

ABSTRACT

The 1940s are undoubtedly the years most neglected by scholars of Italian Futurism. The movement had long supported Fascism, but its vocal endorsement of Mussolini's regime and its military adventures at this time is widely considered to represent Futurism's ultimate betrayal of those 'progressive', counter-cultural values popularly associated with the avant-garde. For many, the movement's apparent engagement with the forces of reaction and conservatism is reflected in the work produced by its artists throughout the war years, which is invariably presented in terms of propaganda imagery, characterised by an unchallenging and retrogressive figurative vocabulary. However, this thesis argues that the 1940s cannot be said to reveal a rupture in either the ideological or aesthetic foundations of the movement, and that common assumptions regarding the crude, rhetorical and one-dimensional nature of Futurist painting (and poetry) during this period are not necessarily borne out by the works themselves.

The text also examines the movement's status within the cultural establishment at this time. It challenges the notion that the reverberations within Italy of Nazism's campaign against modern art during the late 1930s were irrevocably to prejudice the Fascist regime and its institutions against Futurism. Indeed, it is argued that one can no more consider the 1940s a period of decline from the point of view of the movement's political fortunes than one can from an artistic perspective.

Of course, Futurism did not survive the war. However, it is suggested that whilst the cataclysmic events of 1943-44 were to seal its fate, they also served to liberate the imaginations of Marinetti and his followers, reawakening the movement's original, visionary spirit, and inspiring a final burst of creativity that anticipated 'the future of Futurism'.