

Italian Culture from 1900-1929

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Italian culture in the twentieth century was shaped by many different factors. There were several changes in the political system in Italy at this time. Examples of the movements would be Futurism and Fascism to the government that Italy has had after the fall of Fascism in 1945. There was also the introduction of radio, movies, and other technological advances. Both World War One and World War two also help shape the Italian culture.

It is always interesting to study how different regions or cultures experience change. How they welcome the change is always different even within a country. It can differ from city to city and even household to household. Urban centers views often differ greatly from that of rural regions.

Exploring the differences between urban centers and rural regions will be the focus of the first portion of this paper. Shifting then to how Futurism changed the urban areas and also how Futurism set Italy apart from other areas that had Futurist movements. Then the paper will be discussing the impact that the First World War had on Italy, the rise of Fascism and Mussolini in the between the wars period. In 1932 the Great Crisis hit Italy's economy hard as it did everywhere else around the globe. How Italy got involved in the Second World War are ways that this paper could have discussed and expanded as well as the aftermath of the Second World War, such as the Economic Miracle, 1950-1970.

Several secondary sources were used to write this paper. The Oxford History of Italy had four excellent essays that were found to be very beneficial. A few of the JSTOR articles were helpful as well but not nearly as informative as the essays.

Adrian Lyttleton's essay "Politics and Society, 1870-1915" as found in the Oxford History of Italy was very useful in understanding the beginning of the twentieth century in Italy. She provides insight into the political events that led Italy into the First World War. She describes how the North viewed Giolitti differently than the South did. She also explores how Italian nationalism and the Libyan War (1911) undermined Giolitti's leadership.

Paul Corner's essay "Italy 1915-1945: Politics and Society" discusses just that, politics and society during the First and Second World Wars. He goes into detail about the First World War saying that during this war Italy was really fighting two wars: one against Austria and then Germany in 1916 and then a civil war because of civil unrest in the political sphere. He also discusses the rise of Fascism until 1922 when a Fascist government took office. He talks about the Great Crisis of 1932 and the affects that it had not only on the people but also the government and their policies. He then talks about the new Italian Empire gaining control over Ethiopia while the Fascist government was seeking recognition of being a new world power in the period following the First World War. He also discusses the fact that Mussolini had a

personal diplomacy with Hitler and how the Italian government began to resemble the German government; this personal diplomacy with Hitler dragged Italy into the Second World War¹.

David Foragac's essay "Twentieth-Century Culture" in the Oxford History of Italy was also very helpful in describing how the culture changed during the twentieth-century. He starts off by discussing the differences between the rural regions and the urban centers. However he begins talking about what is happening in the urban centers and neglects the rural regions in his essay. He provides little detail about the relationship between the urban centers and rural regions. He gives an overview of the Futurist art movement and he also tells how Fascism had an affect on art in Italy. He also provides some information about the trends after the Second World War.

David Hine's essay "Italy since 1945" can also be found in the Oxford History of Italy. He explores the modern economy and the reconstruction that took place in Italy after the Second World War. The "Italian Miracle", the economic boom period which happened in between 1950-1970, is also explored by approaching the affects this event had on the individual, the society as a whole, and the politics at that time. He also discusses the Social and political changes that were sparked because of the Vietnam War, thus leading to civil unrest.

¹ This contradicts what Dr. Angelos said in a lecture in Italian history on April 27, 2004. He stated that Italy found a loophole in the diplomacy and found a way out of going to war allied with the Germans. At first the Italians declared neutrality and then entered the war in September 1940 when they invade Egypt and are defeated by the British Army.

After reading the articles found on JSTOR, it was a disappointment to find that, while the articles were interesting, they provided very little help in the type of research needed for this paper. The website that was used for gathering primary sources was from Brigham Young University and they had large selection of documents, but the only documents that were in the correct time period were one's that had very little to do with the culture or the "common people" of Italy. Most of these documents were political agreements and the Italian Constitution.

The culture of Italy changed greatly in the twentieth century, not only due to the two world wars fought in the first half of this century, but because of the different political structures and their changes over this time period; political structures as Fascism and Modernism as well. The economy changed much more for Northern Italy than it did for Southern Italy. Southern Italy found itself slipping further and further behind technologically than Northern Italy. The gap between the urban centers and the rural regions grew wider than it had previously been². However, the use of local dialects have decreased since the 1960s³

The urban centers grew more quickly than rural regions. At the turn of the twentieth-century there were strong boundaries between the urban centers and rural regions.⁴ The people who lived in the urban centers looked down upon those who lived out in the rural areas. They,

² David Forgacs. "Twentieth Century Culture," in The Oxford History of Italy, ed. George Holmes. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). 291

³ Forgacs, 291

⁴ Forgacs, 291

the urbanites, viewed all rural people to be backwards, primitive and remote. The urbanites felt this more strongly as they looked at Southern Italy.⁵

In the Socialist party of Italy the members saw this backwardness as a hindrance for their expansion into the countryside. They made vows to eradicate illiteracy, raising the rural people to culture, and spreading culture from the towns out.⁶ These urban people and the members of the Socialist party failed to realize that these rural people were not uncultured but simply cultured in a different way. While the rural people may be less formally educated than those who live in the urban centers; they do possess an education on how to farm and grow food for the very same urban people who look down upon them. These urban centers also looked to the country side for labor and not just for food, thus leading to the urban centers and rural regions to become dependent on one another.⁷

In urban areas Italians had more access to more forms of commercial entertainment than did rural Italians. Among the forms of commercial entertainment was that of movies. In the time before the Second World War movies were extremely popular in the urban centers.⁸ In 1927 the cinema box office receipts accounted for fifty percent of the revenue of all spectator

⁵ Forgacs, 292

⁶ Forgacs, 292

⁷ Forgacs, 292

⁸ Forgacs, 293

events. In 1936 the percentage was raised to seventy and by 1941 the percentage raised to eighty-three percent of all revenue taken in by spectator events.⁹

The Futurist movement was started before the First World War in Milan by animator, writer Filippo Tomaso Marinetti (1876-1944). It developed out of a liaison between Italian artists and French culture.¹⁰ Italian Futurism promoted strong nationalism and embraced militarism, colonialism. Futurism self promoted its values and placed high emphasis on speed, thus placing industrialized communities against rural communities. The Futurists also promoted a modern movement in an old country with very few modern cities. The Futurists claimed to be a cult of youth and aggression and by doing so they separated themselves from other Futurism movements. The Futurism movement came to an end by the beginning of the First World War.¹¹

Italy entered with great enthusiasm into the First World War in May of 1915. Italy soon realized that it had entered into the war unprepared both materially and psychologically. Soon the nation that was never completely united felt divisions among itself. Corner points out that “among all the victorious powers in the First World War, no country was so tested by the experience of war.”¹² Italy helped the allies in a minor way but when it came to negotiations at Versailles Italy received very little for their effort. The Socialist Party organizers viewed Italy’s

⁹ Forgacs, 295

¹⁰ Forgacs, 297

¹¹ Forgacs, 298

¹² Paul Corner. “Italy 1915-1945: Politics and Society,” in *The Oxford History of Italy*, ed. George Holmes. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). 264

effort in the First World War as a useless slaughter.¹³ Many men died during the war effort and to get little out of the negotiations, Italy received very little reparations or land from the Treaty of Versailles.

Beginning in 1922 Fascism was on the rise. This movement was also had its origins in Milan. It began in March of 1919 and the movement was saved by Mussolini in 1920 when the black shirts were organized. They were sent out to the countryside to beat up and murder the leaders of the socialist farm-workers' movement.¹⁴ By 1922 the black shirts controlled much of Northern Italy. While in power Mussolini began to promote himself and his views by the way of all media outlets. He also was beginning to control the media and what they published. He gave businesses that supported him by the way of kickbacks.

The Great Crisis hit Italy in 1932, later than anywhere else in the world. The Great Crisis seemed less severe in Italy because it was still primarily an agricultural based society. The Fascist regime pushed people back into the countryside insisting that they could find work there. They viewed that "rural underemployment was politically less dangerous than urban unemployment."¹⁵ There were very few riots in Italy during the Great Crisis because of the methods used by the police, black shirts, order was well established. The Great Crisis forced changes in the Fascist government's policies. They had to realize that Italy was in no position to

¹³ Corner, 268

¹⁴ Corner, 269

¹⁵ Corner, 277

become a self-sufficient country and did not have the capabilities to expand their country. The lower classes slipped farther down while industrialists profited, often at the expense of the lower classes.

In 1929 Mussolini united Church and state after nearly 70 years of conflict. This was seen as a victory for the Fascist party and the Church received Vatican City as a gift for their agreement to recognize the state. This agreement was called the Concordat.

Italy has gone through many changes in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Many of them beneficial to society but some were harmful. The large number of Italian men who sacrificed their lives in the First World War was devastating to society. This paper could have obviously been expanded to cover more of the twentieth century. Jumping into how Italy got involved with the Second World War could be discussed and the time and changes during and after the war are also interesting.

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