

**The 'Delaying of Age' Novel in Contemporary Italian Literature
(1980–2011)**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the development of the *Bildungsroman* in Italian narrative between 1980 and 2011 and focuses, as a case study, on seven novels by three contemporary writers: Pier Vittorio Tondelli, Sandro Veronesi, and Giuseppe Culicchia. By contrasting the idea of an end of the literary genre with the First World War, as theorised by Franco Moretti in *The Way of the World* (an influential study on the European *Bildungsroman* published in 1987), this research will aim to demonstrate that contemporary Italian literature still engages with the genre. However, this analysis will show that a traditional coming of age process is no longer possible in contemporary society and will propose a different perspective from which to observe the transition from youth to adulthood – and its representation – in Italy. Acknowledging that the postponement of adulthood has become a common trope to describe this process, this thesis will argue that, instead of a coming of age process, the male young protagonist of the novels selected faces a ‘delaying of age process’, a conscious choice to postpone his entry into an unwelcoming adult world.

The first two chapters of this work will establish the methodological background on which the textual analysis conducted in the following two chapters will be based. Chapter One will develop along two complementary lines: on the one hand, by basing my discussion on Moretti’s study, I will trace the origins of the *Bildungsroman* and identify the elements of continuity and diversity between the traditional examples of the genre in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and its evolution in the twentieth century. On the other hand, I will study the changes undergone by youth over the centuries, especially focusing on the shaping of male identity in the first decades of the twentieth century. Chapter Two will provide the socio-historical framework of this research, drawing a picture of contemporary Italy (from the aftermath of the Second World War), which will discuss the central issues against which the ‘delaying of age process’ will be analysed: generation, family, gender roles, work environment and consumption. In Chapters Three and Four, I will read the narrative texts selected as representing that ‘delaying of age’ trend which I will identify as a specifically Italian way of coming of age in contemporary society. By focusing on the relationship between the male protagonists and the ‘other’,

the textual analysis will show new ways of conceiving the process of becoming a man in contemporary Italy.

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