

So Who Has the Last Laugh?

Judith Harris (November 07, 2010)



Some are saying that the Italian political situation is so surreal that it defeats any attempt at humor. They should think again. The comics are having a field day, and maybe a good laugh is just what's needed

ROME - Maurizio Crozza, in an appearance on the TV talk show [Ballarò](#) [2], acknowledged that it's hard to top reality: "Just put yourself in the place of the Milan police chief. It's 2 am somebody phones you to say that a dental assistant is coming to pick up the niece of the president of Egypt." Crozza went on to speculate over Mr. Berlusconi's having been asked to open a national conference



on family values this coming Monday. “This,” opined Crozza, “ is like having Hannibal Lector open a conference on vegetarianism, or like Lele Mora inaugurating the Liturgical year, or Bersani talking to a congress of workers.” (This latter is particularly wicked.)

[Roberto Benigni](#) [3] offered a few helpful if uninvited hints to the beleaguered Premier:

“Silvio, I’ve got an idea, I’m talking to you like your buddy. I know you want to be greater than Ceasar—so to do it you have to disappear like [reclusive pop singer] Mina or Greta Garbo. Just don’t be seen any more. Don’t go only to Switzerland, go further, maybe New Zealand, or a lost island. And take Apicella with you, send us a song, I’ll sing it myself.... That’ll make you into a myth, like God. Your image—why, they’ll write your name on the buses. Like the atheist bus that says GOD ISN’T THERE, we’ll say BERLUSCONI ISN’T THERE. You’ll be mythical.”

Then there’s reporter Paolo Ogetti’s description of Berlusconi’s speech to his faithful on Nov. 3 in a Rome auditorium. “It was like a very forgettable production of Macbeth, with the audience staying on till the bitter end, but only out of politeness.”

Not to be left behind, the perennial bad boy (and culture vulture genius) Vittorio Sgarbi gave an interview in which he boasted about his own cheerily overt libertinism. Mr. Berlusconi long ago reproached Sgarbi for it, but then, inspired by Sgarbi himself (so says Sgarbi), belatedly joined in.

And then there’s the faithful Emilio Fede, companion of TV broadcasts and broads. Fede (it translates to “Fido”) may not have meant it as a joke, but here’s what the director of TG 4, a Berlusconi channel, said to journalist Lorenzo Galeazzi: “The Premier is single. Since he lost his mother his life has become much sadder. If he wants to have a bit of fun one evening a week I don’t see any harm in it.”

Who has the last laugh? Perhaps Mr. Berlusconi himself, in the sense that his own (politically incorrect when not just plain vulgar) jokes have just been collected and analyzed by Simone Barillari in *Il re che ride* (published this week by Marsilio)—The King Who Laughs. One unusually innocuous example: “How does Umberto Bossi make love to his wife? La lega (he ties her up). Bossi, of course, is the head of the [Northern League—La Lega](#) [4]. The author links Mr. Berlusconi’s style of jesting with a serious analysis of how he has used these to win the consensus that has marked his four rounds of government, at least until now.

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