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## THE MODERN AGE

### FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The first half of the twentieth century was an age of transformations and a deep cultural crisis.

It was marked by:

- two World Wars;
- the atomic bomb;
- the discover of new and faster means of transport and communication;
- a new science: the psychology.

The cultural crisis led (ha portato) to the end of the system of Victorian values.

The First World War left a disillusioned and cynical mood (stato d'animo).

The generation gap (divario generazionale) between the young and the old, regarded as responsible for the lives wasted during the war, grew (crebbe).

The dissolution of the Empire caused a remarkable transformation of the notions of Imperial hegemony and white superiority.

The new views of man and the universe emerged:

- Freud's influence  
Sigmund Freud introduced new ideas about the human psyche, deeply influenced by the subconscious. Freud settled (impostò) a new method of investigation of the human mind through the analysis of dreams and the concept of free association that influenced (che influenzò) the writers of the modern age.
- The theory of relativity  
In the field of science the old certainties were discarded (scardinate) by the introduction of the concept of relativity by Albert Einstein.  
Even Quantum Mechanics and the new theories of language postulated by Wittgenstein shook (scossero) the old stable foundations (stabili le fondamenta) of scientific thoughts.
- External time vs internal time  
The idea of time was questioned from the philosophical point of view by William James, American associationist philosopher, and Henry Bergson, French philosopher. They analysed the idea of time not only as historical time but also as psychological time.

Until 1945 everything was war and destruction, afterwards a good deal was post-war reconstruction and many reforms were introduced:

- In 1952 there was the ascension of Queen Elizabeth II
- There was the welfare state that created an atmosphere of great expectations of social Justice

In the 1950s and the 1960s there was a drastic change in the society:

- Young people claimed (afferamarono) a new cultural and moral independence from their elders (anziani);

- The idea of “public decency” changed : the homosexual acts should no longer be subject (non dovrebbero più essere sottoposti a) to criminal prosecution (procedimento penale);
- There was the birth of rock’n’roll music;
- The young people supported actions for Nuclear Disarmament and for peace. The philosopher Bertrand Russel was the leader of the pacifists.

The “swinging sixties” were marked by a mood of rebellion and by the quest for self/expression and liberation, the dominant traits were:

- Pop music
- Drugs;
- Permissiveness;
- Feminism (emancipation of women).

It was because the revolution of the Sixties was successful that man and women live together without marrying, became possible legally have an abortion; homosexual couples openly set up house, ecc.

## **TWO WORLD WARS AND AFTER**

### **The reign of Edward VII**

After the death of Queen Victoria, Edward came to the throne.

The Edwardian wasn’t a good period, was a time of industrial unrest (agitazione industriale) and violent strikes, for high prices and low wages.

### **The suffragettes**

The suffragettes were women sympathisers for the feminist’s movement that wanted women to have the vote. Some of their militants adopted hunger-strike tactics. However, the granting (la concessione) of women’s suffrage came in 1918 and its extension to all women on the same basis as men in 1928.

### **World War I**

The war involved:

- On one side the Central European Powers: Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy;
- On the other side the Triple Entente: Britain, France and Russia and their allies including the USA.

It broke out when the Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo in 1914.

Germany marched through Belgium, a neutral territory, in order to attack France and Britain declared war on Germany.

The war claimed the lives (ha causato la morte) of about nine million men. The Britain was unprepared for the destructive artillery, machine guns and tanks, and the use of gas and shells during the attacks. Shell shock was the term used by doctors to allude to the shell explosions they blamed for the frequent cases of psychological disorders among soldiers.

The war caused the ruin of four great empires, made possible a Communist revolution in Russia and prepared the way for the rise of dictators like Mussolini and Hitler.

American participation accelerated the German defeat. The war ended in November 1918 and the Peace treaty was signed at Versailles in 1919.

### **The Irish Question**

The term refers (si riferisce) to the struggle for (alla lotta per) Irish independence.

During World War I, the Irish volunteers organised a rebellion on Easter Monday 1916 (which inspired Yeats's poem *Easter 1916*) and proclaimed an Irish republic. The rebellion was crushed (repressa) but it became a symbol of Irish heroism.

The struggle for independence continued and in 1919 the Irish volunteers became the IRA (Irish Republican Army) and began the civil war.

The war was only ended with the establishment of the Irish Free State as a dominion of the empire, while the six predominantly Protestant countries of Ulster remained part of the United Kingdom, with their own parliament in Belfast.

In 1949 there was the official proclamation of the Republic of Ireland.

### **The transformation of British society between the wars.**

There were a lot important transformations in the society:

- Thanks to birth-control practices the growth of population slowed down (rallentò);
- Heavy industry in the north declined and light industry in the south expanded;
- Fewer people lived in the centres of towns. People moved out to suburbs and dormitory towns;
- The unemployment affected shipbuilders (costruttori), cotton operatives and coal miners (miniere di carbone);
- There was the boom in the sales of the daily press and the new popular newspapers appeared;
- After First World War newspapers were supplemented (integrati) by the development of radio broadcasting;
- The first car appeared in the early 1920s. The commonest form of public transport was the electric tram-car and the trains.

### **The Jazz Age**

The so-called "Jazz age", in the 1920s, was a period of prosperity in America.

The Government encouraged the private business.

This period was also characterised by reactionary attitudes: during the so-called "red scare" (terrore rosso) political activists were imprisoned and persecuted (the most famous case was that of the two Italian anarchists: Sacco and Vanzetti).

Another reaction was the segregation of minorities into city slums (for example: Harlem).

The puritanical attitudes imposed the prohibition of alcohol, that caused an increased (crescita) of the phenomenon of gangsterism.

In 1929 there was the Wall Street Crash (crollo): it marked the end of the prosperity and the beginning of the Great Depression.

### **The New Deal**

The President Roosevelt in 1932 began a New Deal of reforms. The federal government spent thousands of millions of dollars on relief (in aiuti) for the unemployed on public works. But Roosevelt's New Deal wouldn't have been sufficient (non sarebbe stato sufficiente se) if a new world conflict had not given (non avesse dato) American factories a new impulse.

### **World War II**

In September 1939 Germany invaded Poland and the Second World War started. In 1940 invaded also Denmark and Norway and making the strategic position of Great Britain critical (e rese critica la posizione strategica della Gran Bretagna). Under strong leadership of Winston Churchill the British resistance became extremely determined.

In 1945 Germany finally surrendered (si arrese) and the atomic bomb defeated (sconfisse) the Japan.

### **The Welfare State**

The Welfare State implied a system of government based on looking after the interests and welfare of everyone, in such areas as (in tutti i settori come) health, unemployment and pensions. Both Conservative and Labour parties promoted that new role of the government.

### **Elizabeth II**

George VI died unexpectedly and he was succeeded by his daughter Elizabeth II, crowned in 1953. In that difficult years Britain definitely lost its Empire and was gradually being reduced to a second/class power dependent on the United States.

### **The theatre of the absurd**

Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" is generally considered as the starting point of "Absurd Drama". In the 1950s emerged a group of dramatists composed by: Beckett, Adamov and Jonesco. These dramatists present the absurdity of the human condition, they do not argue about it.

The main features of the theatre of the Absurd are:

- Absence of a real plot
- Sense of anguish and rootlessness
- Extensive use of pauses and silences
- Incoherent babbling made up the dialogue
- Vagueness about time, place and the characters.

### **Drama in the 1960s and 1970s**

Since the 1960s the content of British plays has got more and more revolutionary (sempre più rivoluzionario). British young dramatists were all protesting against society. Moreover the abolition (inoltre l'abolizione) of the theatre censorship (della censura) gave playwrights more freedom. They questioned (mettevano in discussione) the traditional rules of sexual morality and marriage and also they mocked (deridevano) the political, social and religious establishment.

There was the rise (aumento) of socialist theatre and there were an increasing number of Fringe, a sort of Studio theatres, in basements (cantine), attics (soffitte) and the back rooms of pubs (retro dei pub).

At the end of the 1970s there was the decline of the Fringe.