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# From Constitutional Transitions to the Great National Transition: A Constant and Obstinate Italian Narrative

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**Abstract:** The essay aims to illustrate the ways in which Italian literature deals with transitions (constitutional or political). After having clarified the methodological approach, the author identifies and describes in the national literature some historical phases, analysing the trends emerging from the reading of famous novels. In conclusion, some observations are drawn, in which it is highlighted that in the national literature there is a profound awareness of the importance of informal institutional transformations and of the central role of social, moral and economic factors.

**Keywords:** constitutional transformations, constitutional transition, Italian literature, nation-building process, social and political changes

To the youth of Italy, who pay this price with pain and pride, and who will be able to rekindle in their souls that love of our country from which we have strayed.\*\*

A. Palazzeschi, *Tre imperi ... mancati. Cronaca 1922–1945* [1945] (Milano: Mondadori, 2016)

## 1 What Transitions? From Form to Substance

This essay will provide a few examples of the ways in which constitutional transitions in the history of Italy are depicted in a number of works of Italian literature.

It is important to point out that in abstract terms the topic at hand allows for different definitions of the notion of transition.

The first, most canonical definition is the commonly understood meaning of the word *constitutional*, which in the strictest sense refers to legal terminology that is by now widespread even in legal literature (and first and foremost in

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\*\*Translation from Italian by F. Cortese.

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comparative literature).<sup>1</sup> It alludes to the shift from a constitutional system to another system within the context of a succession of different forms of State. This is the case for Italy in the change from a liberal State to a Fascist State and from the latter to a democratic State.

However, at the same time in the legal debate the term *transition* can also refer to other forms of transformational development. For example, perception and assimilation of the evolution from the “First” to the “Second” Republic or the promotion of specific reforms, constitutional and otherwise.<sup>2</sup> From the latter perspective, the list of transitions appears to be longer than one might initially imagine, as it includes many different prominent phases in the history of Italy.

A second, less obvious, meaning of *transition* also comes into play. This is the one used in part of the *historiographical debate*<sup>3</sup> and is a meaning which originally developed within the context of social sciences<sup>4</sup> and which in only one specific dimension is equivalent to technical usage in the legal field, although it is by no

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1 For an academic introduction to the “classic” concept of constitutional transition (and focusing only on books as opposed to submissions in journals – the bibliography is rather extensive), see for example Giuseppe de Vergottini, *Le transizioni costituzionali. Sviluppi e crisi del costituzionalismo alla fine del XX secolo* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1998), as well as Antonino Spadaro (ed.), *Le trasformazioni costituzionali nell'età della transizione. Atti dell'Incontro di studio (Catanzaro, 19 February 1999)* (Torino: Giappichelli, 2000), Silvio Gambino (ed.), *Costituzionalismo europeo e transizioni democratiche* (Milano: Giuffrè, 2003), Luca Mezzetti, *Teoria e prassi delle transizioni costituzionali e del consolidamento democratico* (Padova: Cedam, 2003), Andrea Lollini, *Costituzionalismo e giustizia di transizione. Il ruolo costituente della Commissione sudafricana verità e riconciliazione* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2003). See also Veronica Federico, Carlo Fusaro (eds.), *Constitutionalism and democratic transitions: lessons from South Africa* (Firenze: FUP, 2006), Jens Woelk, *La transizione costituzionale della Bosnia ed Erzegovina: dall'ordinamento imposto allo stato multinazionale sostenibile?* (Padova: Cedam, 2008), and, more recently, Francesco Biagi, *Corti costituzionali e transizioni democratiche. Tre generazioni a confronto* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016).

2 See, for example, with regard to the reform of Title V of the Italian Constitution, Adele Anzon Demmig, *I poteri delle Regioni nella transizione dal modello originario al nuovo assetto costituzionale* (Torino: Giappichelli, 2003). See also, among others, on the relationship between powers of the State, Enrico Cuccodoro, *Il diritto pubblico nella transizione costituzionale italiana* (Bologna: Monduzzi, 2002), Ciro Sbaillò, *Giustizia e Costituzione. Note comparatistiche sulla transizione italiana* (Leonforte: Euno Edizioni, 2012), Stefano Sicardi, Massimo Cavino, Luca Imarisio (ed.), *Vent'anni di Costituzione (1993–2013). Dibattiti e riforme nell'Italia tra due secoli* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2015), and Stefano Ceccanti, *La transizione è (quasi) finita. Come risolvere nel 2016 i problemi aperti 70 anni prima. Verso il referendum costituzionale* (Torino: Giappichelli, 2016).

3 As described in Jacques Revel, *Transizione: intorno a una nozione storiografica*, and Gian Paolo Romagnani, *L'idea di transizione nella storiografia italiana del Novecento*, both in Francesca Bertagna, Leonida Tedoldi (eds.), *Transizioni in Europa e in America Latina (1945–1995)* (Milano: Biblion, 2018), in particular, 15 and 29 respectively.

4 See Maurice Godelier, *Transizione*, in *Enciclopedia XIV* (Torino: Einaudi, 1982), 460.

means extraneous to it.<sup>5</sup> This meaning tends to encompass both real institutional upheavals, which are distinguished by clearly identifiable watershed moments, especially on the formal level, and particularly impactful social, political, economic or technological transformations, whose mid-to-long-term variations and consequences can be examined.

This specific direction in the debate on transitions, as can be observed, does not only broaden the horizon of the investigation. It also provides clarity on the relevance and scope – or, rather, the range – of purely legal discourse and its oscillations between form and substance, between formal and substantial transformations<sup>6</sup> and even more so between constituent moments and implementing phases. This is a complex and uncertain process that is physiologically pushed into the future, in which the latter is almost structurally called upon to confirm the former and at the same time foreshadow, and almost predict, its arrival. It is therefore obvious that with this approach – which is the one being adopted here – there can be multiple transitions that may not manifest themselves in a strictly constitutional manner and can connect to longer, sometimes pre-existing historical trajectories. However, even clearer is the fact that with this approach the observer's evaluation perspective greatly affects the direction and even the meaning of the transition because each time it is a matter of understanding beforehand *where one came from* and *where one is supposed to go*. Thus, it is a perspective that can only bring the jurist's view closer to that of the writer.

We would be remiss to neglect the imagery conjured up by the word *transition* with a third meaning, which in truth might seem the furthest away from legal usage.

There is nothing new in referring to the *method of the game of football* to depict social, economic and institutional changes. Some have tried to detect similarities or continuity between the historical succession of certain tactical choices and the historical succession of specific political and productive decisions, and the related choices in terms of the architecture of the State and the relationship between the individual and a community.<sup>7</sup>

In the technical slang of modern football – which came into use after the success of so-called “total football,” made popular by the Dutch national team in

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5 See, for example, the Constitutional Law Italian Professors yearbook 2015, on the subject of *La scienza costituzionalistica nelle transizioni istituzionali e sociali* (Napoli: Jovene, 2017).

6 For an assessment of the topic see, most recently, the monographic issue no. 1/2020 of the periodical *Diritto costituzionale. Rivista quadrimestrale*, edited by Roberto Bin and Alessandro Mangia.

7 See Daniele Camilli, *Contropiede. Breve discorso sopra il metodo del calcio* (Roma: notteteempo, 2007).

the 1970s<sup>8</sup> – a transition is a full-fledged phase of the action that develops during the course of a match. Specifically, it is a third, intermediate phase of the game between the offensive and defensive phases, and vice versa. The passage from the former to the latter is a negative transition (because it involves losing possession of the ball); conversely, going from the latter to the former is a positive transition (because it involves taking possession of the ball).

That being said, it might be interesting to assess if and how the narrative description of some stories, whether they are long or short, might suggest something with regard to how some characters, or actors, in those stories move around the field of social evolution. We intend, ultimately, to assess whether or not *transition* can serve as a kind of metaphor that collects ideas from literary depictions of certain collective transformations and renders them active and effective, or rather gives them a voice and allows them to operate also in the context of legal reconstruction.

## 2 For what Purpose? For a Topography of Experience of Constitutional Movements

Before applying and superimposing the transitions in question onto certain works of literature, it is important to clarify the *triple* objective of this operation.

The *first goal* is openly cultural and educational. This is not to downplay its importance, but rather to highlight to what extent contact with literature can progressively help perfect jurist's outlook, especially when pursuing ongoing education and self-improvement.

This consideration does not only refer to jurists, but concerns anyone who is perceived, and more importantly perceives themselves, as holders of specialist knowledge. In reference to this kind of people, still true to this day are the unequivocal words of Giorgio Pasquali when he was describing the education of Ludwig Curtius (one of the most famous archaeologists of the early 20th Century) and the depth and breadth of his youthful reading: "He read for sure in a disorderly fashion, which is the best way for anyone with a sincere interest in human culture, who does not want to be confined from the start to a narrow specialism and forsake, in order to become a scientist without wasting time, being a man (and this renunciation more often than not also kills the fledgling scientist)".<sup>9</sup> This is a call

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<sup>8</sup> See Jonathan Wilson, *La piramide rovesciata* (Recco GE: Libreria dello Sport, 2012), 325 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Giorgio Pasquali, *Storia dello spirito tedesco nelle memorie d'un contemporaneo* (Milano: Adelphi, 2013), 34.

not only to acknowledge the importance of the balance and proportion that opening up to a broader dimension of knowledge can bestow on those who intend to better understand the scope and the virtues of their own discipline; but also to comprehend the specific potential for growth of the critical outlook that is trained to interpret other types of reality, as well as on the technical level of individual specialisation.

The *second objective* is to communicate to the legal field how fruitful the experience of other disciplines can be.

For example, what is happening to historians of political thought and to political scientists is very interesting: “The gaze [...] widens: from the great individual works, from the “classical” texts of Western political thought – which obviously continue to be studied – it extends to the much more numerous texts that have had a real influence on the political debate of the time. In this framework, historians should no longer refer only to explicitly “historical” works in the technical sense of the term, but should adopt a dynamic attitude in researching “political” works relevant to the broad cultural debate during the historical period they intend to study”.<sup>10</sup> In essence, for legal experts, and even more so for scholars of public law, referring to literature is an opportunity to expand their knowledge about the forces that caused a certain development or triggered a struggle for control of public space at that time.<sup>11</sup>

There is also a *third goal* in the approach being followed here, and it is the most important one. It comes from the conscious adoption of the first two objectives and from the acknowledgement of the tight relationship between the cultural, human and collective factor in a broader sense and the more specific scientific factor.

With regard to the perspective offered here, it is important to emphasise a certain realisation of the relationship between fact and law. This emerges from a very long transition, of which the entire history of the Italian State and its own establishment as a community with a shared destiny are an emblematic testing ground limited to a relatively short period of time. More specifically, the relationship between the *individual* and the *fact that they oppose the law* comes into play: a relationship in which the individual can be perceived in their experience as a *determining vehicle of the legally and constitutionally significant fact*. A focus on this relationship inevitably involves considering the historical background of the unified country of Italy and its institutions in order to take a deeper look at the different ways in which *Italians* have dealt with collectivity, its overall

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<sup>10</sup> Fausto Proietti, *Flaubert politico* (Vicenza: Ronzani, 2020), 12.

<sup>11</sup> Relevant in relation to this opening up is the epistemological interpretation by Hermann Broch, *Hofmannstahl e il suo tempo* [1949] (Milano: Adelphi, 2010), and his attempt to connect the style of an era to its deepest heart.

organisation and the concrete events that have changed it over time. In other words, this means establishing a topography of the experience of both formal and informal constitutional movements, as well as those which aided or hindered implementation.

Literature offers more than a few indications about the attitude that the citizen-subject *feels* and how they behave in the public sphere with regard to establishment of the fact in the sense mentioned above. This is an interpretation that in reality proves to be increasingly broad and in some cases requires going beyond the distinction between what is private and personal and what is public and collective; or at least, a redefinition of the public by means of a private sphere *acknowledged* by a public sphere that needs renewal.

### 3 Birth and Rebirth: Institutional Transitions and Personal and Collective Willingness

This last perspective should be the basis for discussing constitutional transitions and national literature, if only for the fact that it helps focus on a possible and feasible starting point. Otherwise the enquiry might prove to be rather arduous.

On the other hand, the value of this connection point is well known in relation to the ample and varied literature on (and *by*) the Resistance, a factor on which the constitutional transition par excellence of the Italian legal system is focused (from Fascism to democracy, from the monarchical state to the Republic, from the foreign occupation to the Liberation).<sup>12</sup> It is this literature specifically that produced a significant series of *transitional clichés* that echoed repeatedly through the narrative creations of the Republican age and, perhaps surprisingly, shed light on the meaning of the previous ones.

Beyond the numerous and authoritative memoirs, some of which are even of a legal nature, the supporting framework of the literary discourse of the Resistance always revolves around a common series of macro-themes, which are dense with legal and historiographical implications<sup>13</sup> of the dialectic between *continuity* and *discontinuity*. Actually, on closer inspection, this dialectic is in conflict with the other dialectic between the (revolutionary and) proactive role

<sup>12</sup> For a recent and effective historical and legal interpretation of the Resistance that takes into ample consideration its narration on a literary level, see Giuseppe Filippetta, *L'estate che imparammo a sparare. Storia partigiana della Costituzione* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> See the fundamental work by Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità della Resistenza* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2006). On the subject see Sabino Cassese, "La continuità dello Stato e le 'virtù giacobine' di Claudio Pavone," *Le Carte e la Storia* 1 (2011): 97.

and the (conservative and) passive role of the individual. This latter dialectic in turn questions the canon of *choice*, as the focus of the reflection on the need for breaking points, and on their (lawful or legitimate) limits as the limits of mere breakdown (or of breakdown *per se*) and ultimately honing in on the indispensability of a much more incisive *transformative mechanism*.

This latter mechanism is not always the same, or rather, it does not always presuppose the same intentions.

Sometimes it takes root in a fully-fledged moral, sentimental and intellectual dimension, becoming so conscious that the mechanism itself is overwhelmed by a sense of almost complete disproportion between the task at hand and the totality of horizons along which it is supposed to be fulfilled. As an illustration of this, one might revisit the work of Beppe Fenoglio, *sic et simpliciter*.<sup>14</sup>

In other scenarios, the dimension that serves as a foundation and stimulus for action is also of ethical origin, but it is connected to a justice that shuns pursuing *higher* ambitions and is present in the defence of an elementary, non-speculative and, all things considered, apolitical environment. This is the case, for example, in *L'Agnese va a morire*<sup>15</sup> by Renata Viganò.

In a completely different narrative framework, *choice* is a discovery that comes about not from precise revelatory events that happen on a personal, family or community level, but from an entirely fortuitous accident of destiny that connects the protagonist to a spontaneous and uncontrollable desire for vital, felicitous and even *daily* reunification with the strictly popular component. This is the direction of the late and almost dreamlike reconstruction by Mario Bonfantini in *Scomparso a Venezia*.<sup>16</sup>

Yet these three strands – which seem to require an *unusual* level of effort on the part of the individual *in transition* – merge on a fairly constant point of arrival, that is the perception of contradiction, disillusionment, defeat and death.

Undoubtedly, one might be led to believe that this outcome has a lot to do with a certain type of rhetoric of sacrifice. And this rhetoric might even be partially at work, especially if we take as an example the end of the novel by Bonfantini which seems to have more than a few curious parallels with *Il generale Della Rovere. Istruttoria per un processo* by Indro Montanelli.<sup>17</sup>

But a closer examination might show that the unfortunate epilogue, which completely thwarts achieving the future that one has chosen to put oneself to the

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<sup>14</sup> Not only his novels (among them all), *Una questione privata* (Milano: Garzanti, 1963), and *Il partigiano Johnny* (Torino: Einaudi, 1968), but also his short stories: most recently, *Tutti i racconti* (Torino: Einaudi, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Torino: Einaudi, 1949.

<sup>16</sup> Torino: Einaudi, 1972.

<sup>17</sup> Milano: Rizzoli, 1959.

test and then leaving it up to the hero of the day to experiment exclusively with the darkest and more critical side of the transition, is a symptom of a stronger and longer-lasting opposition. A conflict between a *personality* that is suddenly born within a new dimension on the one hand, and on the other hand a consolidated and deeply rooted *context* of opinions, customs and practices, whose strength of counter-resistance is enough to enable very effective institutional mimicry and bring about structurally the risk of failure.

It is as if these examples showed the ongoing and (by definition) unequal struggle between a *scattered private dimension*, which is reborn to itself and runs its course, and an overwhelming *public dimension background*, which is, and risks remaining, invariably fed by an older model of private relationships. Therefore, it can replicate – just like a fate known to all – the conditions of the past.

This interpretation is very useful not only because it explains the development of a well-known *literature of disillusionment*<sup>18</sup> or of an equally interesting *literature of defeat and abandonment*<sup>19</sup> or of a committed *reflective literature of memory*.<sup>20</sup> But most of all, it is also useful because it reveals that there is a link between literature on the transition of the Resistance and literature on certain later transitions: first and foremost a link to the previous transitions, but also to the hopes that rest on the later ones.

It is very easy to identify this connection when one appreciates the contribution of those great novels which, at the start of the 20th century, seriously questioned the forms and outcome of national Unity: namely, the process of constitutive transition of the Italian legal system as a liberal State and as a constitutional monarchy. Examples are the trilogy by Federico De Roberto, *L'illusione*,<sup>21</sup> *I Vicerè*<sup>22</sup> and *L'imperio*;<sup>23</sup> and the dense and substantial *I vecchi e i giovani*<sup>24</sup> by Luigi Pirandello.

These are very well known and widely studied works. In both cases, the passage from past to future follows an explicit generational arc. This is an element

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**18** See Carlo Levi, *L'Orologio* (Torino: Einaudi, 1950). See also Bruno Fonzi, *I pianti della Liberazione* (Torino: Einaudi, 1961).

**19** See the brilliant debut of a “loser”, an ex-Fascist, who has nothing more to lose since he has lost everything, even what he thought he possessed during his youthful participation in the regime: Giuseppe Berto, *Il cielo è rosso* (Milano: Longanesi, 1948). Also ascribable to this trend is the extraordinary work by Salvatore Satta, *De profundis* [1945] (Milano: Adelphi, 1980).

**20** As one might define the work of Giorgio Bassani: see above all *Cinque storie ferraresi* (Torino: Einaudi, 1956).

**21** Milano: Galli 1891.

**22** Milano: Galli, 1894.

**23** Milano: Mondadori, 1929.

**24** Milano: Treves, 1913.



that, in and of itself, should say something about the authors' focus on the private and family sphere and on the potentially decisive role of those who, by their nature, are called upon to *come later*. However this is a role that is depicted as only being *potentially* decisive, partly because of the uniquely passionate nature of youthful fervour and the "Turgenev device," which was a well-established interpretation in the literary scene of the time.<sup>25</sup> But also due in part to the inertial force of a system of hierarchy and domination, importance of which is able to attract even those who end up being protagonists in the new scenario and take on the new roles that the supervening State system imposes.

It is also worth noting that in both De Roberto and Pirandello there is something that prevents a true and authentic transition, which should not be a mere external transformation, but should be aimed at changing the *character* of Italians. In other words, a change should occur in individuals who should act with greater *willingness* in their experiences. However, this is not possible to impose because it is inhibited by prevalent and insurmountable obstacles.

Even when faced with views that seem different (also based on their geographical location in the North or in the South), it should be noted that both in the literature of the Resistance and in the literature of Italian Transformation at the turn of the century there is a tendency to consider the family, personal and innermost sphere as the primary mover of the general, public and institutional sphere. There is also a tendency to increase the importance of the acknowledgement of this priority either in the forms of a family epic or in those of the *Bildungsroman* to the level of a directly or indirectly pedagogical imprint. This is because in this kind of reconstruction, in Italy the force that needs to be called upon to renew society and its institutions is first and foremost the *base*, since politics, which will always prevail, do not guarantee the desired result. However, at the same time this base ends up being involved in invincible and oppressive logical structures.

It is a dramatic and wide-ranging *topos*, which comes from far away and unsurprisingly arrives at the threshold of the Liberation. It is repeated, for example, in the novels of Francesco Jovine, *Signora Ava*<sup>26</sup> and *Terre del Sacramento*,<sup>27</sup> and it is relaunched in the Republican age with the unforgettable work *The Leopard*<sup>28</sup> by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa and with *Noi credevamo*<sup>29</sup> by

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<sup>25</sup> This refers to the canon established in the famous novel by Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons* [1862], the first Italian edition of which came out in the early 20th Century (Milano: Treves, 1908).

<sup>26</sup> Roma: Tumminelli, 1942.

<sup>27</sup> Torino: Einaudi, 1950.

<sup>28</sup> Milano: Feltrinelli, 1958.

<sup>29</sup> Milano: Mondadori, 1967.

Anna Banti. It carries on as far as the 1970s, where it reconnects openly with the existential theme, typical of the literature of the Resistance, with *Il busto di gesso*<sup>30</sup> by Gaetano Tumiati. This is a largely autobiographical work that summarises in a particularly incisive and at times ironic way the invariable bottlenecks revealed by many failed transitions, including those of Fascism and its Empire, as well as the revolutionary utopia. But most of all it includes the personal, family and social origins of these transitions and the consequent disorientation that such awareness brings about, albeit without any answers.<sup>31</sup>

The almost prophetic, long-term message seems clear and can also be described in terms of the football metaphor mentioned earlier: a passive transition is never necessarily followed by a truly positive transition. For the most part, the result is possession of the ball that is an end in itself that remains in a constantly intermediate stage. This ultimately has no effect on the result of the match but can increase the risk of a systematic counteroffensive.

One might picture the “game plan” of a player who merely follows various movements of the ball and, even when demonstrating the intention to perform some successful moves, does not trust his own strength, the cooperation of his teammates nor directions from the bench. At the end of his calm and measured autobiographical story, this is the image that Giuseppe Raimondi, describes of the Liberation of Bologna in April 1945: “The Italians march modestly, thinking of happiness, without believing in it too much. We entered the procession, the endless line of people. The music came from far away. We walked, carried by the people”.<sup>32</sup>

## 4 The Debate on the Debate: The Medication of Deconstruction and Permanent Transitions

There are other moments in which national literature brings up the subject of transition. One is connected to what might be referred to as the *season of reckoning*, which starts in the 1970s and lasts almost until the early 1990s. Another period,

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**30** Milano: Mursia, 1976.

**31** This is a truly significant novel (unsurprisingly, winner of the Premio Campiello in 1976) in part because the author, a renowned journalist who was active in national newspapers and well-established magazines, was the son of Leopoldo Tumiati. Tumiati was an administrative law expert at the Law faculty of the University of Ferrara, of which he had been the dean for many years, and the “first” teacher of Giorgio Berti. Gaetano was also the brother of Francesco, a partisan who had been captured in the Marche and was shot dead on 17 May 1944, and of Roseda, the author of two very interesting works: *La pace del mondo gelatine* (Ferrara: Bovolenta, 1984; and also Milano: Mondadori, 1995), and *Un piccolo soldato* (Milano: Amadeus, 1991).

**32** Giuseppe Raimondi, *Giuseppe in Italia* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1949), 195.

which starts in the 1990s and still continues to this day, could be called the *age of permanent deconstruction*.

Reckoning and deconstruction, naturally, are phases of the Republican system and its political, social and economic promises. These are all connected in a relationship of so-called evolutionary dependence with earlier transitional literature, but with a much sharper critical outlook. What comes to light during these two new periods are informal constitutional transitions, dictated by a certain evolution of the political system coupled with a change in socio-economic dynamics.

The turning point of the first phase is represented by the works of Pier Paolo Pasolini and Leonardo Sciascia, which share not so much (or not only) the civic passion for which they are often compared. But of greater importance here, their attempt at a narrative and almost philological reconstruction of the conditions of dominance and dependence that form in the *private sphere of the Nation* that are destined to have an impact also on the *public* one, causing the shutdown, if not indeed the collapse of the concrete democratisation process of Italy.

Two works, among many, are more significant than the rest because they highlight the fact that this is second-degree transitional literature: a *discourse on discourse*. In other words, ultimately a story built deliberately on gaps in the previous transitions and on their lethal redundancy, especially in a tragic and crucial historical phase such as the so called “Years of Lead.” This is the case with Pasolini’s great unfinished (and posthumous) *Petrolino*,<sup>33</sup> as well as Sciascia’s *Todo modo*.<sup>34</sup> Both of them, each in their own way, raise a fully-fledged *j’accuse* of transition.

On the one hand, there is a definitive attack on the political and ruling class, the same class responsible for the transition to the republican system and the practical implementation of the great ambitions of the Constituent Assembly. On the other hand, there is also an evident return to the moral theme. This was already alive in the existentialism of the Resistance and its prophetic streaks, but here it emerges in a much more effective way in the description of the strong internal conflict it has with itself and by which it is ultimately defeated.

Pasolini and Sciascia pave the way for a journey that continues until the very beginning of the 1990s, with Volponi’s *Le mosche del capitale*,<sup>35</sup> *La troglia*<sup>36</sup> by Giampaolo Rugarli and *L’ultima provincia*<sup>37</sup> by Luisa Adorno. These are three very

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33 Torino: Einaudi, 1992.

34 Torino: Einaudi, 1974.

35 Torino: Einaudi, 1989.

36 Milano: Adelphi, 1988.

37 Palermo: Sellerio, 1983.

different novels (the first is particularly well known, the second and third less so), which extend the season of reckoning by emphasising its intents and learnings. They then bring it to a close with almost definitive depictions of blocked transitions, including those of economic-industrial, political and administrative types.

Volponi's work, charged so explicitly with a poetic tension that obstinately tries to impress the reader, is revealing on many levels: the declining destinies of the economic boom; the increasingly proclaimed dissociation between building industry and building community; the price a business is condemned to pay when stripped of an essential humanistic engine; the productive world's capitulation to the de-personalising, but all too conscious, language of finance, ambiguously elevated to an exact science; the importance that reason, projects and planning should always have in the intricate reality of contemporary society.

No less forceful is the work of Rugarli, who in complex, chiselled and bewitching language presents, as if in a bad dream, the portrait of an Italy that has become grotesque and irredeemably compromised because it is genetically destined to the deceitfulness and ambition as ends in themselves of an entire ruling class, which have been blinded by the mystique of intrigue and of the *art pour l'art* of power. Even more significant is the ending of the book. At the end of his perilous adventure, faced with a general and almost certain failure, the protagonist and his partner take refuge in an ancient rural village, where there is reason to hope that it will be like the one in the story in *The Thousand and One Nights*. It comes as no surprise that in a *civilly blasphemous* way Rugarli is also able to play with the memory of the kidnapping of Aldo Moro (about which Sciascia wrote one of his most insightful reflections).<sup>38</sup> *La troga* is one of the many variations on the theme of the great, irreducible and evasive *national monster*, which grinds everything, feeds the terrible and audacious complicity of Italians, cannot be eliminated, and can only be tamed by the search for an alternative story of renewed and accelerated breakdown.

Finally, at times almost comical and irreverent, the reckoning is stabilised in the pages of Adorno, who narrates the experiences of adaptation and *hard daily service* of a young woman with an anti-Fascist past who moves to the deep South of Italy. After marrying, she goes to live with the family of her husband, whose father is an official of the Republic who has transitioned fluidly from the Fascist to the democratic system. The language here is not poetic or dreamy. The author looks at reality; no more, no less and the pervading bitterness resorts to satire as its most suitable expressive tool. Here the relationship between administration, society and family is the focus of the critical lens of literature, yet with a gaze inclined to the perspective that the country can be built only by the gradual interweaving of more

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<sup>38</sup> Leonardo Sciascia, *L'affaire Moro* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1978).

liberal individual relationships. Once again, it is the ethical theme of the “constitution of the private” (or *by* the private) that dominates the scene and proclaims that, in the season of reckoning, the problem of transition is delegated to the idea of a critique that cannot be episodic. Rather it must embrace a vocation of diligent therapy or, as one might say, a vaccine.

To continue with the football metaphors, it could even be claimed that during the season of reckoning there is a keen awareness of the fact that the start of a positive transition implies a constant and comprehensive effort in all areas of the pitch. Most of all, it requires of all “players” a renewed and ongoing motivation, which is influenced by: relaunching certain ideals (the rising and broken promises, not only of the republican transition); and through a cross-cutting and continuous *operation of truth* (as if it were a matter of making the citizenry immune from the weight of past debts and their force of gravity). Only in this way can the perhaps positive transition reveal its potential and overcome every phase of uncertainty or, worse, of renewed withdrawal.

Starting in the 1990s, in the so-called *age of permanent deconstruction*, this almost *pharmacological* predicament intensifies with the repeated injection of one evil to cure a more profound implied evil in the hope of complete recovery.

This is a phase that intensifies the question of transition, which in an even more definite way takes on the features of a singular, drawn out process of failed assembly of the citizen *tout court*. It branches out in a network of multiple actions aimed at relaunching the transition in the present through a crude, and sometimes cynical, rereading of the past and of thwarted or failed transitions.

The network feeds off the great debates about the relationship between justice and politics, or between society and economy, and initially started during the passage from the “First” to the “Second” Republic. It then intensified in the recurring phases of the economic and financial crisis, such as in the debate on the environment, on equality or on multicultural society. This is a plural galaxy since very different literary paths lead to it.

One pole of attraction is the *New Italian Epic*, which starts with Lorian Macchiavelli,<sup>39</sup> is carried on by the Wu Ming collective and by the Tersite Rossi collective, the latter with a tendency to merge with the detective genre – alternately tinged with *noir* or crime elements – or with political or dystopian fiction. In this pole the deconstructive discourse oscillates between a declared ideological connotation, which encourages autonomous and profound personal advancement and the subsequent rediscovery of an older message.<sup>40</sup> This continues with almost grotesque

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<sup>39</sup> See in particular *Sequenze di memoria* (Milano: Garzanti, 1976).

<sup>40</sup> This is the case of Wu Ming, as can be seen in many of their works. Among their most recent, see in particular Wu Ming 1, *La macchina del vento* (Torino: Einaudi, 2019).

deformity that deliberately promotes a comparison between historic reality and an openly narrative reality,<sup>41</sup> and more spontaneous social agitation, which is meant to stimulate processes of commitment, dialogue and understanding.<sup>42</sup>

A second pole of reference is the literature of memory, which picks up certain recurring themes of the first pole but goes beyond them. This is because at times in the literature of memory there are important spaces (now, as in the 1970s) for moral stories of reckoning and socio-political and socio-economic critique. The same happens in the works of Giorgio Fontana<sup>43</sup> and Ermanno Rea,<sup>44</sup> in part because in this setting recurring instances of intergenerational and family interaction also coexist (in some ways similar to the transitional literature at the turn of the century, albeit with a decidedly shifted focus). This can also be found in the trilogy by Francesca Melandri,<sup>45</sup> where memory is a place where things can be dealt with in different ways, including relaunching and dramatising the truth of the season of reckoning. Along with this come many difficult and painful phases of the transition of the Resistance or of Fascism, just like other contentious shifts in republican history.<sup>46</sup>

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**41** Very symptomatic of this approach is the weighty series *Trilogia sporca dell'Italia* by Simone Saraso, which opens with *Confine di Stato*, followed by *Settanta* and *Il Paese che amo*, all published by Marsilio (Venezia) between 2012 and 2013. See also different works by Giuseppe Genna such as *Nel nome di Ishmael* (Milano: Mondadori, 2001), *Dies irae* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2006) or *Le teste. L'ultimo thriller* (Milano: Mondadori, 2009). The novel by Carlo Castellaneta, *Notti e nebbie* (Milano: Mondadori, 1975), might be considered a precursor of this approach.

**42** See Tersite Rossi, *È già sera, tutto è finito* (Bologna: Pendragon, 2010); Id., *I Sinistri* (Roma: e/o, 2012); Id., *I signori della cenere* (Bologna: Pendragon, 2016); Id., *Gleba* (Bologna: Pendragon, 2019).

**43** See, respectively, *Per legge superiore* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2011) and *Morte di un uomo felice* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2014).

**44** Especially in *La dismissione* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2002), *Mistero napoletano* (Torino: Einaudi, 1995) and *Il caso Piegari. Attualità di una vecchia sconfitta* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2014), which are all intertwined with each other. Very indicative of the author's "method" and overall research is the beautiful *L'ultima lezione. La solitudine di Federico Caffè scomparso e mai più ritrovato* (Torino: Einaudi, 1992). Within this current is also a tendency towards "mystery" reconstructions, as in the novel by Lodovico Festa, *La confusione morale* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2019).

**45** See *Eva dorme* (Milano: Mondadori, 2010), *Più alto del mare* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2012), *Sangue giusto* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2017).

**46** See, for example, the intense novel by Alessandro Gennari, *Le ragioni del sangue* (Milano: Garzanti, 1993), on the problematic history of the "settling of scores" in which the partisan forces were also involved, or the very recent long short story by Paolo Aquilanti, *Il caso Bontempelli. Una storia italiana* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2020), on the hypocrisy and contradictions of the procedures of post-war purges. Or see Marco Cosentino, Domenico Dodaro, Luigi Panella, *I fantasmi dell'impero* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2017), on the tragic events of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia and the collapse of the Fascist regime. Deserving of separate mention are the enquiries of South Tyrolean German-language literature (consequently not well known to the Italian public, even though they have also been published in Italy) on the ethno-linguistic conflict and the separatist "terrorism" of the

A third area of writing is the one dedicated to the yet-to-be processed acceleration of completely underestimated transitional factors that are decisive and virtually lethal for the relaunch of a national “account.” This is particularly fertile ground when focusing on the Northeast of Italy and the daunting might of its production system. Furthermore, it demonstrates a further metamorphosis of permanent deconstruction and its ability to once again stimulate an empowering and militant debate and to connect it directly to the critical political actions carried out during the season of reckoning. The literary intent in this case is markedly self-reflective, as happens in the works of Vitaliano Trevisan,<sup>47</sup> and in recent years has found a fairly extreme expression in the novels of Romolo Bugaro,<sup>48</sup> Francesco Maino<sup>49</sup> and Giorgio Falco.<sup>50</sup>

The interaction between the three currents is very interesting. First of all, it confirms the lasting persistence of transitional clichés that had been previously coined, with a renewed critique of the political and ruling class or of the role of party politics, as well as the importance of individual rebirth as the prerequisite for social rebirth. Beyond this, there is still a very strong ethical and existential tension, almost as if to reintroduce the project of a model of citizenship – as social experience – that originates deep inside each of us and demands consistency in both the private and public sphere. But there is more.

Especially from the first and third current a line of enquiry emerges that is almost anthropological in origin, which not only reveals the inefficient and fragmented result of the failed transitions, but also exposes the terrible continuation of this. Specifically, the idea of work or in the relationship with one’s own land and landscape, which have also been deformed, and as an unavoidable consequence of tearing down the borders of community and of the prevalence of an illusory tension towards affluence: “In this noose of progress/I don’t know if I’m swallowed/or if I swallow”.<sup>51</sup>

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1970s: see in particular Fritz Tumler, *Incidente a Trento* (Milano: SugarCo, 1990), a novel in which the author digs deep into the previous transition, during the First World War, juxtaposing the trial of the “traitor” Cesare Battisti at the hands of the Austro-Hungarian imperial army with the trial of the South Tyrolean attackers by the Italian State. Similar areas are explored by Joseph Zoderer: see *L’italiana* (Milano: Bompiani, 1985) and *Il dolore di cambiare pelle* (Milano: Bompiani, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> See above all *I quindicimila passi. Un resoconto* (Torino: Einaudi, 2002); *Tristissimi giardini* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010); *Works* (Torino: Einaudi, 2016).

<sup>48</sup> See in particular *Effetto domino* (Torino: Einaudi, 2015).

<sup>49</sup> *Cartongesso* (Torino: Einaudi, 2014).

<sup>50</sup> See in particular the very recent *Flashover. Incendio a Venezia* (Torino: Einaudi, 2020).

<sup>51</sup> Andrea Zanzotto, *In questo progresso scorsoio. Conversazione con Marzio Breda* (Milano: Garzanti, 2009), 10.

This last learning highlights a very strong continuity with the season of reckoning, with which it shares the feeling of uncertainty about the effective impossibility to understand the definitive direction of the transition. To use the football metaphor once again, there is a very clear indication of the use of the continuous and widespread technique of *Gegenpressing*, or permanent transition, without any preconceptions of where there might be room to play a long ball. It is the aspiration to a hypercritical, suffocating tactic that attempts to dignify the utopia of the game itself and of the team (and therefore of the *tight-knit community*) as the end goal. But it is also a setting in which a few long balls betray the attempt to escape towards an original and primitive condition, one of total and perhaps unattainable recovery.

Yet, in order to be able to reflect on the constitutional qualification of the debate on transition, this uncertainty needs to be carefully examined because it strengthens the notion that the constructive debate on the foundation/refoundation of Italy not only could, but even – paradoxically – *ought to be* prepared outside the institutional channels of renewal. This is because the blocking or de-constituent factors are perceived and represented as being located externally and therefore need to be confronted intimately and socially with a different, or at least correctly re-calibrated compass.

## 5 Some Conclusions: The Transition of Sisyphus and the Importance of a Closer Homeland

A review of a novel by Enrico Deaglio, *La zia Irene e l'anarchico Tresca*,<sup>52</sup> a book that could rightfully be included among the works that link the first and second of the most representative currents of the age of deconstruction as mentioned above, contains a consideration that might help bring to a close the perspective discussed so far: “What is it that moves [...] the destiny of a people? There is the power of politics and the power of the Church, the power of finance and the power of culture and information, the power of the secret services and the power of the criminal underworld. In order to understand history we must take an overall look and hold all the threads, because if we pull one, we do not know where it will come undone. If the different powers communicate with one another, time and space do so too: the Fascist period and the current age, the United States and Italy – a *continuum* that seems to have no limits of space or time. The strong tendency towards biographical writing is perhaps a warning not to forget history, which is a

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<sup>52</sup> Palermo: Sellerio, 2018.



conglomeration of personal stories that determine its outcome: history cannot be understood in its entirety if subjective experiences are ignored”.<sup>53</sup>

The passage summarises very well two conclusions. First, the analysis of the evolutions of certain literary developments is a window into the journey of collective national history as a single large and long *substantial transition*, occasionally marked by formal constitutional transitions, the potential of which has not been fully realised. Such incompleteness can be appreciated especially in places where literature shows the dissatisfaction of a *demanding* and *obstinate* subjectivity towards a context (institutional, political, social, economic, etc.). This occurs through insistence on personal or family stories that run through both formal constitutional and substantial transitions that do not recognise this context, or they attempt to block it through dynamics of control or domination that it tries to resist.

In this way it is storytelling that becomes a continuous and necessary reactant, as if it had been trained over time to overcome the blow of missed opportunities and the conscious tragic backdrop of the illusion created by that outcome. It stimulates the permanent promotion of a substantial citizenry considered an antibody for curing and subsequently building an alternative public domain. This domain, however, emerges from the individual’s conscience, from their “awakening,” and exposes those who believe in it to the agony of Sisyphus. In other words, exposure to the danger that the weight against which they have struggled for so long and that has apparently been removed might roll back again onto their shoulders.

Furthermore, this analysis raises another undoubtedly interesting point: the examples of plural experiences, in the form of stories or novels, reveal that the factors that are materially able to “move” or “change” a certain social, and indeed legal order, are positioned on a map of very material and effective forces, which go beyond those that are institutionally recognised. To ignore them means to indulge or stimulate or, worse still, accelerate prevalently passive and regressive transitions. Hence the push to search for the *homeland*, which is no longer formally recognised in the attrition of those forces and with everything that can be grasped pertaining to one’s own daily experience.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, the imperative for

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53 Giulia Zagrebelsky, *Vigilie di guerra: passato e futuro distopici nel nuovo romanzo di Enrico Deaglio*, in *L’Indice dei libri del mese*, online edition (27 September 2018): <https://www.lindiceonline.com/letture/narrativa-italiana/enrico-deaglio-la-zia-irene-e-lanarchico-tresca/>.

54 Following an image from Patrizia Cavalli, *La patria* (Roma: nottetempo, 2011), 13–14: “If I decide not to imagine,/if in my cold task I do not see,/what must I do so that I can feel/perhaps a breath of it, and have a feeling of it?/Perhaps reduce the radius of my gaze to what is around me: to look at those things/that force me to do it touching me/in my senses ...” (translation from Italian by F. Cortese).

jurists to understand the value of this attrition and to acknowledge that the greatest constitutional achievements can be defended and perfected only once much more elementary conditions have been met.

## Bionote

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