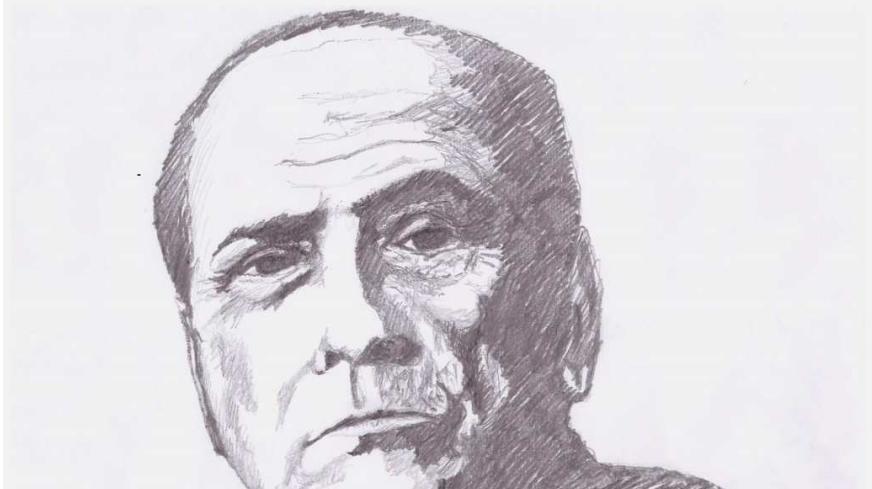


Vittorio Vandelli

Vittorio Vandelli

# Silvio Berlusconi's Italy

*a portrait of the country and its godfather*



**FINALIST AT  
THE INTERNATIONAL LITERARY COMPETITION  
'THE WRITE STUFF', LONDON BOOK FAIR 2015**

*from today's erosion of democracy  
to a near-future new kind of non-violent totalitarianism*

## **PART TWO**

### **Looking back in anger**

#### ***The man who screwed an entire country***

*(The Economist, 11-17 June, 2011)*



*Silvio Berlusconi and Forza Italia ideologue, former senator Marcello Dell'Utri, sentenced to 7 years in jail for external complicity in mafia association. Photo from Simone Ramella, [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com), Creative Commons licence*



*Palermo Anti-mafia Pool iconic magistrates Giovanni Falcone (right) and Paolo Borsellino, slain by the mafia in 1992. Photo from Ho Visto Nina Volare, [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com), Creative Common licence*

*Chapter one*

A gangster and mafia story:

*The Scent of Money and Clean Hands*

(from the seventies to the fall of the First Republic

in the early nineties)



(...)

The killing of Falcone and Borsellino, the murder of Salvo Lima, a series of mafia terror attacks to the heart of the country about to take place show that 1992 and the two years that followed were a key period, a phase that saw the death of the First and the birth of the Second Republic, a time saluted as an Italian New Deal that

metaphorically brought corruption and the mafia straight to Palazzo Chigi, Palazzo Madama and Montecitorio. 1992 is also the year of the Mani Pulite – Clean Hands – investigation, established by another famous pool of magistrates. Mani Pulite shocked the country showing that the criminal attitudes in Palermo and Milan were two branches of the same tree, two intermingled aspects of the illegality and corruption that has permeated Italy to the core since its birth, national sports that would soon most likely find their champion.

This other pool of investigative magistrates was as tough as their Palermo colleagues. They too built a big database, used strong methods in interrogations, had no shame in using pre-emptive imprisonment as permitted by the law and, most of all, they didn't stop when they reached the top of the political ladder: all the famous untouchable politicians of the First Republic we saw every day on TV were now at the bar, their eyes staring, bewildered, even incredulous that all this was really happening. The entrepreneurs caught in the trap confessed and some of them committed suicide. Paradoxically, the pool showed us what we have always known, the fact that corrupt business had to deal with corrupt politics to carry on its trade. To win public contracts, permits and licenses, to cover an illegal deed, the only itinerary was a 'mazzetta', a bribe, to the right local bunch of politicians in power. Consequently, for example, a kilometer of the underground in Milan or of an Italian motorway was twice as much compared to French prices. The mechanism is simple: a firm takes part in a public contest, offers an inflated price for the work, the politician makes that firm win the contest and receives its bribe in return; we, the people, or, better, the taxpayers, pay the price for all this. In his 'civil theatre' play *Promemoria – 15 anni di storia d'Italia ai confini della realtà* (later published as a DVD/book by Promo Music Books in 2009), Marco Travaglio gives us a paradigmatic example that shows the difference between some inevitable corruption in a healthy system and *Tangentopoli*, based on endemic and pathological corruption:

*"The matter is about a canned tuna firm named Nostromo", Bruno Falconieri [a socialist councillor in Milan arrested for corruption] says. "When that firm won a competition for the school canteens regularly, Claudio Martelli, vice-secretary of PSI, came to me personally. In order to show the firm's gratitude, which belonged*

*to his father-in-law, Martelli gave me a sum of money of about 8 – 10 million lire. The bribe grew up to 50 million a year in the following years.” Martelli does not take it (a unique case for a Socialist leader), but he pays it (with his father-in-law’s money, we suppose). Moral of the story: the system of corruption does not admit exceptions. Never let a regular contract exist in the city of the bribes: a dangerous example would be established. If it was heard that in Milan there’s an entrepreneur who wins contracts on a regular basis, others would pretend the same and the Tangentopoli system would tumble down. So, once a hole is discovered, Martelli rushes to close it with a nice ‘mazzeetta’.*

I met Marco Travaglio for the first time when he came to my hometown to launch the book on Tangentopoli called *Mani Pulite. La vera storia. Da Mario Chiesa a Silvio Berlusconi* in 2002, the year after *L’Odore dei Soldi*. Travaglio was one of the three authors, the others were G. Barbacetto and P. Gomez. Travaglio had been invited by the very symbol of the Mani Pulite investigation, former magistrate Antonio Di Pietro, who had left the Judiciary after Clean Hands to form a party called *Italia dei Valori – Italy of Values* – in 1998 which meant to give political representation to the ‘moral minority’ and to be the real parliamentary opposition to B.’s *Forza Italia/PDL*. *Italy of Values* represented about 10% of the voters up to last year, then it almost disappeared since most of its electorate voted for the newly formed *5 Star Movement*. Back to the episode, I thought I knew all there was to know about Mani Pulite but, when I listened to Travaglio, I was deeply upset: I had never heard such a precision in the reconstruction of a contemporary historical period. He had collected data, the witnesses’ declarations and the magistrates and the judges’ official sentences: in putting them together a clear picture had come out, facts and not fiction, so that the real story of Mani Pulite, its system of endemic corruption became clear to me in its entirety as never before.

(...)

*Take the art works of Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Tintoretto and Caravaggio, the operas of Verdi and Puccini, the cinema of Federico Fellini, add the architecture of*

*Venice, Florence and Rome and you have just a fraction of Italy's treasures from over the centuries.*

*While the country is renowned for these and other delights, it is also notorious for its precarious political life and has had several dozen governments since the end of World War II.*

*There were high hopes at the time that the "mani pulite" scandal would give rise to a radical reform of Italian political culture, but these hopes were dashed when the old structures were replaced by a new political landscape dominated by the multi-millionaire businessman Silvio Berlusconi, who himself became increasingly mired in scandals and corruption affairs (BBC Italy profile)*

We, the Italians, the majority of the Italians with the exceptions of the 'moral minority', have always been at least suspicious about the State. We had centuries of foreign dominations before the Risorgimento in the XIX century in which state officials were 'enemies'. We have never developed a civic awareness, a sense of community, of belonging to some common ground. We are a nation of immaculate homes and dirty streets. We have always seen taxpaying as acts of 'coglioneria' [crap, a load of balls] and tax evasion as actions of heroic resistance to public unfair burdens. We are a country in which politicians themselves advocate tax evasion in order to get consent, headed by B. who has practiced this national sport in such a brilliant way. Recommendations have always been an everyday form of survival. We have endless metaphorical expression on these attitudes: *fatta la legge trovato l'inganno* [the law is made, the con is found], *'cca nisciuno è fesso* [nobody is dumb around here], a Neapolitan motto used by the great movie comedian Totò. Our national mentality is in those old movies, in every classic 'commedia all'italiana', with its characters portraying the meanness of the average Italian played by iconic actor Alberto Sordi, the con-man tough to the weak and humble to the powerful. In recent years, actor director Nanni Moretti has revised the 'commedia' with his witty hilarious films about our Berlusconi society. B.'s nickname *il Caimano* comes from his 2006 movie, a surrealistic portrait of *il Cavaliere*. We are a nation of great artists and inventors, the land of Raffaello and Leonardo, the cradle of Renaissance, we are the land of the 'made in Italy' and of the best cuisines in the world: we are so creative also,

alas, because we are a country of individualists, a country who created the Roman Empire and that today let the archaeological site of Pompei fall to pieces for public 'sinecura' [carelessness]. We are a land of contradictions: Italy is an open air museum filled with breathtaking landscapes in which living could be easy if below it the Inferno of inefficiency and dishonesty didn't spoil it all.

*What's strange reading the story [of Mani Pulite] with a foreigner's eyes is that everyone had always known that corruption was rife in Italy, many even had the evidence, but until the early 90s nothing was done. It was politically or legally impossible. For years commentators had derisively talked about 'petrodollari' (the money they salted away in offshore accounts thanks to deals cut with the energy industry). Elio Vetri and Gianni Barbacetto had already published Milano degli scandali, Giampaolo Pansa had written Il Malloppo (The Swag). The scandal of 92-94, then, wasn't shocking because of the discovery of corruption; the real shock came in the fact that it was finally possible for the millions of long-suffering, law-abiding Italians to do something about it writes Jones in his exhaustive chapter on Clean Hands in the book aforementioned.*

As we have seen in the first part of this paper, Clean Hands razed to the ground Tangentopoli. Politicians and the traditional political parties tumbled down, as if falling in the dark depths of Martin's 'sublime' picture *The Last Days of his Wrath*, the rage of the Lord for the corruption of mankind the rage of magistrate Antonio Di Pietro, the iconic investigator, the Perry Mason of the righteous in the public mind of those days.

*The Clean Hands pool enjoyed an enormous groundswell of support writes Jones. People began wearing T-Shirts saying 'Milano ladrona, Di Pietro non perdona' ('Thieving Milan, Di Pietro is not forgiving'). Finally it seemed as if those words written in every Italian courtroom, 'La legge è uguale per tutti, 'the law's equal for all', were coming true. Endless graffiti appeared across Italy: 'Grazie Di Pietro ', or 'Forza Colombo' [another investigative magistrate of the pool] (...) Bettino Craxi was showered with coins outside the Hotel Raphael in Rome: 'Do you want these as well?' chanted the mob. Seen from today's point of view, this meant that in those days people cared. The country plunged into the enthusiasm prompted by Clean Hands as if in a rite of collective liberation. With widespread indignation against the corrupt and the corrupters, largely fed by the press, an entire population deluded itself that it could in some way redeem itself of its own vices in the arena of civil ethics.... Of course those were the days before Mediaset, before B.'s WMD, before B.'s occupation of every public space, before its*

propaganda, before the truth was made to disappear, all instruments that has led to today's indifference. At present the mob throwing coins at Craxi in 1992 is just a vanishing recollection, even if, occasionally, the 'moral minority' still gather to demonstrate against il Cavaliere. As we know from part one of this paper, 'B. backed up the investigation through his media empire he already owned and, in doing so, helped to create a political vacuum which he himself would soon occupy, playing the part of the brand new saviour of the country: actually a corrupt system, 'Prima Repubblica' style, was soon re-established. Becoming Prime Minister meant not to end up like his friend Bettino: B. understood, being a man of some genius, that being at the same time entrepreneur and politician, law enforcer and (allegedly) corrupter, like no one had ever been before, and simultaneously controlling media information made him untouchable'.

In March 2011, during B.'s last cabinet, il Cavaliere announced what he called 'an epochal reformation of the Judiciary', an old obsession of his since the beginning of his public life: the submission of the Judiciary to political power was to be Berlusconi's final legacy. A 'plurinquisito' – multi-prosecuted person – planning a reform of the justice system is bizarre in itself, to say the least; in this particular case the reform was planned as a punishment for the magistrates and inevitably it would have ended up as a favour for the criminals. On march 10, during the press conference to present this epochal 'revolution' just approved by his government, Prime Minister Berlusconi said that if this reformation had been approved twenty years before, the Judiciary would not have invaded politics and Mani Pulite would not have existed, giving this statement a positive meaning without realizing the inner sense of the sentence.

(...)

So, as far as Mani Pulite is concerned, in 1994 B. backed it up and took advantage of it in his first victory at the political elections while in 2011 he said that if this reformation had been approved twenty years before, Mani Pulite would not have existed, and that it would have been a general advantage. The reversal of B.'s opinion is clear: today he is in the same position as the accused Prima Repubblica politicians; consequently the understatement is that the blame is not



to be put on corrupt politics, but on the magistrates that fight political corruption and crime, implying the politicians' right to commit offenses and to annihilate the Judiciary. This planned destruction of legality, that in the future will make organized crime less punishable, is taking place in a mafia-infested country. Even if physically B. won't be there, this is really going to be his ultimate legacy, one of the nastiest aspects of Berlusconi's philosophy that is not going to disappear with its inventor, who, politically speaking, has not been completely defeated yet.

Everybody knows that the Tangentopoli system has never died in Italy and that the Mani Pulite investigation and trials put an end to the Prima Repubblica and its ruling parties but not to endemic corruption. On the contrary, Berlusconi's rule helped to create a mood in the country that facilitated the spreading of crooked business since *il Cavaliere* as Prime Minister was felt as actual and philosophical guarantee of non-punishment for illegality. Everyone who can see behind standard regime information knows it. But just to prove it beyond reasonable doubt in February 2014 the European Commission issued its first *Anti-Corruption Report* that stated that half the amount of corruption in the EU – 60 billion euros – is Italian, as I discuss in part three, chapter one. To give further undisputable evidence of the commission's report, two maxi corruption scandals, precise updated blueprints of the original Tangentopoli, exploded in May and June 2014. The first is linked to the 2015 Milan Expo, setting the crime scene in the same city and with the same protagonists since, almost unbelievably, some of the people that were arrested are the very same who had ended up in jail in 1992, a paradox which is only apparent. The second is the *Mose* scandal in Venice, a corruption case in the rich hard-labouring God-fearing North-East, an area that, socially speaking, is still deeply Victorian, with its façade *perbenismo*, its fake respectability and its hypocrisy. (...)