

*Attitudes of the youth in contemporary Italian literature –
from Tondelli to Murgia*

Summary

The purpose of the present thesis is to present the evolution of youth attitudes in postmodernity through an analysis of works by a number of up-and-coming writers. The focus on the young generation is due to its considerable sociocultural significance but also because it is this particular group that provide best insight into the phenomena that pervade the present era of radical change. Tracing this evolution as demonstrated in the works of young authors results in a multifaceted perspective that transcends literature. This dissertation consists of four chapters.

The first chapter provides the theoretical basis for the study of attitudes adopted by the young generation. The main focus is on postmodern theories and various approaches to postmodernity. As a point of departure, the author juxtaposes the views of some of the greatest investigators of postmodernity such as Zygmunt Bauman and Anthony Giddens in order to demonstrate how a plethora of approaches reflect the complexity of the era itself. Special attention is paid to identity, whose development is often hindered, and to concepts that are inseparable from it such as narcissism and nihilism. In order to best capture the ambiguity of postmodernity, the second part of the chapter discusses the various spheres in which it manifests itself, including social relations, space, consumption and the job market.

The remaining chapters are of empirical nature and include a direct analysis of a selection of works by young authors. Each analysis is preceded by an overview of historical and political circumstances that informed the given period, such as the economic rise and fall and other mechanisms that had a crucial impact on society's transformation.

The second chapter opens with an analysis of marginal spheres of young people's lives and a presentation of various aspects of behaviour demonstrated by this age group. The first to be considered are the use, abuse and addiction to alcohol, with particular emphasis on the diverse modes, circumstances and motives for alcohol consumption. The author then examines the evolution in the use of narcotic drugs and other intoxicants. The following subchapters investigate the sexual practices of the youth in order to identify the changes that have occurred in the approach to this intimate sphere of life. Another part of the chapter is

devoted to the typology of journeys. Given its ambiguous nature, the concept is considered from a number of perspectives: as a search for identity, a form of escape or the final journey beyond existence.

The third chapter explores the various modes of consumption, placing emphasis on the relationship between an individual and the surrounding space, the ways in which that space is perceived, the places of consumption and their continuous expansion within the geographical territory of Italy. Special attention is paid to popular holiday destinations which are seen as parallel universes far removed from everyday reality, and the influence that such places have on young people's conduct. The remaining part of the chapter is devoted to human body and the position it holds in the eyes of postmodern society, as well as its functions and dysfunctions. From a mechanism designed to fulfil our basic physiological needs to the object of consumption, the chapter examines the pervasive changes in body ideals to highlight the obstacles that young people struggle with when building their identity. The author then considers a number of consumption-related issues and indicates the ways in which mass media regulate interpersonal relationships. The chapter finds its natural conclusion in the exploration of such phenomena as material goods, brand equity and cultural consumption.

The fourth chapter deals with the problem of instability and the various ways in which it manifests itself. Taken under scrutiny are family-related issues, namely the role that family plays in the personal development of an individual and the change that this deeply-rooted social institution has undergone, in parallel to economic and sociological changes. From the total absence of family through its *unpresent presence* to the impossibility of starting one's own, the author considers the characteristics of a postmodern family-life and the way it influences the youth and the future of society as a whole. The focus then shifts to the moment of transition from within the structure of a family into a peer group, understood as a preferred environment for the exchange of personal experiences. Of particular interest are the relationships forming within this community, the sociopsychological mechanisms underlying the process of leaving the school environment - the primary space of socialization, and the factors that prepare a young individual for autonomous existence within society. The final part of the chapter covers the ever-changing relations between young people and the job market - a sphere where the instability reaches its breaking point. The emphasis is placed on the evolving profile of a young employee and such phenomena as vagrancy and the precariat.

The final chapter delivers a synthesis of observations made throughout the dissertation. Presented here are thoughts and remarks concerning not only youth attitudes but

also the condition of literature produced by representatives of the young generation. In this context, the present dissertation concludes with an analysis of the myth of youth, expressions of identity and fragmentation, concerning both individuals and newly-produced works of literature, and the myriad ways in which postmodernity impacts the attitudes expressed by the young generation.