

## Morandi's Italian Job: Nationalising Italy's First Heir

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“When reading in *My Prisons* by Pellico the story of Maroncelli’s poor leg, tears came to [Vittorio Emanuele III’s] eyes, and he burst into an exclamation of scorn, which obliged me to remind him of our present good relations with Austria. It was easy to build upon such foundations of culture, intelligence and heart.”

This extract from the memoirs of Luigi Morandi, who taught the young heir to the Italian throne, is only one of many anecdotes that reflect Vittorio Emanuele’s (1868-1946) innate “Italianness”. The book mentioned, *My Prisons*, published in 1832, was the autobiography of a *carbonaro* (i.e. freemason): Silvio Pellico was arrested by Austrian troops in Milan because of his ideals of Italian patriotism and desire to free the Italian nation from foreign rule. A bestseller in the nineteenth century, the book toed the post-unification government’s line of thought, insisting, as it did, that a unified Italy, freed from the impostors that had ruled it for centuries, was inevitable. Pellico and his friend Maroncelli, who had suffered incarceration for their fervent patriotism, sacrificed their freedom for the *patria* and Maroncelli even lost a leg during his imprisonment. The bravery and pure *amor di patria* displayed in the memoirs is the very stuff that post-Risorgimento education in Italy focused on. Vittorio Emanuele’s emotional reaction, as



though unable to contain his intrinsic patriotic feelings, is Morandi’s way of showing that the prince’s sentiments regarding Italy were pure and he was aware, from a young age, of his link to his people and duty to his country. Not only was the education of the heir key in turning him into the first Italian-born king, but it also framed the laws and curricula that were created for the primary education of the masses.

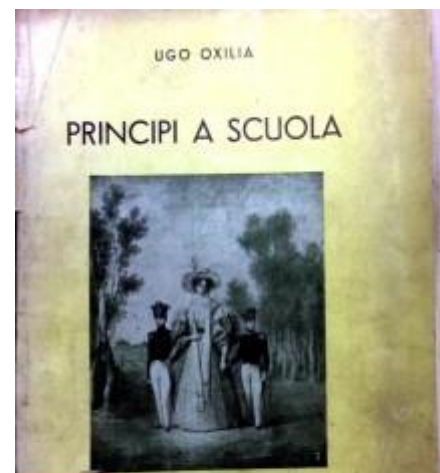
Young Vittorio Emanuele III (Museo del Risorgimento, Milano, 30110).

The instruction received by the young Vittorio Emanuele played an important role in differentiating him from his Piedmontese predecessors. It framed his future in the new national narrative. Unlike him, his father and grandfather had not been extensively educated, focusing more on military training. In the Savoia tradition schooling a future ruler was not seen as a vital component.

In fact, in 1882 Umberto I, who was attending Vittorio Emanuele’s exam session, was surprised both by the range of his son’s curriculum, as well as the child’s deferential behaviour towards his academic tutors. The Court Chaplain retorted that the king’s consternation was to be expected seeing as during his own childhood Umberto and his younger brother Amedeo, ‘commanded; the tutor sitting on a chair, [the princes] sitting in an armchair... and they would study only when they felt like it.’ Umberto’s education was consequently relatively unsuccessful and it was later noted that the king felt very uncomfortable when having to sign his own name in the presence of others.

Even Vittorio Emanuele II – the ‘father of the fatherland,’ the hero of the *Risorgimento* – was famed for his lack of educational sophistication. Aside from the fact that he did not speak Italian very well, preferring the Piedmontese dialect and French (most of his correspondence being in the latter language), he was also seen as a ‘mediocre scholar.’ A 1900 publication, *I Principi a Scuola* (The Princes at School), which was part children’s book, part manual, told the story of how Vittorio Emanuele II and his brother Ferdinando were educated during their childhood. The book’s moral comes as a separate final chapter, where the author duly states that:

“Vittorio Emanuele was extraordinary in everything he did, and thus managed to be a great King even though he was only a mediocre scholar. But you, o child of Italy, that are not Vittorio Emanuele, will not be a good citizen, you will not be a good Italian, if you are not a good scholar.”



Oxilia’s book on Vittorio Emanuele II’s education, “The Princes at School” (1900) (Museo del Risorgimento, Milano, 11360).

Although the book suggested that monarchs did not need a thorough education, the way in which Vittorio Emanuele III's schooling was organised was very different from that of previous Savoia rulers. Naturally, the focus on the military education was not neglected and Vittorio Emanuele served his time in various military academies, first in his native city of Naples and then in Florence. However, the approach taken to his early schooling was more varied than the traditional Savoia one. Although directed by Colonel Osio, a veteran of the Risorgimento wars, the prince's education also involved teachers with a civilian background – like Luigi Morandi.

Morandi was born in Umbria in 1844 and had become an Italian teacher by the age of nineteen. Early in his career he taught at various schools and he was very active in engaging with students. He set up evening classes in the towns where he taught and even started his own newspaper, *L'Umbria e le Marche*. His activities and dedication were noticed by the Court and, in 1881, he was appointed as the Italian teacher of the heir to the throne. He spent the next five years at the child's side and, in 1901, after Umberto's assassination and Vittorio Emanuele's accession to the throne, Morandi published a collection of his memoirs during his time as the new King's tutor: *Come fu educato Vittorio Emanuele* (How Vittorio Emanuele was educated, 1901).



Luigi Morandi, Vittorio Emanuele's Italian teacher 1881-86 (Museo del Risorgimento, Milano, Opuscolo 8916).

This book, published just after Vittorio Emanuele's accession, was supposed to shed light on a prince who had previously avoided public attention. Helen Zimmern, who published *Italian Leaders of To-Day* in 1915, claimed that the prince could not be called popular, because of this reticence, but that according to Queen Victoria he was 'the most promising of all the heirs to European thrones.' The

attempt to familiarise Italy's reading public with their new ruler seem to only be the continuation of a nationalisation of the country's history, making it "Italian" and Savoia-centric, which had begun post-unification. The trend was reflected both in Vittorio Emanuele's individual education and in that which was imparted on the masses.

Luigi Morandi's book shows that the Italian curriculum followed by the young prince was made up of a canon of "Italian" works, which defined Italy before it was even Italy. He had focused on the works of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, all composed long before unification (in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century), and all written in Florentine, which – according to Alessandro Manzoni – was the purest form of the Italian language.

Manzoni was a nineteenth century Italian novelist, author of *The Betrothed* (1827), and one of the appointed members of the commission for the unification of language in post-1860 Italy. Moreover, the intense focus on the grammar, spelling and pronunciation of Italian during the five years of Morandi's teaching is one of the themes that runs through his memoirs, again and again, highlighting the importance of the language itself for creating an 'Italian' monarch.

In one account Morandi describes Colonel Osio's reaction to a mistake made by the prince in his written assessment: "On the morning of 9 December 1882, namely after a year and a few days that the Prince had begun studying the Italian language and was practicing his writing, the Colonel saw in his work a spelling mistake, one of those spelling mistakes that, as he repeatedly stated, no matter how insignificant, were enough to discredit a man's reputation.' In fact, Osio's harsh ways caused him to berate the royal student continuously. On one such occasion he made it clear that "both the son of a King and the son of a cobbler can be dunces!" Not even the son of a King could be above stupidity.

This treatment was part of Prince's education. Osio believed that he should not be treated in any special way, rather that he had to understand and appreciate his own position of responsibility. Similarly to Wilhelm II's tutor, Georg Hinzpeter, Osio believed in 'Spartan ways' of education and that privilege would not help the Prince develop into a convincing leader. Osio instructed Morandi never to make his pupil's life comfortable: if there was a book he needed then the Prince should stand up and get it himself. Once Morandi, who was running late, picked the book the Prince was to study from the shelf and placed it, open, on his desk in order to speed things up. Seeing this, Osio took the book and returned it to its place. The



Colonel Osio, the prince's tutor  
(Museo del Risorgimento, Milano, 89).

Prince then got up and went to get it. Such were the lengths to which Osio was willing to go in order to make sure that the Prince would never take his position for granted. On another occasion, when the Prince was sick, Osio made him go on his daily ride regardless of his cold. When Morandi tried to stop him, Osio replied: ‘And if we went to war tomorrow, would the Prince not ride because of his cold?’ Thus severity and discipline were key factors of his education, and although harsh, Morandi did see worth in the idea since the Prince was ‘well-aware of the singular obligations that the singularity of his position imposed upon him.’

In the same way that the young Prince was being taught his moral duty to his people, school curricula were being written in order to teach pupils their civic duty to their nation. The choice of history texts, which focused heavily on the Risorgimento and in the period between 1870 and 1890 gave a particularly Savoia-centric account of the



happenings, were meant to mould the students into ideal citizens. Even the written syllabi took on strong nationalist and monarchic tones, defining both Italy and the schoolchildren using predominantly all-inclusive language: Italy is *our Patria*, the *patria* of all *us* is dear Italy, *we are* Italians. The monarchy also played a role in national instruction. In Giuseppe Fiandra's *Sillabario figurato per l'insegnamento simultaneo della Lettura e scrittura, ad uso della prima classe elementare* (1889) he portrays the King as the figure who enables education:

The front page of Morandi's memoirs, "How Vittorio Emanuele III was Educated" (1901) (Museo del Risorgimento, Milano, 30110).

The portrait of the King reminds us that he, *like a father*, provides us with our education so that we can become virtuous men in order to be useful to our families and to the *patria*. In another syllabus, the focus is on Queen Margherita and the fact that she ‘loves us children very much...’ and that the freedom that the Savoia won for Italy can only be rewarded through the students’ nationalised schooling.

Thus, the curricula and syllabi were political tools in the same way that Vittorio Emanuele’s own education had been determined by the politics of court. Morandi’s role was to make the Prince as “Italian” as possible in order that he could then become a

pervasive symbol of “Italianness.” Throughout his memoirs in fact, he recounts episodes, like the one described at the very beginning of this piece, where the Prince demonstrates passionate patriotism and the awareness of his intrinsic “Italian” soul. Morandi also highlights various acts of the Prince’s bravery, to clarify that although reserved he did possess the House of Savoia’s mythical traits. In 1885, for example, he was injured by an explosion in a university lab, and those present were very impressed by the prince’s *sang froid*. Moreover, his sense of duty was also underlined and Morandi proudly recounts how the boy refused to be promoted in the army because of his background – he instead demanded to be promoted by merit, just like everyone else.

Morandi was also at pains to show that the Prince was not a simple-minded personality. Although his schooling included a focus on his family’s history and their role in the unification, the boy still managed to display a sharp mind. In 1886, as Morandi explains, the prince presented a thesis on his ancestor, Carlo Alberto and ‘he spoke at great length of [his] virtues and shortcomings (...), like the most impartial of historians would have done (...) after all, his education was informed by the cult of truth...’. This display of critical thinking (in fluent Italian, naturally) was supposed to paint the picture of a just and thoughtful monarch, who, though linked to tradition, was nevertheless prepared successfully to lead the country into the twentieth century.

For a number of reasons Morandi’s memoirs must be read with caution. Despite the fact that most contemporary characterisations of the prince were not as positive as his and many believed him to be both dull and completely obsessed with his diminutive stature, Morandi recounts the story of a quiet but intelligent boy, capable of sharp thinking and affection, inquisitive and bound by duty. These were, according to his narrative, the characteristics that an “Italian” heir should strive for. The portrait thus paints a clear picture of what the court and parliament believed a modern monarch should embody. Not only does it give us insight into contemporary interpretations of monarchy, the timing of the memoirs’ publication and the compliment-strewn nature of his writings also show the attempts made in order to make the new King better known to his people. By telling the stories of his childhood Vittorio Emanuele would become more endearing, more human, and thus closer to the Italians.



Overall, despite the not wholly truthful narrative and alterations that might have occurred in Morandi's recollections, the memoirs provide a rich insight into what was expected of an "Italian" heir and how central the nationalisation of the royal image was. However, whether or not these expectations were met and the Prince was successfully Italianised is a completely different story.

The Prince of Naples in military uniform (Museo del Risorgimento, Milano, 30110).

#### Further reading:

- Alessandro Manzoni, "Dell'Unità della Lingua e dei Mezzi di Diffonderla," in *Opere Varie*, (Fratelli Rechiedei Editori, 1881)
- Luigi Morandi, *Come fu educato Vittorio Emanuele*, (Ditta G. B. Paravia e Comp., 1901),  
<https://archive.org/stream/comefueducatovit00mora#page/n5/mode/2up>
- Elisa de Roberto, "Lingua Nazionale, Lingua Materna e Costruzione Identitaria nei Sillabari Ottocenteschi," in Annalisa Nesi, Silvia Morgana, Nicoletta Maraschio, eds., *Storia della Lingua Italiana e Storia dell'Italia Unita*, Associazione per la Storia della Lingua Italiana (ASLI); Atti del IX Convegno ASLI (Firenze, 2-4 Dicembre 2010), (Franco Cesati Editore, 2011), pp.255-267.
- John C. G. Röhl, "Education Fit for a King," in *Young Wilhelm: The Kaiser's Early Life, 1859-1888*, (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.116-142.
- Helen Zimmern, *Italian Leaders of To-Day*, (Williams and Norgate, 1915)

**Citation:** Maria-Christina Marchi: Morandi's Italian Job: Nationalising Italy's First Heir, AHRC-Project "Heirs to the Throne in the Constitutional Monarchies of Nineteenth-Century Europe (1815-1914)", "Heir of the Month", June 2014.

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