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Pueyrredón raised a storm of protest when he banned Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* at the request of the foreign minister who was trying to chart a neutral course in wartime.

Walter demonstrates effectively that local government had an instrumental role in building Buenos Aires before the Second World War, particularly in regard to the creation of a leading transportation infrastructure and the sometimes frantic pace of construction. While those interested in urban culture may be disappointed, Walter follows through expertly on his stated objectives.

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Adamson, Walter L. *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism.* (Studies in Cultural History). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. Pp. xiv, 338. 12 illustrations, bibliography, index. $39.95 (US).

That beautiful medieval Florence, with its magnificent museums and glorious architecture, should have been a fascist stronghold well before Mussolini's march on Rome in October 1922 seems to suggest a painful contradiction. History, beauty, and good taste do not cohabit, some of us still like to think, with vulgarity, brashness, and violence. Uffizi and squadristi belong neither in the same city nor in the same sentence. Yet, through Walter Adamson's fine study of a group of Florentine intellectuals—the circle that founded and dominated the cultural reviews *Leonardo*, *La Voce*, and *Lacerba* - we discover, yet again, how former definitions and distinctions have collapsed in our century and how, whether we like it or not, modernism and fascism are indeed related phenomena.

It is that very collapse of fixity and form and the advent of a new fluidity and transience that in the end characterizes the modern experience. The optimists of course put a positive gloss on all this; they talk of emancipation rather than *dis*integration, of vitality, not nihilism. Like their intellectual confrères elsewhere, the turn-of-the-century Florentine avant-garde—represented here primarily by Giovanni Papini, Giuseppe Prezzolini, and Ardengo Soffici—argued that beauty and violence, thought and action, history and actualism, were not opposites but merely the sterile categories of a rationalism whose time was up. The alternative to that rationalism and its lowbrow appendage, sentimentalism, was a cult of youth, action, genius, hardness, and spiritual renewal, through which the old categories and moral confusion would be transcended and a new age, purer and bolder, would dawn. Indicative of the approach was Soffici's interpretation of Papini's physical ugliness as "beauty at a higher level."

If the morally bankrupt compromise politics of Giolittian Italy and the endless tourist invasions of their Tuscan homeland made these men apoplectic, the war in Libya in 1911–12 against the Turks gave them a taste of violence as "spiritual educator" and made their mood apocalyptic. The excitement, danger, and intensity of that war induced visions of what Papini called "a true Dreamland." When less than two years later all-out European war erupted, with its potential for revolutionary change but with Italy initially on the sidelines, all three writer-performers became ardent interventionists. Civilization, they said, had to be plunged into barbarism in order to reinvigorate itself.

Italy of course jumped alliances in May 1915, joined the Entente, and experienced the Great War fully, its horror, dislocation, and frustration. If the war did not become the "magnificent event" that Prezzolini had hoped for, ineffable and incredible it nevertheless was. As such it intensified the dissatisfaction with the old order, its values and its politics, particularly when, after the peace treaties, the Italian victory became politically as well as morally suspect.

Mussolini acknowledged his debt to the Florentine cultural critics, especially Prezzolini. He had read, applauded, and even contributed to their journals. Their response to him and his movement was not without ambiguity, but, as Adamson rightly points out, any attempt to translate into practical, and invariably mundane, political terms the "militant idealism" of these intellectuals was bound to elicit skepticism from them. Still, if thought and action were one and the same, as the Florentine avant-garde, together with the premier philosopher of fascism, Giovanni Gentile, were wont to claim, then Benito Mussolini, in all his vital and vulgar splendour, was their brainchild.

Adamson's study is, despite its title, less about Florence than about some influential thinkers who happened to reside in Florence. Based on extensive research in primary sources, written with clarity and verve, it is an important contribution to the debate on modernism and deserves attention.

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