

BOOKS. The State of a Nation Just Before “The Great Beauty”

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First published in Italian in 2010, well before the world-wide success of *La Grande Bellezza*, this debut novel from one of Italy’s most famous movie directors is a brilliant cockeyed state-of-the-nation address that captures the brand of Italian modernity after the years of “Berlusconification.”

As the Italian daily [la Repubblica](#) [2] commented, “Sorrentino uses this novel to deal with Italy’s unstoppable descent into today’s dazed, corrupted and tragically foolish reality.”

In a fast-moving, [Raymond Chandler](#) [3] type plot, *Everybody’s Right* tells the story of Tony Pagoda, a talentless Neapolitan crooner, cokehead, and male chauvinist who succeeds in gaining the cheap fame of the kind promised in the [Berlusconi](#) [4] era—including fame, money, and the saucy accessibility of 18-year-olds (or sometimes younger) aspiring newscasters and dancing girls.

At the peak of his glory, Sorrentino’s quintessential anti-hero seems to muster the secret of mundane success, when he cynically reflects: “Only those that nobody wants to listen to have careers. It’s more convenient. That way the people, the public, who haven’t achieved much in their lives, can feel better about their own failure by seeing themselves reflected in the fellow up there on



stage, just a few metres higher than them.”

Indeed his success stretches over borders and across the seas. But somewhere things begin to go awry, the public’s tastes in music is changing. Tony decides to leave the music world and start over, making a clean break with the past, traveling through Brazil and South America in search of a new life for himself.

Here, his peculiar vision of the world, irreversibly shaped by those years in which enjoyed the adoration of audiences the world over, is under assault. The world strikes him as a barren place that is completely at odds with his understanding of it.

In the final chapters, back to his country as the house singer for a Berlusconi stand-in, Tony ends up in a life of infinite license, where “everybody’s right.” Yet he remains cursed by his special brand of integrity—or we should better say naivety, as he realizes that, beyond the villas of the superrich, “it’s all just one huge rape.”

Which masterfully brings us back to the conclusion of the very first chapter, set in Manhattan where Pagoda meets idol Frank Sinatra, and ends up first serviced and then robbed by a trio of Times Square whores. “Why don’t things like that ever happen to Frank Sinatra? Maybe because he doesn’t go around picking up whores in Times Square.”

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- [1] <http://test.casaitaliananyu.org/files/thegreatbeauty1403645650jpg>
- [2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Repubblica
- [3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raymond_Chandler
- [4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silvio_Berlusconi