakespeare or Homer. The code made the observation that:

... anche la malvagità ed il delitto appartengono alla storia della umanità, e che, sin dai tempi più remoti, le arti letterarie e figurative hanno attinto largamente a fatti delittuosi. Le opere classiche di ogni tempo e luogo, i canti biblici e quelli omerici, le tragedie dell'antica Grecia e quelle di Shakespeare, narrano le vicende drammatiche di uomini che hanno gravemente violato le leggi umane e divine, o che hanno subito violenze ed oltraggi da parte di chi si era posto al di fuori della norma o contro di essa. Né può affermarsi che il messaggio recato da dette opere possa considerarsi nocivo, poiché molti di tali testi sono letti e commentati agli adolescenti nelle scuole.¹⁹

The classics, whilst being integrated with mass culture through television, had a special status as a civilizing influence and were not perceived as being as dangerous as other cultural forms such as American programs or advertising. The civilizing aims of the RAI administration and the uniquely Italian hybrid forms that emerged in this context demonstrate the way that high culture was incorporated into television. I examine how traditionally elite culture was received and found to be meaningful. There are two main points to observe in the cases of the popular programs discussed below. First, audiences *enjoyed* hybrid combinations of mass and traditional elite culture. Some of the most popular programs of early television combined elite and popular elements. Second, audiences for these programs were large in number, they had very broad appeal to viewers from different socio-economic backgrounds. Unlike most other television shows they generally attracted both male and female viewers, people of diverse ages, education levels, regions and socio-economic groups. The government's aim to educate and

¹⁹ RAI Teche, *Dossier Rai: 3 Gennaio 1954 - Cinquanta Anni Di Television* p. 65. ...also wickedness and crime are part of the history of humanity, and from time immemorial, literature and art have extensively drawn from criminal acts. The classics of every time and place, the Bible, the poems of Homer, the Ancient Greek and Shakespearean tragedies tell dramatic tales of men who have seriously violated the human and divine laws, or who have endured violence and abuse from those outside or against social norms. Nor can it be asserted that the message given in these works could be considered harmful, because many to such texts are read and taught to adolescents in school.

develop the cultural capital of its citizens was a key factor in facilitating the combination of elite and mass elements.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s television viewing in Italy was a collective activity due to the low levels of television set ownership (only about 3 per cent of the potential viewers).²⁰ More than half of all viewers watched television in a public place such as a bar or club and almost 20 per cent at the house of family or friends. This collective experience reflected prevailing social behaviours, in that people watching television in public places were predominantly male and the young, whereas female and older viewers were more likely to watch television at other people's homes.²¹ Nevertheless, television viewing increased the number of women in public spaces and it gave young people the opportunity to meet members of the opposite sex in a socially acceptable manner. By 1964 television was regularly watched by two thirds of the Italian population and the number of television licenses had reached 5 million, although there were still regional and class differences in set ownership as more than half of these licences were in the wealthier and more industrialised north.²² As more Italians bought their own television, television-watching activity increasingly occurred in the home and the family moderated viewing behaviour.

RAI surveyed its television audience from 1956 and analysed the demographics of television viewers and their opinions of the programs. The research looked at a comprehensive range of demographic factors such as sex, age, education level, class, occupation, region and size of city or town. The research tracked the uptake of television viewing and reception of different program genres by audience across Italian society. In addition to this published data, special internal reports were commissioned on programs. Different survey approaches such as face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews were used, between July 1959 and March 1961 approximately 30,000 adults were surveyed on their opinion on television programs. A survey group with socio-demographic factors representing the broad make up of Italian society was developed. The data needs to be used carefully, for example in the mid 1950s the methodology to identify class was the assessment of the researcher without reference to the person being surveyed. The research analysis can, at times, assume a somewhat patronizing tone and reflect

²⁰ Potential viewers in 1955 are the 20 million people in the north and south who lived in areas which could receive television. RAI - radiotelevisione italiana, *Quaderni Del Servizio Opinioni: 1 La Televisione E Il Suo Pubblico*, (Torino: ERI Edizioni RAI, 1957). p. 10.

²¹ RAI: Radiotelevisione Italiana 'Quaderni Del Servizio Opinioni 1', p. 12.

²² RAI: Radiotelevisione Italiana, *Rai Annuario 1965*, (Torino, 1965). p. 45 and p.277.

more about the values of the researcher than the motivations of the viewers. Nevertheless, this audience research presents a valuable and unique source of information on viewer opinions that enriches the current debate on viewer agency and the passive or engaged reception of television product that deepens our understanding of the history of television in Italy. Audience members rated the enjoyment of programs or episodes: *per niente* = 0; *poco* = 25; *discretamente* = 50; *molto* = 75; *moltissimo* = 100. These figures were aggregated and the enjoyment level reported and analysed by RAI.²³

Based on an approach inherited from radio, Italian state television was categorized and scheduled in specific genres: for example, Monday evening was scheduled for films, Thursday for quiz and Saturday for variety, and after 1957, the evening news was invariably followed by *Carosello* a fifteen minute program of advertisements.²⁴ Cultural programming focused on the arts, science and history. The drama genre usually presented live or television productions of theatre that included a comprehensive selection of classic and modern works from William Shakespeare, Anton Chekov, Carlo Goldini and Luigi Pirandello²⁵. Traditionally elite cultural content was not confined to these genres. Classical adaptations and references also appeared within lighter formats, such as, the quiz and variety genres and even in the early advertising programs. Popular and modern hybrids that integrated mass culture and traditionally elite culture will be explored in the sections below.

a) Contestants and the classics: *Lascia o Raddoppia*?

Era giovedì, la sera di <<Lascia o raddoppia>>. I visi erano intenti, le bocche serrate, le fronti corrugate nello sforzo del pensiero; e poi si spianavano felici alle risposte, e le labbra si aprivano in sorrisi consapevoli. Quella gente <<sapeva tutto>>: rispondeva con i candidati del palcoscenico a quelle domande strane su argomenti ignoti; partecipava, si identificava con essi, acquistando così un bene maggiore della forza e della bellezza: la divina, gratuita, totale, assoluta onniscienza.

*Dappertutto, in quella sera ormai sacra a Minerva, gli italiani interrompono gli affari, i divertimenti, le passioni, il lavoro, e perfino l'elaborazione delle leggi, e si radunano per crescere sopra sé stessi, per acquistare il dono della conoscenza.*²⁶

²³ RAI: Radiotelevisione Italiana, *Quaderni Del Servizio Opinioni 1: La Televisione E Il Suo Pubblico* (Torino: ERI Edizioni Radio Italiana 1957), p.3.

²⁴ RAI 'RAI Annuario 1965', p. 120.

²⁵ RAI 'RAI Annuario 1965', p.104.

²⁶ Carlo Levi, 'La Sapienza', *La Stampa*, (1956). La Stampa Archivio <http://www3.lastampa.it/archivio-storico/> viewed 25 August, 2013 It was Thursday, the evening of *Lascia o raddoppia*? The faces were intent, the mouths shut, the brows furrowed in the effort of thought, and then smoothed, happy in the answer, and lips parted in knowing smiles. The people "knew-everything" and answered along with the candidates on the stage the strange questions on topics unknown; they participated and identified with the contestants, acquiring a good greater than

The first widely popular Italian television show was *Lascia o raddoppia?* a quiz which ran from late 1955 to mid 1959. As Carlo Levi's above description suggests, many Italians enjoyed *Lascia o raddoppia?* and viewing the show was a communal, and at times, emotional experience. Levi believed that viewers participated in the event and identified with the program, and its contestants in the manner of fans at a football match. By April 1956, Thursday nights were, as he said, sacred to Minerva, goddess of wisdom, as 10 million viewers watched the quiz, twice as many viewers as on any other night of the week. Transcripts of the program were reprinted in newspapers the following day for those who had missed the show or, lived in areas that were yet to gain television reception. In October 1956, Pio XII held an audience with the host Mike Bongiorno and a selection of *Lascia o raddoppia?* contestants, claiming that he would willingly join the 15 million Italians who watched the show weekly but his commitments meant that he only had time to read the transcripts in the newspapers or magazines.²⁷

By 1957, RAI had received more than three hundred thousand applications from would-be contestants, some of them from people who had never seen the show but had only read the transcripts.²⁸ Applicants most frequently requested subjects in the categories of 'Sport and Science', 'History and Geography' or 'History of Religion or Mythology'. Significantly, just over 20 per cent of applications were for traditionally elite subjects such as opera, classical music, theatre, art and literature.²⁹ Female applicants were most likely to request history, popular music and literature subjects.³⁰ Of the hundreds and thousands of applications received a high number of applications were inadmissible due to incompleteness, subjects being too specific, or applications coming from experts. Around forty-one thousand applications or approximately 13% of applications were considered. RAI analysed the ineligible applications by region and education level application and observed that a larger proportion of incorrect applications came from regions such as Sicily and Basilicata as well as from applicants with limited formal education.³¹ This suggests that the quiz program and the opportunity to win prize money had captured the imagination of large numbers of the Italian population and that people from

strength and beauty: the divine, free, total, absolute omniscience. Everywhere, in the evening now sacred to Minerva, Italians interrupt their business, entertainment, passions, work, and even law making, and gather to improve themselves, to acquire the gift of knowledge.

²⁷ 'Il Papa ha conversato per venti minuti coi personaggi di "Lascia o Raddoppia" *L'Unita* 7 Ottobre, 1956. Page 2.

²⁸ RAI: Radiotelevisione Italiana, *1956-1957 Due Anni Di Lascia O Raddoppia*, (Torino: Edizione Radio Italia (ERI), 1958). p.261.

²⁹ RAI: Radiotelevisione Italiana. 'Due Anni di Lascia O Raddoppia?' Derived from Tabella No. 6 p 282-3

³⁰ RAI: Radiotelevisione Italiana 'Due Anni di Lascia O Raddoppia?' p. 265.

³¹ RAI: Radiotelevisione Italiana 'Due Anni di Lascia O Raddoppia?' p.264.

different many educational and socio-economic backgrounds related to the program and that it had relevance not only as a viewer but as something that they could envisage participating in as a contestant.

Despite *Lascia o raddoppia?* being an Italian production, the host Mike Bongiorno was the perfect cultural hybrid. Born in America and raised in Italy, he had fought as a partisan in the north of Italy and later worked during the war years on the Allied Military propaganda radio program *Voice of America*.³² *Lascia o raddoppia?* was the first Italian quiz show to offer prize money. The contestant would win money for a correct answer and the opportunity to '*Lascia o raddoppia*' – leave with the money or double the money and risk losing it. Contestants answered questions from within their chosen area of expertise, which included a range of both popular and elite subjects from horse racing to Dante. *Lascia o raddoppia?* also liked making strange juxtapositions, an ideal show, according to a 1956 article in *La Stampa*, would include a sailor from Genova on Egyptian art; a Venetian gondolier on botany; a ballerina from the Scala on gastronomy; a Law Professor on cycling and a retired General on dancehall music.³³

The program was filmed in a theatre in Milan and broadcast live. The format built on Italy's strong tradition of radio quizzes and drew on international examples of popular television quiz shows in America and Europe, particularly *Revlon's The \$64,000 Question*. The program included elements of ritual and drama; the contestants appeared sequentially, and the program commenced with new arrivals who were given 30 seconds to answer questions from a sealed envelope. After this, the returning contestants were introduced, they were sent into the glass cabinet, and asked to wear headphones and speak into the microphone, in order that Mike Bongiorno who stood immediately outside the cabinet, could hear them. The questions were intended to be difficult and contestants were given one minute to answer.

A crucial element of the program was its featuring of 'everyday' contestants, often with appealing or eccentric personalities, ordinary people with nerves, strong regional dialects, quirks and jokes, yet who answered obscure questions and recalled details and dates on their chosen topic. Contestants with charisma, humour or beauty were likely to become crowd favourites and even celebrities. Successful contestants benefitted financially; the prize money

³² Simonetti, Flavio 'Il mestiere di Mike Bongiorno' *Tempo* A.XVIII -N.31, Milano, 31 Marzo 1955 p 25

³³ Ghirotti, Gigi "Lascia o raddoppia" cerca dilettanti di materie curiose" *La Stampa* Martedì 7 Febbraio 1956 p. 3. *La Stampa* Archivio <http://www3.lastampa.it/archivio-storico/> viewed 8 December, 2011

was over five million lira and in later years consolation prizes, such as a Fiat 600, were offered. Fame was another potential benefit. The contestants could be transformed from ordinary people into celebrities, and like stars, they received fan mail, wedding proposals and appeared in popular magazines or advertisements. Names of contestants who captured the imagination of viewers entered television history; such as the 'Ginger Rogers like' blonde football expert Paola Bolognani, the scandalous curves of Maria Lousia Garoppo and Dr Gianluigi Marianini a university graduate who won the quiz answering questions on fashion and went on to promote Cholorodont toothpaste.

Part of the mythology of *Lasica o raddoppia?* was the celebration of the self-taught and self-starters. This image was promoted by the media and particularly by the RAI. Contestants who had invested time in their own education were held up as examples of what could be possible in modern Italy. A 1960 RAI documentary examining the young people of Italy, *Giovani Oggi* contrasted the apathy of a group of truant students in Rome against the self-discipline and ambition of Felice Mannarelli, a successful *Lascia o raddoppia?* contestant who competed in order to win enough money to be able to afford to go to university. The documentary juxtaposes images from Mannarelli's small rural village: the 'old ways' of the shepherd and his animals are contrasted against the 'new ways' of passing cars, an aeroplane overhead and the screen then fades to modern apartments and the future. A voiceover offers this description of Mannarelli, and the ambition required in modern times:

*Un povero ragazzo qualunque, ma con una volontà insolita e un sentimento preciso del tempo in cui viviamo che li hanno permessi di risolvere da solo uno dei problemi più vivi del mondo di oggi... conoscere, mettere al frutto la proprio capacità, realizzare la proprio qualità.*³⁴

The journalist goes on to cite Italy's one million citizens with a third grade education and another million with a fifth grade level of education, adding that '*la società aiuta chi può o vuole aiutare la sua volta e nel progresso tecnico, scientifico, moderno non aver un istruzione e come non aver un braccio*'.³⁵

³⁴ Carlo Alberto Chiesa, 'Giovani Oggi', (RAI televisione, 1960). Puntata 3 6:25 to 7:30 RAI mediateca identificazione C376: A poor young everyman, but with a uncommon drive and an exact feeling for the times in which we live that have permitted him to work out by himself one of the main problems in the world of today' which is 'to have knowledge, to achieve your capability, to realise your true qualities.

³⁵ Chiesa, C 'Giovani Oggi', Puntata 3 6:25 to 7:30 RAI mediateca identificazione C376: Because for someone who wants to help technological, scientific and modern progress, to not have an education is like not having an arm.

The education level of contestants who appeared on *Lascia o raddoppia?* was actually significantly higher than both the average education level of television viewers and the national average. More than a quarter of the contestants or 26 per cent were university graduates, 30 per cent had completed secondary school and 28 per cent middle school, and 13 per cent or one in six of the contestants had a elementary school level of education.³⁶ This was in stark contrast to the Italian national levels of education, which in 1951 were that: 1 per cent of the population had a university degree; 3 per cent had completed secondary school; almost 6 per cent had completed middle school; and 77 per cent had completed elementary school or were literate without qualifications; almost 13 per cent were illiterate. In 1954, the education level of the television audience was also higher than the national average but not as high as the *Lascia o raddoppia?* contestants: 7 per cent with university degrees, 14 per cent completed secondary school, 21 per cent completed middle school and 58 per cent had an elementary school education.³⁷

Franco Monteleone has suggested that the program's lack of class distinction was key to its success.³⁸ Demographic data on the *Lascia o raddoppia?* audience shows that it had broad appeal and it was popular with viewers across sex, age, education and class categories.³⁹ There were, however, some differences; women recorded a higher level of enjoyment and older people a little less. The viewers of a high economic status reported a high enjoyment of the program, though the enjoyment of middle and lower class viewers was greater still. Elementary, middle school and higher school educated viewers all reported a high level of enjoyment of the show. The only group of viewers to show a large deviation in the level of enjoyment from the others were viewers with a university degree. Nevertheless, in 1956 more than half of the university-educated viewers reported that they enjoyed the program.⁴⁰ *Lascia o raddoppia?* was most popular with young women with less education and least popular with older university educated men.⁴¹

Lascia o raddoppia? was more than television, it was a public debate which people from right across society participated in and about which everyone could hold and voice an opinion.

³⁶ RAI Televisione Italiana. 'Due Anni di Lascia o Raddoppa?' Data derived from Tabella N. 7 Page 285-6.

³⁷ Ginsborg. 'Table 22 Educational qualifications of Italians over six years of age, by geographical area, 1951-1981', p.440.

³⁸ Monteleone, 'Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia', p. 323.

³⁹ RAI:Radiotelevisione Italiana. 'Quaderni Del Servizio Opinioni I' p. 38-40.

⁴⁰ RAI: Radiotelevisione Italiana, 'Quaderni Del Servizio Opinioni I', p.38.

⁴¹ RAI: Radiotelevisione Italiana, 'Quaderni Del Servizio Opinioni I', p. 40.

Controversial results or fascinating contestants would become actual news. Journalists would come to watch the show and report on the developments. The so-called *contra-fagotto* or double bassoon scandal erupted when a favourite contestant, the mathematics professor Lando Degoli was eliminated from the program for an incorrect answer which saw the works of Giuseppe Verdi and the instruments he used enter the national debate, it was a subject hotly contended in bars and reported in the newspapers until the contestant was reinstated on the show.

Newspapers and weekly magazines analysed the reasons for the success of the quiz and of its host Mike Bongiorno. Intellectuals frequently cited this success as the evidence of the cultural apocalypse; and it became central to the intellectual debate on mass and American culture. The major problems raised included: that the prize money represented a commodification of knowledge; that unlike analysis and deep understanding, rote learning was easy and pointless; and that contestants were gaining fame without achievement. Of these, the strongest complaint was the fatuity of rote learning; contestants were merely 'memorising football champions or soup ingredients'.⁴² Intellectual and academic Diego de Castro suggested that while *Lascia o raddoppia?* operated as a modern evolution from gladiatorial contests in the Coliseum he questioned the cultural achievement arguing that Renaissance philosopher and father of Humanism, Pico della Mirandola remained in history not for his memory but for his culture.⁴³ Other writers, however, suggested that culture had not been damaged by the program which had the potential to inspire a taste for culture. They credited the quiz with increased book sales and decreased demand for playing cards in Milan.⁴⁴ Well-known figures were asked to comment or provide their own insights into the success of *Lascia o raddoppia?* For Carlo Levi, the program was successful because it engendered mass identification and participation. For Federico Fellini, the program's success was due on one hand, to the way that viewers could trust and get to know contestants as strangers who became friends; and on the other, the way that viewers could watch from an armchair participating without ramifications in the contestants' downfall or 'lynching' '*partecipando al suo linciaggio senza venirene accusati*'⁴⁵ When asked what he would re-name *Lascia o raddoppia?* the writer and journalist Giovanni Ansaldo suggested '*Trippa o*

⁴² Diego de Castro I dilettanti e la Cultura Formazione educative di "Lascia o raddoppia" La Stampa 28 April 1956, no. 102 Page 3 La Stampa Archivio <http://www3.lastampa.it/archivio-storico/> viewed 10 March, 2012

⁴³ Diego de Castro I dilettanti e la Cultura Formazione educative di "Lascia o raddoppia" La Stampa Page 3 La Stampa Archivio <http://www3.lastampa.it/archivio-storico/> viewed 10 March, 2012

⁴⁴ Ghirotti, Gigi "Lascia o raddoppia" cerca dilettanti di materie curiose" *La Stampa* Martedì 7 Febbraio, 1956.

⁴⁵ '37 Domande a Federico Fellini' *TEMPO* (A. XVIII-N.26- Milano, 5 luglio 1956), p.6.

scallop?' or 'Tripe and escallop'; while Edda Ciano, Mussolini's daughter suggested '*Sadismo ore 21*' or 'Sadism at 9pm'.⁴⁶

Television audiences in general, and particularly during this early period of Italian state television, are often represented as passive and reassured recipients of American or Christian Democrat-filtered culture.⁴⁷ Audience responses to *Lascia o raddoppia?* however, suggest engagement and selectivity. While Italians watched in their millions, their enjoyment of the program vacillated, depending on the contestants and their progress. Enjoyment ratings in 1956 when the program was in its first year were very high: between 75-95 (out of 100). In 1957, although the number of viewers was greater, the enjoyment ratings were lower overall and ranged between 62 and 80. The period May 1957 to November 1957 proved one of the most volatile, the highest rating of 80 coincided with the win of Felice Mannarelli followed by a two-month slide in enjoyment ratings down to 62. Enjoyment ratings returned back into the 70s with the appearance of the Italian actress Pina Renzi as a contestant and Jayne Mansfield as a guest star but neither celebrity received enjoyment ratings as high as Mannarelli. In 1958, the first half of the year maintained good viewer enjoyment rating of around the 75 mark but the second half of the year saw enjoyment ratings slump to the 60s and even down to 52. By 1959, enjoyment ratings were in the 50s and even 40s, only rising again for an appearance by Adriano Celentano and the final episode. International celebrities from the elite and avant-garde arts participated though in some cases incurring lower enjoyment ratings. Opera star Maria Callas attained a viewer enjoyment rating in high 60s when the range for the year was 52-78 and avant-garde composer John Cage averaged low enjoyment ratings between 47-52 during his period as a contestant. Nevertheless Cage was admired for his international status and success in winning the major prize on the show (as a mushroom specialist). After Cage performed some of his avant-garde work on a range of instruments including a bath and a blender, host Mike Bongiorno farewelled him by wistfully expressing the wish that Cage would stay in Italy and his music return to America rather than the reverse.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ '32 Domande a Giovanni Ansaldo', *TEMPO*, (A.XIX-N.14 - Milano, 2 Agosto 1956), p.6. and '43 Domande a Edda Ciano' *TEMPO*, (A.XVIII - N.31 - Milano 2 Agosto 1956). p.6.

⁴⁷ Silvio Lanaro, *Storia Dell'italia Repubblicana: L'economia, La Politica, La Cultura, La Società Dal Dopoguerra Agli Anni '90*, (Venezia: Marsilio Editore, 1992). Page 215; Franco Alberoni in Paolo (ed) Capuzzo, *Genere, Generazione E Consume: L'italia Degli Anni Sessanta* (Rome: Carocci Editore Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, 2003). Page 32

⁴⁸ Camillio Brambilla 'Trionfo della <<Nonnina Milanese>> a <Lasica o Raddoppia>> *Stampa Sera* Venerdì 30 – Sabato 31 Gennaio 1959, p. 4. La Stampa Archivio <http://www3.lastampa.it/archivio-storico/> viewed 2 December, 2011; and Laura Kuhn, *John Cage Trust* <http://johncagetrust.blogspot.com/2011/04/lascia-o-raddoppia-milan-1959.html>, viewed 2 December 2011. *Stampa Sera* Venerdì 30 – Sabato 31 Gennaio 1959, p. 4. La Stampa Archivio

The RAI audience researchers observed that viewers' enjoyment of the program was tied to the individual personalities of contestants, and suggested that viewers were moved by the victory of people they had grown attached to. Moreover, this engagement and feel good factor was thought to transcend that of a passive spectator. *Lascia o Raddoppia?* was still watched by around 35% of the Italian adult population, however by 1959 the variety program *Un, due, tre* and Mario Riva's *Il Musicchiere* had reached similar levels of popularity, and in the case of *Il Musicchiere*, exceeded it.⁴⁹

b) Choreography and the classics: *Biblioteca di Studio Uno*

Variety shows and light entertainment were extremely popular in the 1950s and 1960s. In the late 1950s, Italian audiences spent more than half of their television viewing time watching quiz, review and variety shows. By the early 1960s, other genres such as film and television series had gained popularity and quiz, review and variety shows made up 38% (1961) and then 20% (1963) of the audience's viewing time. The Saturday evening programs such as *Studio Uno* and *Canzonissima* regularly attracted audiences of around 12 million viewers and could receive very high enjoyment ratings in the 80s, which rarely happened with the other genres such as drama, opera and current affairs.⁵⁰ These variety programs epitomised the new modern Italy, stylish and cosmopolitan with a strong American and international influences yet creating a uniquely Italian result. Unlike other television genres, it was popular right across Italian society with an audience that included viewers from across numerous sex, age, class, education and occupation categories.⁵¹ This trend continued throughout the 1960s with a popularity of format and a demographic equilibrium that remained consistent until the end of the decade when the shows became generally more popular with women.⁵² While variety shows on television had a widescale appeal, this did not apply to the variety theatre audiences where attendance

<http://www3.lastampa.it/archivio-storico/> viewed 2 December, 2011; and Laura Kuhn, *John Cage Trust* <http://johncagetrust.blogspot.com/2011/04/lascia-o-raddoppia-milan-1959.html>, viewed 2 December 2011.

⁴⁹ RAI: Radiotelevisione Italiana, *Quaderni Del Servizio Opinioni: 5 La Televisione E Il Suo Pubblico*, (Torino: ERI Edizioni RAI, 1959), pp. 149-56.

⁵⁰ RAI: Radiotelevisione Italiana, *Quaderni Del Servizio Opinioni: 11 L'accoglienza Del Pubblico Per I Programmi Televisivi Dal 1961 Al 1964*, (Torino: ERI Edizioni RAI, 1967). Page 77.

⁵¹ RAI: Radiotelevisione Italiana, *Quaderni Del Servizio Opinioni 10 Il Pubblico Della Tv Nel 1964*, (Torino: ERI Edizioni RAI, 1965). Page 61. This was in contrast to other genres such as cultural transmissions where education level was a clear factor or film where sex, age and education were factors. NB Quizzes were measured in a separate category to variety in the 1950s and became less popular in the 1960s.

⁵² RAI: Servizio Opinioni, 'Appunti Del Servizio Opinioni Number 121: Indagine Sugli Interessi Della Popolazione Italiana 1969', (1971). p. 16

demonstrates sex, age and education difference, where women, middle aged and older people and those with low to medium levels of education were less likely to attend.⁵³

The variety shows of Antonello Falqui and Guido Sacerdote broadcast in the early 1960s proved the most popular. The shows used American Broadway styles and television production techniques on a grand scale to create an Italian combination of (a) stage and television and (b) an American-Italian aesthetic. The style was light and modern and used television in a new way, not as a radio with pictures or a broadcast of a theatre stage but with visual and technological techniques that explored and played to the strengths of the new television medium. Programs such as *Giardino d'inverno* and *Studio Uno* introduced popular performers, such as Mina and the Kessler Twins, to the Italian public. The programs represented a shift toward modern sophistication not only within visual style but also marked the beginning of a change in values reflected in their particular popularity in urban areas. As Franco Monteleone has observed, the showgirl costumes of the long-legged German Kessler twins demonstrated that Italians and their television had come a long way from the indignation over the scandalous curves of quiz show contestant Maria Luisa Garoppo on *Lascia o Raddoppia?* in 1956.⁵⁴

The new shows were modern and stylish, combining popular and elite subjects for urban and urbane tastes. For example, *Studio Uno* with its sharp choreography and chic visual representation of singers and dancers represented modern sophistication:

*La prima edizione era colta, raffinata, un po' pretenziosa. Insieme a Emilio Pericoli e Renata Mauro si potevano vedere filmati con Thomas Mann o intere puntate dedicate a George Gershwin. Lo spettacolo aveva una dichiarate vocazione internazionale.*⁵⁵

Audiences were not always satisfied with the programs, however. RAI's audience research on the variety programs of 1961-1964 found that while large numbers of people watched variety programs, and that it was the most popular of the different television genres, the audience satisfaction with these programs varied, and was, I contend, both discerning and far from the stereotype of the passive television viewer. The research noted, clearly with a sense of disbelief, that even programs with famous personalities would not guarantee high satisfaction ratings. It is

⁵³ RAI: Servizio Opinioni, 'Appunti No 121' Table n.25 p. 38

⁵⁴ Monteleone. 'Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia', p. 347.

⁵⁵ Walter Veltroni, *I Programmi Che Hanno Cambiato L'Italia: Quarant'anni Di Televisione*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1992). pp. 251-2. The first series was cultured, refined, a bit pretentious. Together with (popular Italian singers) Emilio Pericoli and Renata Mauro you could see segments with Thomas Mann or entire episodes dedicated to George Gershwin. The show had a declared international vocation.

interesting to observe the conclusions (and the visible prejudices) of the RAI researchers in their effort to make sense of this perceived anomaly in their understanding of mass culture that strongly rating 'escapist' programs were not always found to be enjoyable. They could only attribute the low enjoyment rating to remorse:

*Si potrebbe anche ipotizzare che nella reazione critica dello spettatore si scarichi un certo senso di colpa per il tempo perso a vedere qualcosa che nulla aggiunge alla sua cultura ed al suo prestigio.*⁵⁶

In 1964, Falqui and Sacredote developed a new eight-episode program derived from *Studio Uno*. The program, *Biblioteca di Studio Uno*, (*Studio One Library*) gave a modern musical variety treatment to popular classics with dance numbers and contemporary music. The idea had developed from parody sketches of films on *Studio Uno* by the *Quartetto Cetra* and the group formed the basis of the new show alongside well-known guest performers. It was the first of the so-called *kolossal* or blockbuster variety shows of the 1960s with big budgets, casts and chorus. Aldo Grasso has estimated that the eight episodes of *Biblioteca di Studio Uno* employed 160 actors and singers, 1500 extras, and used 400 pieces of music with 150 scenes.⁵⁷ The show drew on a broad range of inspirations including European literature and theatre classics, American film and Broadway variety and combined them with Italian film, television and music personalities so that *'Tutti sono passati da Biblioteca di Studio Uno. Più o meno come tutti, in quegli stessi anni, passavano da Cinecittà.'*⁵⁸ Although making adaptations of the classics was an established film and television approach, this hybrid combination of modern and traditional themes in order to parody traditional culture was distinctive. The classics would have been familiar to the demographically broad television variety audience through print form such as literature or *fotoromanzi*, or through performance as theatre, or in film and television adaptations. The classics interpreted were:

- *The Count of Montecristo* by Alexander Dumas (1844);
- *Il Fornaretto di Venezia* a play by Francesco Dall'Ongaro (1846) which had been released as a film in Italy in 1963;
- *The Three Musketeers* by Alexander Dumas (1844);
- *Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson (1886);

⁵⁶ RAI Televisione Italiana, 'Quaderni Del Servizio Opinioni 10', Page 128 One could also hypothesize that the critical reaction of the viewer comes from a certain sense of guilt for the time wasted watching something that adds nothing to their culture or prestige.

⁵⁷ Grasso, 'Storia della televisione Italiana', p.140.

⁵⁸ Veltroni, 'I Programmi che hanno cambiato Italia', p.30 Everyone came to Biblioteca di Studio Uno. More or less like everyone came to Cinecittà at this time.

- *The Story of Scarlet O'Hara* based on the book *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell (1939) and also the Academy Awarded Hollywood film (1939) not released in Italy until 1951;
- *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1905) by Emma Orczy;
- *Grand Hotel* (1929) by Vicki Baum Austrian living in USA, Hollywood film (1932) which received the 1932 Academy Award for Best Picture;
- *The Odyssey* by Homer (8BC) also released as a film *Ulysses* (1954) made in Cinecittà starring Kirk Douglas and Anna Mangano.

Non-Italian, European writers wrote six of the eight works, classics predominately set in Europe and in the nineteenth century. There was one Italian work, an adaptation of the play *Il Fornaretto di Venezia*, which had been released in Italy as a film in 1963 and would be released in Europe later in 1964. The other classics had all found international success as books or films, or both. *The Story of Scarlet O'Hara* based on *Gone with the Wind* was the only American classic. The lack of representation by Italian classics is partially due to stronger traditions of accessible writing in Britain and France and their more developed international markets. However, in a 1963 interview in *La Stampa* just before rehearsals were due to commence, Felice Chiusano, one of the performers from *Il Quartetto Cetra*, referred to a twelve episodes for *Biblioteca di Studio Uno* with two other Italian classics to be included in the show:

- *I Promessi Sposi* (1827) by Alessandro Manzoni;
- *Piccolo Mondo Antico* (1895) by Antonio Fogazzaro which had been televised by RAI in 1957 and as a film in 1941.⁵⁹

Another member of *Il Quartetto Cetra*, Virgilio Savona recounted that rehearsals and casting for *I Promessi Sposi* were underway when Falqui and Sacredote informed the quartet that the episode would not go ahead as RAI had Sandro Bolchi working on a television film of the classic book. Savona recalled the producer Sacredote saying that RAI's Director of television programming, Sergio Pugliese had not wanted *I Promessi Sposi* mocked as it was currently in development for a television film, and that it was a prestigious work that RAI had made significant financial investment in. "*Sergio Pugliese non vuole che venga messa alla berlina un'opera già in fase di allestimento, un'opera prestigiosa che sta costando all'ente un grosso sforzo finanziario*"⁶⁰ However, this was also true for the RAI production of a television film of the *Count of Montecristo* to be directed by Edmo Fenoglio, which was not cancelled.

⁵⁹ *La Stampa Sera* 'Il nuovo <<Studio 1>> va in biblioteca a parodiare romanzi' Anno 95. Numero 268, Giovedì 14-Venerdì 15 Novembre 1963, (Torino: Editrice La Stampa Spa, 1963) p.11.

⁶⁰ Maurizio Ternavasio, *Il Quartetto Cetra: Ovvero Piccola Storia Dello Spettacolo Leggero Italiano*, (Torino: Lindau, 2002). p. 128

The challenge presented by *Biblioteca di Studio Uno* came from its attempt to go beyond the adaptation of well-known classics; rather the objective of the show was to mock the classics. Parody cuts to the heart of the established boundaries where, as Bourdieu observes, a spectacle such as a circus and melodrama:

...like all forms of the comic and especially those working through satire or parody of the 'great' (mimics, chansonniers etc.), they satisfy the taste for and sense of revelry, the plain speaking and hearty laughter which liberate by setting the social world head over heels, overturning conventions and proprieties.⁶¹

Italian television audiences were more than ready to overturn 'conventions and proprieties'. *Biblioteca Studio Uno* was one of RAI's most popular programs of 1964, across demographic groups and particularly with women and older viewers. Each episode was watched by between 12.9 and 13.7 million viewers and the audience satisfaction for *The Three Musketeers* and *The Odyssey* were 80 and 81 respectively. The show also received commendation from the European television industry when the *Three Musketeers* episode received the award for best production at the 1965 Montecarlo Television Festival. The episode *Dr Jeckyll and Mister Hyde* received the much lower enjoyment rating of 64, which RAI research attributed to its macabre content though it also faced considerable artistic challenges to create a light dance sequence out of an identikit process, or the somewhat surprising singing and dancing chorus of London prostitutes who one by one (yet always in step), were grabbed, screaming and then murdered just off-stage.⁶²

The audience enjoyment of *Biblioteca di Studio Uno* required a familiarity with the classics and a sense of their value, as well as a willingness to participate in the inversion of cultural values and mockery. The shows were light, spectacular, modern and American — exactly the type of program that those who had read Adorno had warned about. For *L'Unità*, the second episode of *Biblioteca Studio Uno* was already tired, monotonous and formulaic, by the fifth episode;

*Biblioteca di Studio uno si sta avviando ad essere una sorta di operetta moderna di seconda mano la cui utilità, ai fini del divertimento del pubblico, è sempre più discutibile.*⁶³

⁶¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1984). Page 26

⁶² RAI, 'RAI Annuario 1965' p.258

⁶³ *L'unita* 'Contro Canale' Domenica 15 Marzo, 1964 p. 9. *Biblioteca di Studio Uno* is becoming a sort of second-hand modern operetta whose usefulness for the purpose of public entertainment is increasingly questionable.

c) *Carosello* and the classics

The government control of television included limits to advertising. It was not entirely excluded, yet it was restricted by a 1952 agreement between the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications and the RAI:

*La pubblicità dovrà essere contenuta nella formula più conveniente per non recare pregiudizio alla bontà dei programmi: la trasmissione delle frasi o delle visioni aventi carattere esclusivo di pubblicità non deve occupare più del 5% del tempo riservato alla concessionaria per l'esecuzione dei programmi*⁶⁴

Before 1957 there was no advertising on Italian television. This changed with the introduction the program, *Carosello* made up of four, and later five, sponsored vignettes with strict limits imposed on product promotion including when and how-many mentions the product received. The product could only be referred to at the beginning and end of the short sketch. The sketch or story frequently had a tenuous link to the product. Yet, successful approaches were developed that would operate like a series, with regular characters such as the bald Detective *Ispettore Rock* for brilliantine cream or popular animated cartoon characters such as Lavazza's *Carmencita* and the small 'black' chick *Calimero* for *Ava* washing powder. An early market research survey found that in 1957, almost 85% of respondents said that they normally watched *Carosello* 3-7 nights a week.⁶⁵ As Paul Ginsborg has observed, *Carosello's* approach was a uniquely Italian form of advertising that by 1960 became the most popular program on Italian television, especially with children.⁶⁶ By 1961, more than 16 million adults watched at least one *Carosello* show a week and 7.7 million watched it every day.⁶⁷

The restrictions on television advertising were partially due to the government's wish to contain consumerist values. However, the restrictions were also in response to successful lobbying from the print industry in order to protect its lion's share of the advertising market against a new player. In 1958, of the Italian adult population of 35.7 million, print advertising reached more than two thirds of the market with 24.5 million adults, radio reached about half the market with

⁶⁴ 'Considerazione sulla pubblicità televisiva in Italia e proposte di riforma dell'attuale formula' 1st convegno nazionale degli utenti e dei tecnici della pubblicità televisiva, Trieste 4-5 Luglio, 1958., p.7.

⁶⁵ SIPRA internal document: *Inchiesta sulla pubblicità televisiva (1957)* Page 8. NB This is a very limited survey of 185 television owners in Turin and surrounding areas.

⁶⁶ Ginsborg 'A History of Contemporary Italy', p. 241.

⁶⁷ Indagine sulla pubblicità televisiva "Carosello" Presentazione dell'indagine Pietro Gennaro e Associati SPA Aprile 1963 [data relates to 1961]

17.5 million adults, cinema reached around a third of the market with 11 million adults and television less than a third of the market with just under 10.5 million adults.

Early market research on *Carosello* is fairly limited however respondents reported a high level of enjoyment (seventy per cent found the program to be good or great) and a clear preference for comic sketches above other approaches such as musical, sports, didactic information or pantomime.⁶⁸ The comedy of *Carosello* and popularity with children were defining features. The difficulty that advertisers faced with the comic vignettes is that audiences would remember the actor but not the product.

The representation of traditionally elite culture in *Carosello* followed two main themes; firstly, the association with quality and good taste for both the product and the consumer; and secondly, playing to the strength of the program, humour and comedy. Advertisements referenced art or artists to confer quality and prestige on their product an association with the importance of good taste in modern life, in particular for the growing middle class. As an example, the 1957 advertisement for *Gran Senior Fabbri Brandy* featured artist Franco Gentili creating and finishing a work of art, 'Here is the picture that gives every house a corner of good taste. And here is the brandy that gives every house their personality.' *Ecco il quadro che a ogni casa dà una cornice di buon gusto. Ed ecco il brandy che dà a ogni casa la propria personalità.*⁶⁹ The association operates in terms of the artist's creativity and excellence being likened to the brandy, but also referring to attaining style and good taste as part of the viewer's lifestyle and home. The acquisition of good taste was part of the emerging modern Italian life, not only a home with whitegoods and a television, but also sophistication and taste, an appreciation of the classics and a sense of modern design.

The most popular *Carosello* sketches used comedy to sell their product, and this held true in the representation of traditionally elite culture, much of the humour rested on the mockery of elite culture, intellectuals or people who were trying to associate themselves with elite behaviour. Advertisements would satirise and mock cultural snobs, or lament the torture of music lessons or bad singing performances. Some advertisements directly or indirectly referenced the clash of values between traditionally elite art and commerce. A good example is the 1958 advertisement

⁶⁸ SIPRA internal document: *Inchiesta sulla pubblicità televisiva (1957)* Page 12.

⁶⁹ Piero Dorfles, *Carosello*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998). Page 50.

for Perugina *Baci* chocolate *An Artist Above All*.⁷⁰ In this vignette, Shakespearean theatre and film actor Vittorio Gassman, is being asked to appear in an advertisement for *Baci* chocolates.⁷¹ Gassman assumes a mock-superior tone and haughtily explains that he cannot be in an advertisement because he is an artist, listing his Shakespearean performances as Hamlet, Othello, Richard II and Richard III as well as Henry IV, V, VI and also VII and VIII. Gassman and the actress Anna Maria Ferrero discuss respect for art as opposed to the love of money, and the different ways actors are treated in the US and Italy. Gassman and Ferrero are offered more money and quickly suspend their artistic principles to sell *Baci* chocolates. The advertisement finishes as the actors appear in costumes with the *Baci* brand, although Gassman tries not to say the product name. *An Artist Above All* openly references the conflict between artistic principles and commercial culture, the actors make the joke about artistic principles at their own expense and the audience laughs along with them. The sketch requires the audience to have an awareness of the conflict between elite and commercial culture as well as enough of a familiarity with the works of Shakespeare to get the joke that there are no plays Henry VII and VIII. Given the frequent programming of the works of Shakespeare on RAI, it is very likely that they would.

Another way to reference elite culture was the comic situation of different worlds meeting; the everyman and the intellectual. The 1962 *Carosello* sketch *Literature improves Carlo Campanini* is set in a stark modern literary salon, comedian Campanini confesses to the camera that he fears he may not have the capacity for a literary discussion.⁷² The self-important literary intellectual, played by actor Gianni Cajafa, starts off with a reference to the poet Giacomo Leopardi. Campanini finds a chocolate wrapped with small notes of famous quotes and adds "'The ends justify the means" Machia.' He is corrected by the intellectual who adds, '...velli' (as in Machiavelli) Campanini apologises, "Sorry there was a mark (*macchia*) on 'velli.'" Campanini maintains the intellectual conversation of citation and literary reference by reading the small notes from chocolate wrappers. The intellectual asks the Campanini if he knows the work of "Shaw, George Bernhard Shaw". Campanini responds that he only knows the "Perry Como Show" at which point the intellectual responds that he hasn't read any of Perry Como

⁷⁰ Guia; Berselli Croce, Edmondo; Nove, Aldo; Mondadori, 'Carosello... E Poi a Letto: 1957-1977 La Storia Della Televisione Italiana Volume 1', (Torino: RAI Trade, 2008). *I registi di Gassman - artisti innanzitutto*

⁷¹ Vittorio Gassman was known as Italy's Lawrence Olivier and one of the few actors to successfully cross over from theatre to popular film and television.

⁷² Croce, Carosello... E Poi a Letto: 1957-1977 La Storia Della Televisione Italiana Volume 1. 'Chi si difende si salva, La letteratura si addice a Carlo Campanini' (1962)

Show's work and asks for a recommendation. At the end of the advertisement Campanini says "to counter a modern life, I drink Cynar". The humour of the advertisement is based on empathy for Campanini and mockery of the smug intellectual. The stereotyping of elite culture and mockery of fake or boring experts is a recurring image. Bettina Funcke has examined the constructions of high and low hierarchies within the art world and the way in which high and low culture reference each other. She suggests that the high culture construct of the 'masses' is matched by the mass culture constructed stereotype of 'the artist', suggesting that:

Through their reciprocal reference, high culture and mass culture create independent, interlocking fictions and constructed images and figures. The sheer quantity of images representing "the masses," along with mass-media culture's corresponding invention of "the artist," suggests an element of mutual desire, a longing for something represented by an Other that lies beyond one's reach.⁷³

This idea is useful in this context, Campanini does desire something beyond his reach or capacity but in doing so he also reveals the pretensions of the intellectual and references the debate between elite and mass culture. The humour comes from the punning and the mistakes by both Campanini and the intellectual on elite and mass cultural references that the audience knows, Giacomo Leopardi, Niccolò Machiavelli, George Bernhard Shaw and Perry Como. The jokes only work if the audience understands both traditionally elite culture references and a popular American television program broadcast on the RAI.

Conclusion

Italian television used elite culture, not solely in the educational or drama programs produced by RAI, but also in popular quiz, variety and advertising programs of the 50s and 60s. These shows developed popular content that brought elite and mass culture together into programs that were enjoyed and found to be meaningful by a large audience. As the audience survey data suggests, these television programs reached across educational and economic differences to create widely appealing products. The analysis of audience enjoyment levels can be used not only to identify which programs were meaningful but also to challenge the interpretation of Italian television viewers as passive and undiscerning.

The representation of elite culture in these programs did not take a sacred approach to 'high' art nor respect established boundaries. The stereotype of the intellectual or artist was used to mock

⁷³ Bettina Funcke, *Pop or Populus: Art between High and Low*, (New York: Sternberg Press, 2009). p. 18.

cultural hierarchies and challenge intellectual snobbery, disempowering any sense of superiority with laughter. The parodies of the classics challenged clear cultural boundaries by mixing modern and classic culture together, displaying an irreverent but playful approach that produced a sense of familiarity, ownership and enjoyment. However, state control of Italian television meant that the extent to which programs could challenge cultural boundaries had limits and that Italian classics could not be treated as lightly as the international classics. The mockery of intellectuals and the appropriation of the classics both required knowledge of the elite and popular culture references as well as an awareness of the debate regarding mass and consumer culture as opposed to the elite and sacred cultures. The programs not only mixed elite and mass culture together, they also applied American formats and ideas in the Italian context. De Grazia has argued that one of the challenges to Europe of the American commercial culture was its classlessness and lack of adherence to traditional cultural forms and boundaries, which 'challenged the distinctions between high and low, elite and popular cultures that since the seventeenth century had arisen in response to the democratizing tendencies attendant on the print revolution.'⁷⁴ Mass culture in Italy also developed content that challenged cultural boundaries.

Another mode in which mass culture represented elite culture was through its appeal to self-improvement and class mobility in a modern world. This could be represented in an educational sense, such as the quiz winner leaving his small village and spending the prize money to go to university, to make his own future. Elite culture could be used in the context of the consumer choices presented in television advertising; espousals of good taste and middle class lifestyles, where art and quality applies to both the product and the consumer. Urban sophistication, class and culture were closely associated in the context of modern culture.

The significance of these early popular Italian television programs was the combination of elite and mass culture into a cultural activity, which drew together an audience across gender, age, class and education divisions. The programs challenged cultural hierarchy and used elite culture and the classics as something that viewers could both understand and enjoy.

⁷⁴ De Grazia, 'Mass culture and sovereignty', p. 54.

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