

HUI216

Italian Civilization

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0.1 The class Web site

- <http://www.campo7.com/hui216>
- What you will find there
 - announcements and assignments
 - a detailed calendar
 - an outline and notes for each lecture
 - many of the required readings
 - the syllabus
 - the topics for the paper, bibliographical references, and suggestions for further research

0.1 Contact information

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1.1 Differences among Italians

- Different areas of Italy have different languages and different cultures because their histories were different, even though their destinies were affected by the same crucial events at one point or another
- Their political institutions, the official languages, the economies and even the school systems, to name just a few components, have been different for a very long time
 - Consider the difficult relationship between Northerners and Southerners: more about this in the next slides
- Before 1861, for example, Neapolitan was the official language used in the kingdom of Naples, used in official documents and at the court
- Until 1797 the Republic of Venice, in its official documents and laws, used a language which was a mix of Tuscan and Venetian, with a few Latin words and expressions interspersed in it

1.1 The South and the North of Italy

- Even when we talk about the South and the North as well-defined entities we are really making too broad a generalization
 - If you consider the regions in the North of Italy, only the modern political party called Northern league can believe that all the regions of the Po valley have a common identity and share common historical denominators
- The reality is that even when you consider a very small parcel of Italian land, you will usually find noticeable differences, and this will be clearer to you next week, after you read a presentation of some travelogues written by British and American travelers, who went to Tuscany between the end of the 19th-century and the beginning of the 20th century
 - Those travelers indeed believed that the inhabitants of Tuscan towns and villages separated by just a few miles belonged to different ethnic groups, that their cultural differences corresponded to different racial identities!

1.1 The South and the North of Italy (2)

- Social and economic differences between North and South in Italy were largely determined by the different history of the two areas of the Italian peninsula
- Contrary to common belief, those differences have little to do with the level of education
- In fact, depending on the areas of the North and the South that you choose to compare, you find that small towns in Apulia or Sicily may have a much higher percentage of people with a diploma or a university degree
- The phenomenon is produced exactly by the limited possibilities that the economy offers in some local areas: many people from the South have to depend on their education to find a job either with governmental agencies (in Rome or in other major cities), or with the larger companies and factories that are numerous in the North

1.1 The South and the North of Italy (3)

- In some small towns in the northeast of Italy there is instead a higher percentage of school dropouts, because young people, even teenagers, can easily find a job with local manufacturing companies in a booming economy
- They might choose money and the security of an employment over a longer and more arduous curriculum of studies
- In the case of small companies, which are very common in areas of the North, further encouragement to leave education and start working may come from the fact that members of the same extended family all work together, sharing ownership and profits of a small business

1.1 The South and the North of Italy (4)

- The trend that I just described has been strong especially during the 1980s and at the end of the 1990s
- Nowadays those same manufacturing companies of the North have a harder time finding enough workers, and they beg the government to allow more foreign workers into the country
- At the same time, competition with the cheaper workforce available in Eastern Europe (Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, etc.) has slowed down salary increases in Italy, and therefore less Italians choose a blue-collar job

1.1 Data about the South and the North

- Growth rate of gross domestic product in Italy divided by area, in recent years (from data published by CENSIS, an Italian agency, in 2002; the Italian regions included in each area are indicated in a map posted in another slide)

	2000	2001	2002
• Northwest	3.4%	2.5%	2.9%
• Northeast	3.0	2.2	2.8
• Center	2.7	2.2	2.6
• South	2.4	2.2	2.5

1.1 Data about the South and the North (2)

- Unemployment in the South of Italy, according to CENSIS, was below 20 percent at the end of 2002, an abysmal number, almost twice as much as the national average
- On the other hand, exports from the South of Italy between 1999 and 2000 have grown by a staggering 27.3 percent, considerably more than the national average, during the same period, of 16.5 percent.
 - Still, in spite of this noticeable increase, the actual monetary value of those exports is much lower than the corresponding figure for each of the other three areas of Italy, which explains why the growth rate of the gross domestic product for the South is lagging behind

1.2 The slow process of political unification

- “Italy is a geographical expression” (famous statement by Austria’s Prime Minister, Prince of Metternich, in 1849: at that time Austria controlled most of the Italian northeast)
- Unification, in the case of Italy, has been a very slow process compared to the evolution of other countries in Europe, such as Spain, France or England
- In 1861, after a first, partial unification of Italy, the first kings, the Savoias (or Savoy) gave the Italian nation a highly centralized government, afraid that a federal structure could weaken the newly created political entity
 - They firmly believed that federalism could not achieve the result of bringing the various Italian communities together
 - They did not believe that Italy was the cultural and historic reality with well-developed roots in Italian society

1.2 The slow process of political unification (2)

- The Italian identity, national values, and the very idea of Italy as one society, with one sentiment, common projects for the future, common traditions, lived mostly in the hearts and the works of Italian writers and artists, painters, sculptors or musicians
- Italy for long has remained an idea cherished by intellectuals, with no grounding in history
- In fact often reality showed a different picture: wars and violent fights among Italians, divisions on political and social issues
 - During the naval battle of Lissa (1866), the newly created Italian fleet battled against the fleet of the Austrian empire, whose ships were manned mostly by Venetian sailors under the orders of Austrian officers; rather than being the glorious page in the history of the liberation of Italy that Italian textbooks of my childhood claimed, the battle was another case of Italians willingly fighting against other Italians

1.2 Italians fighting on different sides: the episode of Via Rasella

- In 1943, during the Second World War, the Allies landed in Sicily
- Before the end of the summer of 1943, after Mussolini had been removed from power and arrested, Italy left its alliance with Germany and Japan to take side with the Allies
- The German army then occupied most of Italy, and helped reconstitute a fascist government based in the Po Valley, in the north of Italy
- For a year and half the fascist army of the so-called Republic of Salò (from the name of the town on the Garda lake where the fascists placed their headquarters) fought with the Germans against Italian partisans and later against units of the former Italian army deployed under Allied command: it was a Civil War of sorts, with many Italian casualties on both sides

1.2 Italians fighting on different sides: the episode of Via Rasella (2)

- Rome, still occupied by the Germans, was proclaimed “open city” in order to protect its artistic treasures
- In March 1944, while Americans were fighting their way out of the shores south of Rome, Italian partisans placed a large amount of explosive by a street-sweeper’s cart in Via Rasella
- As troops of the German police regiment “Bozen” (=Bolzano, the name of a city in northern Italy) marched through Via Rasella, the explosive was detonated, killing instantly 32 of the soldiers, almost all of whom were South Tyroleans, i.e. Italians from Alto Adige, an area close of the border with Austria where German is still the main language
- The Germans retaliated the next day, executing 335 persons (Jews and other Italians held in the prisons of Rome) in the Ardeatine Caves near Rome

1.3 The existence of a dual identity throughout Italian history

- While Roman civilization did so much to unify Italy from the point of view of politics and the administration, the process of cultural and linguistic assimilation of the various cultures and civilizations that existed in Italy before and during Roman domination (to name just a few: the Etruscans, the Greeks, the Gauls, the Sabines) was much slower, and in some cases was interrupted by the barbaric invasions and by the collapse of the Empire during the V century CE (=Common Era)

1.3 The existence of a dual identity throughout Italian history (2)

- After the Roman Empire collapsed, various local communities, which maintained limited contacts with one another, saw a resurgence of local customs and dialects
 - Peoples that under the Empire considered themselves both Romans and, at the same time, Greeks or Samnites or Gauls, returned to emphasize their original local identity
 - They kept referring to themselves as Romans for a few centuries after the fall of the Empire (we have documents that illustrate that habit), when in fact they were already developing new vernacular languages based on Latin with the contribution of local languages or of local variations of Latin (these new languages are the so-called Neo-Latin languages, a group that includes most Italian dialects)
- The dual identity that was so common under the Romans was then replaced by a single highly localized identity throughout the Middle Ages

1.3 Dual identity in Italian civilization and society

- After France, Spain and Germany occupied or extended their political influence over portions of Italy, cultural and political projects of unification born at the end of the Middle Ages were put on hold for another three centuries
- When Italy finally became one again, under the Savoia family, the new royal family was so afraid that they might lose their authority over the new national territory that they imposed a highly centralized structure to Italy, even though the best political minds of that time recommended that Italy be a federation, to respect the autonomy and to reflect the peculiar history of each region

1.3 Dual identity in Italian society

- That process of forced unification, imposed from the top, did not erase the differences that existed in Italian society, simply masked them
- In fact, the lack of consideration for local cultures made many Italians angry at the new government, so that many citizens failed to identify and bond with the new national government, only reinforcing their allegiance to the small parcel of land and to the small community they grew in

1.3 Dual identity in Italian society

- To this day most Italians have a dual identity
- Often in social gatherings they introduce themselves as Tuscans or Sicilians, or better yet as citizens of a single town or village, while at the same time few reject the idea that they are also Italian
- But you can still see the mixed feelings that Italians have for their central national government in behaviors such as widespread fiscal evasion, and in the general lack of national pride (very few, including yours truly, know the national anthem by heart, most are eager to criticize their country and their leaders, etc.)

1.3 Religion in Italian civilization

- Nonetheless, there are unifying factors in Italian civilization, such as the respect for classical culture, the widespread deep interest in political issues, and religion
- Religion was a powerful unifying force inside Italian culture and customs for many centuries
 - Even during the period of the separation between the Catholic Church and the Protestants, all attempts to bring some of the Italian states outside the Catholic world and have them join the Protestant movement failed

1.3 Religion in Italian civilization (2)

- There were Protestants among the Italian intellectuals and politicians, especially in Venice and in northern Italy, and some who took into careful consideration the idea of severing all contacts with the Papacy as a way of strengthening local governments
 - In fact there had been times in which Popes used the power and the charisma associated with their position to maneuver Catholics, so that they would lobby for or against legislation that did not encounter the favor of the clergy: but you should not fall prey to simplistic generalizations about the use and abuse of political power by the Church
- Even in today's much secularized Italian society, 86 percent of the Italian citizens choose to donate money to the Catholic Church through a specific option available on their income tax forms: their state-regulated contributions to the Church in 2003 were approximately 1 billion euros (€1=\$1.22, as of 1/25/06)

1.4 "La parola Italia" [The word Italy]

- "La parola Italia" ("The word Italy") was the title of a conference held in Florence in February of 2001
- Prominent Italian scholars, writers and politicians participated and read papers
- Giuliano Amato, Italy's premier at that time, said on that occasion that ideals such as State and Nation lack prestige in Italy, adding that Italian politicians are responsible for that, because they are concerned only with their own power and that of their parties

1.4 "La parola Italia" [The word Italy] (2)

- Patriotism and nationalism were weakened by the events of 1943-45, according to Catholic intellectual Pietro Scoppola and writer (and former president of the Italian public TV) Enzo Siciliano
 - Patriotism, the defense of the homeland and the advancement of the nation were key ideas in fascist propaganda, especially between 1943 and 1945
 - On the other hand, both the left-wing partisans and the Catholics fighting against Germans and fascists were coming from a cultural background in which the idea of nation was less important than the values of international cooperation and mutual human respect and support

1.4 "La parola Italia" [The word Italy] (3)

- Tullio De Mauro, former Minister of Education, offered the following remarks
 - 95% of Italians now speak Italian fairly well, but
 - 49% of them have the equivalent of a 5th grade education, mostly older adults (either because they grew up in rural areas, or because their education was interrupted by the dramatic events of the Second World War)
- Other scholars remarked that Italy has a weak identity, a polycentric profile
- Each Italian has a multiple identity (local, regional and national)
 - This may be why many Italians were in favor of the European Union (EU)
 - And why so many favor the extension of political rights and the granting of citizenship to legal immigrants

1.5 Obstacles along the path to Italy's cultural and political unification

- Geography

- One should not overlook the fact that mountains (e.g., the Alps, the Apennines) cover two thirds or more of the Italian peninsula; the orography, i.e. the physical configuration of the Italian territory, certainly played a role in maintaining local identities and regional traditions separate
 - Click here to see a [map of modern Italy](#) (a smaller copy appears in the next slide)
 - Click here to see a [map of Italy with mountains and plains](#) (.jpg file; a smaller copy, platform-independent, is visible in another slide)



1.5 Italy

- 116,341 square miles
- 20 regions (administrative and political unities)
- 100+ provinces, corresponding to the larger towns and cities
 - Only four cities have more than one million inhabitants: Rome, Milan, Naples, Turin
- 4 seas, areas of the larger Mediterranean Sea

Source of map
<http://www.cnn.com/TRAVEL/CITY.GUIDE/S/WORLD/Europe/italy/bigmap.html>

1.5 Italy

- The main mountains and valleys
 - The Alps (“Alpi”)
 - The Apennines (“Appennino...”)
 - The Po valley (“Pianura padana”)
- The territory offers very few natural resources (minerals, oil etc.), and few areas where agriculture can be a profitable enterprise
- Italy is more or less at the same latitude as New York State, but enjoys a much milder climate thanks to the high mountains shielding the peninsula from the cold northern winds

Source of map

<http://www.italyemb.org/italiaf2.jpg>



1.5 Italy between East and West, North and South

- Being close to western and central Europe, Italy's commercial economy prospered during much of its long history
- The driving force of the economy during most times has been the activity of importing goods from the Middle East and from North Africa, and exporting them to the rest of Europe
- Being close to the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and to the unstable Federation of former Yugoslavia, during the Cold War Italy's democracy could not develop fully or freely, since the first priority of foreign allies (the U.S. and NATO) was to keep Italy (with the largest Communist Party in Western Europe) from surrendering to the influence and power of the Soviet regime and its military/political alliance (the countries of the Warsaw Pact)

Source of map:

<http://web.mit.edu/conor/www/whereswally/europe.jpg>

1.5 Map of the European Union – Interactive map at http://europa.eu.int/abc/maps/index_en.htm





1.5 The main geographical areas in Italy: Northwestern, Northeastern, Central, and Southern Italy (with the islands)

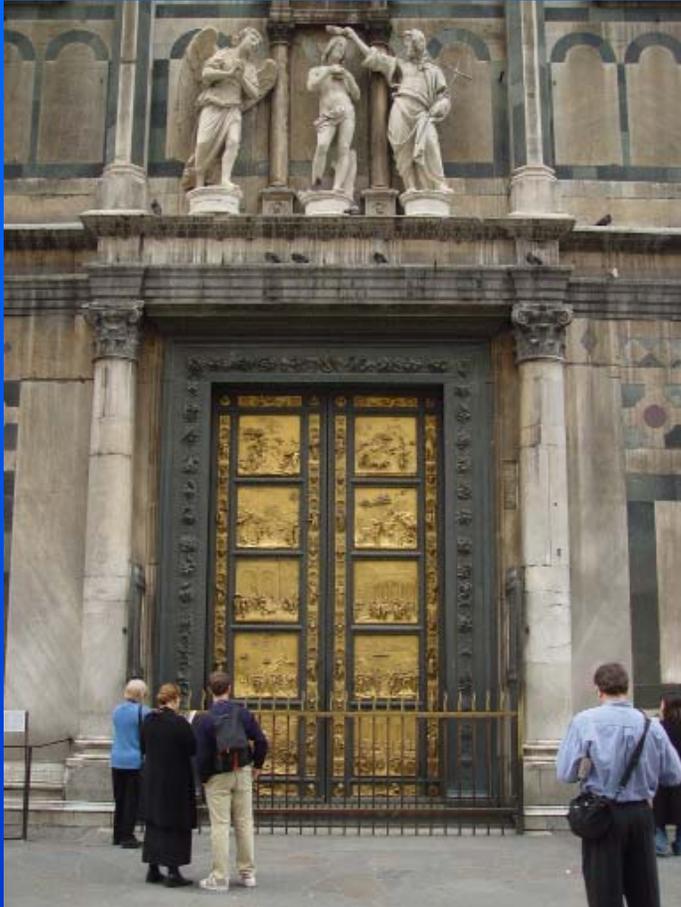
1.6 Considerations about stereotypes in proverbs and sayings

- Even some of the proverbs and sayings that are still popular in many Italian regions prove that local identities have always been very strong, rooted in the past of the different communities
- In fact it is not uncommon even now to hear or read proverbs that betray the persistent rivalry between neighboring towns
- For example, in Tuscany there is the saying "Fiorentini ciechi" ("Florentines blind")
- This saying is used by itself, or in combination with others, in this form: "Fiorentini ciechi, / Pisani traditori, / Senesi matti / Lucchesi signori"

1.6 Considerations about stereotypes in proverbs and sayings (2)

- The use of the epithet "blind" for the Florentines is documented as early as the XIV century
- Here is the common explanation given at that time
 - In the Baptistery of San Giovanni, in Florence, on either side of Ghiberti's Door of Paradise there are two porphyry columns. The columns were donated to Florence by the Pisans as a sign of gratitude for the military help that the city received in 1117 against Lucca, when Pisa's fleet was otherwise engaged against the Moslems in the Balearic Islands. The two columns are fractured, perhaps after one of the floods, though popular tradition would have it that they were already broken when they arrived from Pisa, and hidden beneath lengths of cloth for this reason, thus justifying the saying "The Florentines are blind and the Pisans are traitors."

1.6 Ghiberti's Gates of Paradise in Florence (1425-1452), and one of its panels, with a scene of the story of Joseph, from the Old Testament



1.6 More examples of proverbs and sayings

- "Senesi matti" ("Sieneese mad") is also a very ancient saying: in the seventh Day of Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1350s), the character Dioneo, in the introduction to his novella staged in Siena, mentions "la bessaggine de' sanesi" ("the stupidity of the Sieneese")
 - Rumor has — even today — that the water of a famous Sieneese fountain, [Fontebranda](#), causes incurable madness in those who drink from it
- And one cannot forget the ever popular (and ever offensive) "Meglio un morto in casa che un pisano all'uscio" ("better a death in the family than somebody from Pisa at the front door")
 - According to the traditional explanation, death is more bearable because Pisans always complain so much that they make everybody around them terribly sad and depressed

1.6 More examples of proverbs and sayings (2)

- Among many others, the insult "thieves" is one that seems to bounce from one side of Tuscany to the other, inside sayings
 - For example: "A Marradi," the proverb goes, "seminano fagioli e nascono ladri" ("In Marradi they plant beans, and grow thieves")
 - Tradition has that Dante himself, traveling through that region, refused to spend the night in the village of Marradi, apparently because of its bad reputation. According to the joke which is supposed to explain the name of the village, somebody asked him: "Why don't you stop here? This is a town of gentlemen." To which he replied: "Sì, *MA RADI*" ("Yes, but scarce").
 - During a different research I happened to find a much better way to explain this proverb, inside a letter sent by a famous Jesuit, Paolo Segneri, to the Grand Duke Cosimo III, in 1681. In that letter, Segneri remarks that it would be wise to have a special police officer in Marradi, because the village being so close to the borders of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, it is too easy for its citizens commits criminal acts and then cross the border passing into Romagna, the next state (extradition was very rare at that time)

1.6 Proverbs and sayings: a nation of thieves?

- Among those accused of theft in proverbs and sayings, no one has a reputation worse than the inhabitants of Campi Bisenzio, a town near Florence:
 - "Brozzi, Peretola e Campi, / son la peggio genia che Cristo stampi" ("Brozzi, Peretola and Campi are the worst species created by Christ")
 - "Campi, valigia davanti" ("In Campi, [keep] your suitcase in front of you")
 - "Si dice a Pisa e a Pontedera: / Campi è un luogo da inferno e da galera" ("...Campi is a place good for hell and jail")
- It was also said, as a joke, that Campi did not have a cemetery because all the Campigiani died in jail (in Florence, the nearest city), and so they did not really need a place to be buried back home

1.6 Proverbs and sayings: a nation of thieves? (2)

- Because of its reputation, Campi deserves an entire chapter in a famous pamphlet, *Those Cursed Tuscans* (1956), written by a prominent 20th-century Italian author, Curzio Malaparte
- Malaparte maintains that still in the early 1900s the people of Prato (his hometown) "were afraid to pass by Campi at night," and, in his usual caustic way, he closes the chapter with a peculiar defense of the Campigiani, which borders on insult
 - "And there they are, rigid on the bridge, my dear Campigiani. Look them in the face. To recognize true Tuscans one need only look them in the face. They all have flaming skins, scorched eyebrows and burnt hair, as if only just now returning from a long trip through the infernal regions."

1.7 Inno di Mameli (The Hymn of Mameli): Lyrics by Goffredo Mameli (1827-49), music by Michele Novaro (1822-85)

- The music was composed in 1847
- In 1861, when Italy became united, the national anthem was the "March of the House of Savoy"
- To that anthem the Fascist government (1922-43/45) added a second one, "Giovinezza"
- Mameli's Hymn became the provisional national anthem in Oct. 1946, after Italy became a Republic

1.7 Inno di Mameli (The Hymn of Mameli): Italy's national anthem

- The words recall the battles for freedom waged by the Italians against the Austrians and the French
 - Read the text of the anthem and learn more about it on the site of the Italian cultural Institute in New York city
 - <http://www.italcultny.org/audio/audio1.htm>
 - If you understand Italian, use instead the Web site of the Quirinale, the official residence of the President of the Italian republic
 - <http://www.quirinale.it/simboli/inno/inno.htm>
 - [Here](#) everybody can find audio files of the anthem, playable onscreen

1.7 Inno di Mameli (Hymn of Mameli): key passages on Roman glory, on the connection between *nation* and *war*, on political divisions

- Fratelli d'Italia
L'Italia s'è desta,
Dell'elmo di Scipio
S'è cinta la testa. [...]
- Stringiamci a coorte,
Siam pronti alla morte:
Italia chiamò!
- Noi siamo da secoli
Calpesti e derisi,
Perché non siam popolo,
Perché siam divisi [...].
- Italian brothers,
Italy has awaken,
She has wreathed her head
With the helmet of Scipio. [...]
- Let us gather in legions,
We are ready to die!
Italy has called!
- We for centuries
Have been downtrodden and
derided,
Because we are not a people,
Because we are divided.

1.7 What many Italians would like as national anthem: "Va' pensiero" (*Nabucco*, by G. Verdi, libretto by T. Solera, 1842; [link points to site with audio files](#))

- "Nabucco was Verdi's third opera, and his first real success"
- In this chorus "the Jews, enslaved in Babylon, sigh for their distant homeland"
- "Italy in 1842 was still a divided country, partially occupied by Austria"
- Verdi "saw in the plight of the Jews in their Babylonian exile a metaphor for the condition of Italy in his own time"
- "Fly, thought, on golden wings; rest upon the slopes and hills, where, soft and mild, the air of our native land smells sweet!
Hail the banks of the Jordan and Zion's fallen towers.
Oh, my country, so lovely and lost!
Oh, remembrance, so dear and despairing!"
 - Original source (now offline): <http://www.bbc.co.uk/proms/programmenotes/verdi73a.shtml>

1.7 *I don't feel Italian*

- Giorgio Gaber was a well-known singer-actor, who began his career during the 1960s
- His last CD, *I don't feel Italian*, came out a few days before his untimely death (due to cancer), and rapidly reached the first place in the Italian hit parade, having sold 100 thousand copies during the first week alone (it came out on Jan. 24th, 2003)
- Even former Italian President Francesco Cossiga manifested his appreciation of the title song, which is representative with the problems associated with the establishment of a national Italian identity



1.7 Excerpts from Giorgio Gaber, "Io non mi sento italiano" (2003)

- Io G. G. sono nato e vivo a Milano / Io non mi sento italiano / ma per fortuna o purtroppo lo sono.
- Mi scusi Presidente / non è per colpa mia / ma questa nostra Patria / non so che cosa sia.
- [...] Mi scusi Presidente / non sento un gran bisogno dell'inno nazionale / di cui un po' mi vergogno.
- [...] Mi scusi Presidente / ma ho in mente il fanatismo / delle camice nere / al tempo del fascismo.
- Mi scusi Presidente / ma forse noi italiani / per gli altri siamo solo / spaghetti e mandolini. / Allora qui m'incazzo / son fiero e me ne vanto / gli sbatto sulla faccia / cos'è il Rinascimento.

1.7 Giorgio Gaber, "I don't feel Italian" (2003)

- I, G. G., was born and live in Milan / I don't feel Italian / however luckily or unfortunately I am.
- I am sorry Mr. President / it isn't my fault / but this motherland of ours / I don't know what it is.
- [...] I am sorry Mr. President / I don't really feel the need for the national anthem / and I am a bit ashamed of it.
- [...] I am sorry Mr. President / but it brings to mind the fanaticism / of the black shirts / at the time of Fascism.
- I am sorry Mr. President / but maybe us Italians / for others we are only / spaghetti and mandolins. / And so here I get mad / I am proud and I brag about it / I shove in their face / what the Renaissance is.