

Book Review: Franco Baldasso, *Against Redemption. Democracy, Memory, and Literature in Post-Fascist Italy*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2022, 303 p.

By Gianluca Cinelli

*Against Redemption* contributes to the cultural history of post-war Italy that tracks the unfolding of individual intellectual trajectories in the context of Italy's transition from fascism to the Republic. In the background stand the war, the parenthesis of the Resistenza (with its ideological and eschatological legacy), and the heritage of fascism which continued to affect public life after 1945. The central intention of the book, as one can read in the conclusions, is to "uncover the rich and complex intellectual networks that defined the post-Fascist transition in Italy" (199) through the examination of the positions of many different authors, including Malaparte, Moravia, Bertolucci, Brancati, Savinio, Morante, Saba, Carlo Levi, Flaiano, and Piovene.

Overall, it is clear that the author sees in the work of these intellectuals a constellation whose common denominator was the critique of the "political wrong" of the post-fascist transition, which was, first of all, the symbolic redemption from fascism. All the authors examined shared, in different ways, an anxious relationship both with the present and the past, and an urgency to challenge the simplification of history and politics expressed by the juxtaposition of blocks (fascism vs. anti-fascism, communism vs. anti-communism). Therefore, the author starts with the premise that in the period 1943-1948, the Italian response to the war and fascism did not consist of a cohesive and coherent cultural life but rather of the proliferation of heterodox voices (10). Apart from a few authors on whom the book focuses more thoroughly, numerous secondary publications and occasional contributions to the post-war cultural and political debate are also accounted for in a broad-ranging investigation.

Beyond the relevant contribution on the role of the selected authors in the post-war debate on the democratization of republican Italy, the book's main thesis does not seem very innovative. The author clearly expresses his intention to analyse and theorise post-war literary practices as a primary form of intellectual dissent, capable of questioning the post-war categories of cultural analysis (3). However, aspects of the Italian post-war cultural debate such as the dissent towards Croce's historicism, the critique of the myth of the Resistance as

an instrument of easy redemption from fascism, the reticence towards the lost war, and the reluctance to discuss the role of Italian intellectuals in the debate on anti-Semitism are some of the topics that this book touches upon without, however, contributing particularly innovative insight.

The book has the ambition to include in an overall narrative different intellectual experiences, like in a picture of landscape seen from an increasing altitude: the author of *Against Redemption* looks at a multifaceted cultural season whose most significant exponents (although there are still others that the book does not deal with) seemingly shared the basic objective of rejecting the teleological interpretations of historicism. In other words, the book seems to suggest that post-war Italian intellectuals, despite their different inclinations, ideological orientations, and existential experiences, shared the struggle against one common adversary: Croce's idealism. By developing a reflection around the concept of humanism, which fascism and anti-fascism adopted in polar opposite ways, the author concludes that both fascism and anti-fascism failed as revolutions and that the aftermath of the war, therefore, did not produce enthusiasm for the possibility of renovating Italian cultural and political life, but tiredness and "moral prostration", which makes the post-fascist transition a historical moment of great fluidity and wasted opportunities (203).