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BOOK REVIEWS

Bonsaver, Guido. *America in Italian Culture: The Rise of a New Model of Modernity, 1861–1943.* Oxford: Legenda. 2023. Pp. 576. ISBN 978-0-1988-4946-9 (hardcover) \$155.

Guido Bonsaver's new book, *America in Italian Culture*, focuses on the process of Americanization of Italian culture in the years between Italy's Unification and the Fall of Fascism (1861–1943). It explores the connections between "the transnational and the totalitarian" to examine the "cultural make-up of Italians" (viii). It does so by analyzing the cultural exchange between Italy and the USA and by focusing primarily on the Italian national and socio-political context. The book is divided into two parts, a logical choice of such a line of inquiry. This categorisation assists readers in understanding the intricate political and cultural evolution of Italian society and its mixed yet enduring fascination with "America."

Part 1, "The Discovery of America, 1861–1919," examines the reception in Italy of early American cultural imports, from the myth of America to the discovery of jazz music. Part 2, "American Culture in Fascist Italy, 1922–1943," focuses on the fascination with American culture and products in the years of Fascist rule. Both parts are further divided into five chapters, each addressing one specific aspect of American culture in Italy. The organization of the material in a chronological order aids the reader in navigating a vast corpus that would otherwise appear overwhelming.

Bonsaver adopts a multidisciplinary approach to observe the reception of American cultural and economic power in different cultural domains. More specifically, he uses a transnational framework enriched by Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony. Semiotics and contact linguistics, as well as reception theory, provide further strength to the analysis of the six cultural fields examined in the book: periodicals, literature, film, music, radio, and comics. Together with complementary topics, like the knowledge and dissemination of the English language, the spreading of other American products and models, such as architecture, technology, and philosophy, this makes for an all-rounded analysis that has the merit of filling a gap in the field of the history of the relationship between Italy and the USA. At the same time, Bonsaver's book offers a comprehensive overview of academic works on the importance of American culture in modern Italy,

guiding the readers through a complex topic and clearly setting his own work within a rich academic framework.

The two parts of the book are further organized thematically, with chapters communicating with each other and linking the two very different historical phases of one of the most turbulent periods of Italian history in a smooth transition. After exploring Italian culture and political outlook at the end of the unification process (chapter 1), part 1 addresses the perception of the USA in Italy (chapter 2) and leads the readers into the development of Italian mass culture (chapter 3). It then explores the cultural exchange between the two countries in literary production (chapter 4) and the dissemination of jazz music (chapter 5), providing a detailed look at American influence in unified Italy and providing examples for a better appreciation of the reception of American culture in a modernizing Italian society. Part 2 focuses on the years of Fascist rule (1922–43) and starts with an examination of the connections between “America” and “modernity” as perceived in Italy (chapter 6). The cultural themes analyzed in this section contribute to an understanding of the development of Italian mass culture. The first theme is American literature (chapter 7) and includes an examination of comics and a reflection on the use of the English language, focusing in particular on its significance in Italian literature and culture in general. Once again jazz finds its space. Particular attention is also paid to the relationship of the Futurists with the new genre that changed the world of music (chapter 8); this part’s thematic analysis ends with the regime’s interest in the film industry and the influence and appeal of Hollywood and American film production (chapter 9). Part 2 concludes with the examination of the final years of the Fascist regime (chapter 10) and is divided into two sections: one addresses the coexistence of American culture and an increasingly controlling cultural policy as inspired by Nazi Germany; the other focuses on the impact of foreign-language policies in the dissemination of American cultural products (literature, comics, music, and cinema).

Some aspects of the rich cultural exchange that characterized the relationship between Italy and the USA had to be left aside, mainly fine arts and material culture. Bonsaver does not fall short of explaining his selection, primarily driven by the chosen timespan. There is no doubt that much remains yet to be said about the impact of American culture on Italian culture and society, and the lack of these two fields might leave some readers dissatisfied. Nonetheless, the richness of the themes addressed by the book and the presence of many illustrations that accompany each theme make up for

any absences. In fact, Bonsaver's monograph is well balanced and provides in-depth insights despite the extended timeframe considered and the vast corpus analyzed.

Bonsaver presents the achievements and limitations of a research field that has a lot to tell us on the development of modern Italian culture and society, and it does so with in-depth research and detailed examples. *America in Italian Culture* is thus a valuable addition to the literature, offering reflections on the influence of American culture and the way that anti-Americanism developed fueled by Fascist policies and restrictions. The fascination with "America" emerges in its complexity and ambivalence, projecting a myth that still echoes in today's Italian society and culture.

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