

Reassessments: Literary and Cultural Canons

Réévaluations : canons littéraires et culturels

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Changing Traditions, Changing Canons – Pier Vittorio Tondelli's Other Libertines

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Italian literature in the late 1970s and early 1980s

At around the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, a certain change of perspective can be seen in Italy not only in literature, but also in editorial policy and behavior. The Sixties and Seventies were dominated by the neo-avant-garde movement and the theoretical debates of *Gruppo 63* (Group 63) and, consequently, marked by a relative “crisis” of the genre of the novel in favor of essay-writing.¹ Such a crisis of the narrative was also caused by the flourishing of postmodern ideas and theories, due to which prose works tended to be anti-narrative and self-referential, emphasizing combinatoric rules and focusing on theories of narration as opposed to “traditional” story-telling. However, by the end of the 1970s, one can see a growing interest and demand among the public to have at hand and read “real” stories, with ties and references to current reality and to readers’ own lives and everyday experiences. This is in great part due to the success of certain significant books, such as Italo Calvino’s *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore* (If On A Winter’s Night A Traveler, 1979), Elsa Morante’s *La Storia* (History, 1974) and Umberto Eco’s *Il nome della rosa* (The Name of the Rose, 1980): works that brought back faith in literature and (mostly the last two books) in the possibilities of narration (cf. La Porta, 1995: 10-11, 23-24; Bonura, 1992: 29-30; Tani, 1990: 130-131). At the same time, editorial culture also changed its attitude: it started to look for “real” stories and to promote, besides some authors that were already successful, young and unknown writers whose publication offered the double advantage of introducing new literary voices and representing less onerous expenses for publishing companies than those of more well-known narrators.²

1) In reference to the influence of the neo-avant-garde and of Group 63, cf. Benussi (1987: 12-15), Tani (1990: 33-36, 197), Manacorda (1987: 91-142, 190-191, 335) and Petito (2005: 11-12); on the dominance of essay-writing, cf. Benussi (1987: 12-15), Tani (1990: 36, 42, 130) and Petito (2005: 12).

2) On the mechanisms of editorial policy in the last decades of the 20th century, cf. Tani (1990: 130-140), Panzeri (1996: 15-24) and La Porta (1995: 12).

It was then no accident that a new group of writers emerged in the 1980s. Referred to as “the young narrators,” they were primarily first-book authors, who brought to Italian literature new approaches to facing reality and new modes to describe it. The use of the plural is not incidental: the picture of this “young narrative” appears to be highly varied, and the ways of the individual authors are consequently difficult to categorize. In fact, the label itself was also more a product of editorial policy created as much for increasing salability as for facilitating a collective discourse about these writers (among whom one can find Antonio Tabucchi, Andrea De Carlo, Aldo Busi, Roberto Pazzi, Daniele Del Giudice and Pier Vittorio Tondelli) than a reliable term of identification for describing the linguistic and formal aspects of their work (cf. La Porta, 1995: 12; Panzeri, 2001a: 74).

However, what seems to be a very important common characteristic in these writers is their will and ability to narrate stories and their power to “look around themselves without prejudices, open to recognizing the connotations and symbols of a new society” (Tani, 1990: 139³), that of the Seventies and the Eighties. Giulio Ferroni highlights another important common element: as he explains, this was the first time the young demanded space in literature *for themselves* and, unlike earlier young generations, did not define themselves in relation to “adult” literature but wanted to show their own world and to appear as they really were (Ferroni, 2001: 286). That they had no intention of opposing their predecessors is probably also due to this, just like the fact that they had no crystallized program: they just wanted to *do* literature, without any debate, controversy or contrast (cf. Pedullà, 1991: 7-11; Ammirati, 1991: 21-22; Ferroni, 1991: 654-655). The general character of these opinions may already in itself cast light on how difficult it can be to “categorize” this new generation’s publication of highly varied works, for which literary critics also often describe these years simply as the period of “the hundred ways of doing literature” (*i cento modi di fare letteratura*; cf. Pedullà, 1991: 8; Szénási, 2004: 99).

In spite of all that, it seems that the new narrators can also be characterized by another feature which manifests itself in a renewed interest in the surrounding reality that they attempt to apprehend by various, often very individual techniques. Tondelli also says in a conversation:

What characterized the emergence of new authors in the Italian literature of those years was the absolute individuality of their ways. ... I think that each of us, in those years, tried to solve the problem of contemporaneity. Some used the spoken language, others a more literary style, others *retro* and still others that more purely cinematographic style (Panzeri, 2001a: 74, 76).

As Tondelli’s words demonstrate, one can clearly see a strong return to reality in the works of this new generation, consequently it may not be wrong to talk, in terms of Italian narrative fiction in the late Seventies and early Eighties, of a (new) return to realism, or even of a “new realism of the Eighties”: a realism which might not have been entirely missing earlier, but which manifests itself more strongly and coherently in this period.

3) In the present paper, all the English translations of works originally in other languages are mine: D.M.

At the same time, this turn also brings with it – due to the new context, the technological advances and the social and cultural changes of the second half of the 20th century (cf. Ferroni, 1991: 593-670; Manacorda, 1987: 219; Tani, 1990: 17) – new modes and techniques of describing reality, traceable, within narrative fiction, in a certain modification or change of the literary means. What is more, examining the Italian literature of these decades from this point of view, it seems to me that in the field of narrative fiction there are a number of works (or perhaps it is even better to say a *range* of works) which can be characterized not only by modal changes, but also by *reduction*. I use this term to describe not only the simplification – at times even the trivialization – of the themes narrated and of the literary means themselves, but also the reduced use of the latter. I am thinking, among other works, of novels such as Andrea De Carlo's *Treno di panna* (Cream Train, 1981), in which the narration moves primarily on the surface and is mainly reduced to a mere observation of things. Further, still before *Cream Train*, in the first book by Pier Vittorio Tondelli, *Altri libertini* (Other Libertines, 1980), even if extremely different from De Carlo's novel, a certain reduction can be perceived first of all in the choice of language, which is strongly affected by vulgar expressions and contains various elements until then less common (if not thoroughly unknown) in “official” literary production, but also in the choice of the themes narrated, which are in the same way proof of a certain “downward stylistic movement”. It is also interesting to see (in relation to De Carlo's *Cream Train*, as well) what Tondelli says about his own way of writing: “I am the narrator who puts the surface into a scene, knowing that this surface is our crust, the crust of contemporaneity, but at the same time it also becomes substance” (Tonchi, 2001: 944).

Because of such techniques of reduction, it may also be possible to talk, in terms of Italian narrative fiction in the last decades of the 20th century, about a certain kind of “reductive realism”: that is, about a way of writing which does not aim (any longer) at either the totalizing descriptions of “Great Realism” (which attempts to offer a comprehensive historical, social etc. picture of reality), or at that of sociologically committed Neorealism (with its great desire for documentation), both of which would intend to communicate moral positions and judgments in a more direct way, but about a realism that concentrates on the surface, on some elements of contemporary reality knowable and recognizable in everyday life; this is a realism free from explanations and judgments, in which it is more the process of interpretation (at the same time, of course, not thoroughly independently of the text) which can lead to wider conclusions, to general truths.

In any case, I deem it important to note that by saying all this I am not claiming an *impoverishment* of contemporary Italian literature. Just the opposite: I believe that such changes signify and open new possibilities for Italian literature, some original ways which might have been unexplored so far and can embrace surprising complexities, since the stylistic and thematic choices one can find in similar, what we might call reductionist works are – as we will likewise see in Tondelli's book – consciously planned and well-founded. So, what happens here is not so much a degradation of the narrative genre but rather a very interesting renewal and regeneration of it.

Pier Vittorio Tondelli: *Altri libertini* (1980)

After these preliminary observations (considered important in order to develop a picture of the period's narrative fiction as well as a context in which to position *Other Libertines*), Pier Vittorio Tondelli's book is in the centre of our attention: I will attempt to show the novelties it represented with respect to the earlier literary tradition. Thus, I intend to indicate features which can be seen as signs of the downward stylistic movement or reduction I describe above and, at the same time, to show how much these points are in reality – and in spite of what they might appear – fruits of a very complex operation. In this way, I also want to prove the efficacy of writing such as Tondelli's, which could also be defined as “reductionist” and which had a great influence on the following generations as well as a deep and undeniable effect on the evolution of the literary canon.

When Tondelli's *Other Libertines* was published in 1980, it caused an immediate sensation – as well as a scandal. As a matter of fact, even though the book – or, as the writer preferred to define it, “episode novel” (*romanzo a episodi*; cf. Panzeri 2001c: 1123) – with its six stories was popular among readers, it was also very soon confiscated by the authorities for the new thematic and linguistic features it represented (though it was released again in 1981). Indeed, *Other Libertines* reflects an “uncensored” spoken, everyday language, rich in rough and foul expressions and obscenities; in the same way, the themes narrated are also often “shocking” and “rough”: for example, the six stories talk about the everyday life of some (apparently) care-free young people (or groups of young people) in the region of Emilia-Romagna at the end of the Seventies, among whom we meet young drug addicts, drug dealers, homosexuals, transvestites and so on, characters who were quite unusual and “scandalous” in those years.

In the beginning, a great deal of criticism underlined, due to the setting and the generational character of the book, its *sociological* and purely *generational* aspect, while much less was said about its literary characteristics (cf. Panzeri, 2001a: 122-124). It is primarily for this reason that it became associated with two other novels, Enrico Palandri's *Boccalone* (1979) and Claudio Piersanti's *Casa di nessuno* (Nobody's House, 1981), since those are also connected in some ways to the Seventies, to the cultural climate of those years, to the movement of '77 and the disillusionment that followed.⁴ Apart from these books, Rocco and Antonia's (pseudonyms for Marco Lombardo Radice and Lidia Ravera) similarly generational *Porci con le ali* (Pigs with Wings, 1976), which provides a frank and open narration through the voices of two teenagers in Rome of the (first) sexual – and in this case political – experiences, ambitions, desires and fantasies of the young of that decade, can also be associated in some respects with Tondelli's writing or even be considered as something of a “precursor”.

In Tondelli's book you can really feel a strong connection to these years and decade. So much so that, according to Stefano Tani, “the real beginning of the phenomenon

4) On the common aspects of these books, cf., among others, Petito (2005: 24, where Petito cites from Generoso Picone's introduction to the 1993 edition of Piersanti's *Nobody's House*), Picone (2001: 19-20), Belpoliti (2010: 319, 325), Benussi (1987: 17-18) and Carnero (1998: 40-42).

of 'the young narrative,' with all its weight of generational expectations, is not so much *Other Libertines*, which closes one decade, but rather *Cream Train* (1981), which opens another," given that, in his opinion, Tondelli's book

fits into the series of editorial operations typical of Feltrinelli ... which are much more fruitful when they are located on the crest of a still hybrid moment, such as the year 1980, situated between the last convulsions of a decade of great socio-political commotions and the beginning of a massive return to order ... (Tani, 1990: 199).

In any case, the connection of Tondelli's book to the Seventies can be felt not because it could be characterized by any ideological discourse: as the writer also said, his works "show a rejection of ideology" (Tonchi, 2001: 944). The absence of this, though, was not perceived as a deficiency: "It does not mean that I am an indifferent writer since I believe that there is an important social aspect in my books" (Panzeri, 2001a: 63). And it is exactly in this "social aspect" where the relation of *Other Libertines* to the preceding decade lies since the "episodes" of the book talk about young people's reality in the late Seventies: young people tired of politics and of any kind of ideology, seen in their private and everyday lives, through which, then, a certain collective picture of them will also be possible to perceive. So much so that according to certain critics "in the early stories of *Altri libertini* the self, the 'I', is substituted by an undefined and choral 'we'" (Zancani, 1993: 221), and "the subjective and collective dimensions become interconnected to such an extent that they mutually condition each other" (Tagliaferri, 1992: 14). In fact, through the generational cultural references (such as those in the long description of the character Annacarla's room in Tondelli, 2000: 151-153),

the book offers itself as a reliable catalogue of all the myths and figures of the youth imagination of those years, at least relative to what we might call an "alternative" space (the movement of '77 and its milieu, including the less politicized factions) (La Porta, 1992: 263).

So it seems that in *Other Libertines* Tondelli managed to realize one of his main intentions with writing: that "from [his] books could emerge the expression of an era, of a time" (Panzeri, 2001a: 47). Because of this he did not object when people used the term "generational" in connection with his first book; what is more, he said that he was the very one who "attempted in a certain sense to narrate those things which could be called 'generational ways'" (Panzeri, 2001a: 54). And the generation he wanted to talk about was his own, even if in his book he often chose to have as main characters those living on the edge of society (but always suitable for characterizing those years), what might be called the "boys of life" of his time.

The reference to Pasolini's *Ragazzi di vita* (*Boys of Life*, 1955) is not accidental: *Other Libertines* often became associated with the works of this Italian writer – and mostly with this very novel. Enrico Minardi (2003: 59) makes this association; moreover, Ilona Fried notes that "in his first works Pier Vittorio Tondelli may approach the legacy of Pasolini,

he aims at **social, familiar taboos**” (emphasis in the original). At the same time, she also points out that “Tondelli is going his own way” and intends to show the present, the world of a given period not by “using the dialectical elements, but certain idioms of the spoken language, swear words, argot, and [...] also builds nonstandard grammatical forms into his style” (Fried, 2003: 51).

One can see that to focus on contemporary reality, to “register faithfully the observations about what happens around [him]” (Tonchi, 2001: 945; but cf. also p. 944), was already in itself one of the most fundamental elements of Tondelli’s writing. So much so that when defining, one decade after the publication of *Other Libertines*, what it meant for him to be a writer in the Eighties, it was this very aspect that he emphasized the most: “It meant to have a style which is capable of compromising itself with contemporaneity, with the jargon, the spoken language, the slang of the youth, the background of rock culture and subcultures” (Panzeri, 2001a: 66).

As one can see, to be contemporary and to be able to talk of certain groups of young people also means finding the proper way to do it (the context, the language, and so on). Though it may have been through a certain downward stylistic movement, Tondelli certainly found this way: that is where his uncommon content and language choices came from, which he applied not only to introduce certain novelties into Italian literature and to explore certain unknown areas of it (cf. Mainardi, 2001: 948), but also to describe the new reality of the Seventies (or at least some areas of it). Thus, while Tondelli was not completely unaware of the possibility of scandal his book could create (cf. Panzeri, 2001a: 45), he also worked according to a well-considered project: that of creating possible situations capable of representing “the life, the problems, the anxieties, the frustrations, the enthusiasms” (Carnero, 1998: 26) of his generation, and also that of finding a similarly effective language.

However, Tondelli had no lack of literary models to follow for his work. His style and his literary choices owe a great deal to American literature and to the Beat Generation (cf. La Porta, 1992: 265; Panzeri, 1994: 21; Tagliaferri, 1992: 12; Minardi 2003: 58; Levini, 2007: 108-112; Buia, 1999: 80-81, 93-94): let us just remember the importance of the motif of travelling in *Other Libertines* (but also in all the work of Tondelli and his generation in general). The writer himself described the influence of the American trend as follows: “[T]he literature of the Beat Generation offered a way of escape. It taught you to dream, it incited you to move, to set off, to discover the towns and the lands, the inns, the pubs, the meeting places” (Tondelli, 2001: 788, but cf. also pp. 786-790; Panzeri 2001c: 1123; Panzeri, 2001a: 84).

Tondelli’s literary formation owes much to Jack Kerouac, considered as the “bearer of a new style,” who “put in the center of narration the little everyday things, the marginalized people, the ordinary events, always seen and described through the deforming and sublime lens of poetry” (Tondelli, 2001: 787). In the same way, the literary influence of another noted representative of the American trend, William Burroughs, can also be demonstrated in his work: Burroughs’ addiction to drugs and inclination to homosexual relations not only influenced the themes and the style of the American author’s writings, but also often recur in the narration of *Other Libertines*.

Apart from them, James Baldwin's works were also among Tondelli's favorite readings. As an African-American, Baldwin talked about subjects considered taboos in his time, subjects like homosexuality and racial discrimination. But Tondelli also mentioned some further names connected to violent and anti-conformist literature, such as those of Richard Price and Hubert Selby, while critics likewise compare his writing to that of Charles Bukowski (e.g. La Porta, 1992: 265; but cf. also Palandri, 1992: 18-19).

Referring to foreign influences (not only American, but also European ones), he still remembered Louis-Ferdinand Céline for his work on the flow of spoken language and Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, who served him "first of all in terms of the discourse, the language" and aided him in "the study of the dialogical word as well as in that of the polyphonic structure of the novel" (Panzeri, 2001c: 1123). In the conversations with Fulvio Panzeri, published about ten years after *Other Libertines* (in which, therefore, it is possible that Tondelli was speaking of writers he came to know only *after* having written his first book), apart from the overseas influences (among which was also that of a woman writer, Carson McCullers), he also mentions those of French (Roland Barthes), Austrian (Ingerborg Bachmann, Peter Handke) and English (Christopher Isherwood) authors (cf. Panzeri, 2001a: 85-86).

While Tondelli was a writer who paid attention to the international literary world, he was also a strongly *Italian* author, and not only because the short stories in *Other Libertines* are set in Italy (Correggio, Reggio Emilia and its surroundings) and the Tondellian narrative is deeply linked to the Emilian region (cf. Levrini, 2007), but also due to its linkages to Italian literary models: first of all to Alberto Arbasino, Giovanni Testori and Gianni Celati. In fact, on Arbasino and Testori, Tondelli said:

Reading, for example, Testori's *Il ponte della Ghisolfa* (Ghisolfa Bridge) or Arbasino's *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy) or *Le piccole vacanze* (Little Holidays), you have the clear sensation of how the Fifties and the Sixties were vital, and still are, in these books. They spring out with an extraordinary expressive power. [...] They are stories of extraordinary topicality.

And what Tondelli wanted to achieve in his books (and in *Other Libertines*) was the same: "If this was so, twenty years from now, with *Other Libertines*, I would be happy..." (Panzeri, 2001a: 85).

With all this in mind, he did not limit himself to the world of literature, but was also aware of other cultural channels, such as those of cinema, music, comic books and the figurative arts. What is more, Tondelli considered their influence just as significant as that of literature (if not even more important): "I believe that my cultural and generational formation... has its points of reference in cinema, television, comics, and all the mythology connected to the personalities of pop and rock, with the drugs also within this mythology, rather than high culture" (Mainardi, 2001: 953). It is no surprise that Silvia Ballestra (rightly) observed that

[f]or Tondelli there was no contradiction, at least I believe, among the various forms of expression: from literature to music to fashion to lifestyle, everything could be traced

back to an inextricable mass of references; all the cultural stimuli (and among these rock perhaps deserves a primary position) managed with identical importance to pervade his writing (Ballestra, 1992: 333).

It is in this context that it becomes possible to understand, besides the thematic choices, the linguistic ones in *Other Libertines*: seeing Tondelli's adherence to contemporary reality, due to which his writing is also affected by extra-literary genres, and his commitment to providing a valid imprint of this reality is most manifest. It is partly for this reason that the language of the book imitates everyday *spoken language*, rich in expressions from youth jargon because this was exactly the way in which the young generation of the Seventies (or at least certain layers of it) talked, joked, suffered and expressed their feelings.⁵

So Tondelli turns his attention to common, everyday phenomena and events, which is also sustained by the use of the spoken language: that is, as Tondelli said, of “a very direct language, more similar to what I used in letters that I wrote to my friends” for which “writing had become more narrative, less reflective and literary” (Panzeri, 2001a: 46). This language of primarily paratactic structure and apparent immediacy is, though, the result of a complex and well-considered operation, in fact proved not only by the influence of the genres mentioned above, but also by a further sign: by the inherent “pulsation” of the text, the rhythm deriving from it. Just like the language, the “application ... of ‘individual’, ‘private’, ‘minimalist’ themes” (Carnero, 1998: 21) may also have the aim of lending a rhythm to the narration, of filling it with emotion since what Tondelli intended to do was to create an “emotive” literature:

My literature is emotive, my stories are emotive; the only space that the text has to be lasting is the emotional one; ... emotive literature is that which is most intimately connected to language; emotive literature expresses the intimate and emotional intensities of language ... (Tondelli, 2001: 779).

The role of the early Celati – writer and professor of English and American literature at Drama, Art and Music Studies (DAMS) at the University of Bologna – was essential in the formation of Tondelli's vision, given that Celati himself had also worked a great deal on language and on the flow of the spoken language in his first writings (cf. for example Belpoliti, 2010: 148-149). It was thanks to him that Tondelli became acquainted with Louis-Ferdinand Céline (of whose work Celati was a translator): this “meeting” proved to be similarly essential for Tondelli himself. This is how he spoke of their influence:

The experience of Gianni Celati in the Seventies was very important. As a narrator, he put you in direct contact with the page, with his predisposition to the ‘gags,’ to the flow of the spoken language. As a translator of Céline, he held extraordinary lessons on an author unknown to us. What fascinated me in Céline was the grotesque, the rhythm of

5) For an analysis of the language in Tondelli's works, see D'Angelo and Feola (1997: 165-171).

the page, the adventure and the velocity of the word. This is what I took a little bit of for *Other Libertines* (Panzeri, 2001a: p. 85).

But Arbasino's "lesson" was also highly important since, in order to render his writing emotive, he intended, just like Arbasino, "to invent on the page the sound of the spoken language" (Tondelli, 2001: 780, where Tondelli cites from the work of Alberto Arbasino, *L'Anonimo lombardo* [The Anonymous Lombard]; cf. also Panzeri, 2001b).

This work on writing could not avoid taking into consideration the influence that music (and primarily rock) exercised on the language and life of the young generation of the Seventies. Thus the Tondelli of *Other Libertines* (but also that of the later books) also wanted to talk of the importance of music, and he did so, besides the direct references to music groups and songs, by working on language itself since, as he said: "[T]he relation you had with the songs was exactly identical to that with literature and refined poetry: the need to understand, to interpret, to memorize" (Tondelli, 2001: 340). For this reason, his desire was that "of producing a text which [had] an internal course analogous to certain musical rhythms" (Panzeri, 2001a: 51).

The result of this deep consciousness in writing is a linguistic novelty for which Tondelli can also be considered, in some respects, an *experimental writer*. In fact, the linguistic work in *Other Libertines* is such a determining factor that critic Giuseppe Bonura comes to the immediate conclusion that "characters [in *Other Libertines* are] a consequence of the choice of the language, and not vice versa (assuming that you can separate the two things)" (Bonura, 1992: 33). Tondelli himself explained the role of the characters in his works as follows:

All the interest is brought to the characters; the characters are emotive intensities, are short circuits of sound; ... the characters are discursive drifts in the streaming flux of the language; the characters are rhapsodies of a spoken language in motion; the characters are rhythmic actions ... (Tondelli, 2001: 781-82).

Whether you accept Bonura's statement or not, it is impossible to deny that what results from the Tondellian project is a great vitality of narration, a flowing language which is, at the same time, complex, "pulsating" and, to quote Italian singer Luciano Ligabue, a book which is very "rock" (cf. Ligabue, 1994: 88-90).

So, in a certain sense, Tondelli's *Other Libertines* is an experimental book, while its realistic character is also undeniable, even if Fulvio Panzeri's observation that "*Other Libertines* is only apparently situated within the trend of extreme realism" (Panzeri, 2001c: XVIII) also seems to be right. In fact, Tondelli himself did not think of writing neorealist stories; at the same time, though, he did not deny that in his writing "the search for 'narrativity', for legibility and for a direct capture of reality [reconstituted] in some way the relation with the vein of realism" (Mainardi, 2001: 957).

In any case, the thematic and linguistic characteristics of *Other Libertines* (the narration's attention to the everyday, the use of spoken language, the description of minimal, private, everyday events) make it possible, within certain limits, also to associate it with

another trend of the late 20th century: namely, that of Minimalism. Or, to be more precise, that of “Post-“ or “Neo-Minimalism” (as defined by Fernanda Pivano; cf. Pivano, 1986: 219-268), a term which covers Minimalist writers who belong to the generation after the “first” Minimalist wave (Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie, Mary Robison, etc.) and whose first works appeared during the Eighties.⁶ In fact, just as in (Neo-)Minimalist works – those of Bret Easton Ellis, David Leavitt, and Jay McInerney, published, though, several years later than the Tondellian novel – there is also a preponderance of minimal facts in *Other Libertines*. Here too “characters are what they do and morality is implicit in the action and in the gesture” (Bonura, 1992: 31), while the “basic units of the narration [are constituted by] the existential fragment[s] ... assumed as absolutes” (Bonura, 1992: 34). Given all this, maybe we could also say that Tondelli was, in a certain sense, a forerunner of Minimalism or at least – as Bonura says – the “trend ... of American Minimalism” (Bonura, 1992: 31) in Italy,⁷ even if his narrative and language seem to be less “dry”, rigid, neutral and objective than what one can see, for example, in an Ellisian novel.

Conclusions

These pages have focused on Pier Vittorio Tondelli's first book, *Other Libertines*, with special regard to the various novelties it represented in Italian narrative fiction: the inclination to realism which manifests itself as much in the themes narrated as in the book's language, and lends the narration a “crude”, at times even obscene character. This examination of the author's stylistic choices and of his book's relation to Italian and world literature aimed to cast light on the complexities and the efficacy that lie behind the apparent simplicity of *Other Libertines* (“simplicity” for which the book may also fall in the category of what I have defined as “reductive realism” and “reductionist” works).

For this purpose, the author's literary ideas and activity as a writer were discussed (partly moving beyond his first book, as well), in part due to the great influence Tondelli exerted on the next generations of writers. His significance is evident not only because of his constant efforts to propagate the fame of many young narrators of the Eighties (e.g. within the Under 25 project, in which a number of authors that are already successful today – Giuseppe Culicchia, Silvia Ballestra, Gabriele Romagnoli, etc. – had the chance to publish their first writings⁸), but also because of the great effect that his taboo-breaking language and narrative choices had exercised on their style (e.g. on that of the

6) On (American) literary Minimalism (and Neo-Minimalism), see, apart from Pivano's work (1986: 219-268), *Mississippi Review* (40-41, Winter 1985), Abádi Nagy (1994), *HELIKON* (49.1-2, 2003), Abádi Nagy (2001: 129-143) and Tani (1990: 140-145).

7) See also Panzeri (1996: 17): “The world of Leavitt, of Bret Easton Ellis, of a certain McInerney (and also that of the solitary and very original Raymond Carver) is included in part in the world of Tondelli.” (Panzeri cites a paper by Giuseppe Bonura read at the “Nuovi narratori 90” conference, held in Ancona, 20-22 April 1990.)

8) The Under 25 project, established among other things to provide an opportunity for writers younger than twenty-five years old to be published, spawned three volumes: *Giovani blues* (Il Lavoro Editoriale, Ancona 1986), *Belli & perversi* (Transeuropa, Ancona 1987), and *Papergang* (Transeuropa, Ancona 1990).

pulp and “cannibal” writers, for whom Tondelli was seen as a precursor or a certain kind of “leader”; cf. Mondello, 2007, especially pp. 15-48; Pezzarossa, 1999: 206-211).

As these influences and the discussion of the characteristics and novelties of *Other Libertines* demonstrate, not only was Tondelli a particular, innovative voice in the field of Italian literature, but he also brought some important changes into Italian narrative fiction due to which – today it is already impossible to deny – he deeply affected the evolution of Italian literary traditions and the Italian literary canon: what once was considered scandalous because of its newness and departure from traditions, by now become part of the canon and is essential for an understanding of current trends in contemporary Italian literature.

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