

**Gillian Ania**

## **Tullio Avoledo's début novel, *L'elenco telefonico di Atlantide*: Millennial Inspirations and Constraints**

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### Summary

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### **I. *Creating the writer***

«Lavoravo da quasi dieci [anni] nello stesso ufficio (l'ufficio legale di una banca di provincia), un lavoro ben pagato, stavo facendo anche carriera: tutto sembrava andare per il meglio, quando la mia banca venne assorbita dal più grande gruppo bancario italiano. Di colpo tutto cambiò».1

In the summer of 2000, Avoledo thus found himself obliged to move from Pordenone to Milan, a change that affected him deeply («Mi sembrò che mi stesse crollando il mondo addosso») and led, such was the force of his sentiments, to the writing of *L'elenco telefonico di Atlantide*, a "banking fantasy". When published, in 2003 (by Sironi), the novel won the Premio Forte Village Montblanc for emerging writers, and met with some critical attention; later that year it was reissued by Einaudi. Seven more novels have now followed, including *Tre sono le cose misteriose* for which the author was awarded the Premio Grinzane Cavour (in 2006), and *La ragazza di Vajont* and *L'ultimo giorno felice*, both published in 2008.

Chance, then, was partly responsible for creating the writer. Yet other factors were also at play in the decision to write a novel rather than, for

example, a mordant journalistic exposé of the banking world. The second element of the "cocktail", as Avoledo refers to it, was a "corso di lettura" that he had followed previously in Pordenone, focusing on the writers Gianmario Villalta and Mauro Covacich. This suggests the existence of some kind of aspiration even before the "crisis" (his personal banking crisis), that Avoledo was, even if subconsciously, seeking a way in. Looking back on the "corso", the author told me:

«Ricordo quanto mi impressionò, fra tutti, un racconto di Salman Rushdie, *La radio gratis*. [...] È stata quindi per me una grande emozione ritrovare Rushdie sul palco, alla cerimonia di premiazione del Grinzane, l'estate scorsa. Gli ho detto "Mr. Rushdie, è incredibile trovarmi su questo palco con lei, in questo giorno. Un suo racconto è stato fondamentale per me, perché cominciassi a scrivere". Rushdie rispose "Oh yes, indeed?" O qualcosa del genere. E con queste tre parole si è chiuso il nostro incontro...».<sup>2</sup>

Much earlier in life, Avoledo had written poetry, and might have continued along this route had he not, he freely admits, encountered the poet Leonardo Sinisgalli in the mid-1970s: «Sinisgalli lesse le mie composizioni e mi disse, con tutta la gentilezza possibile, che per me era meglio rimanere un *lettore* di poesie, piuttosto che un poeta...».<sup>3</sup>

The third factor, and linked to the first, was the - as it turned out - short period Avoledo spent working in Milan; this proved to be the most "explosive" element. The author was not only turning to writing as a reaction to a change in circumstances, but more especially as an outlet, a way of externalizing his feelings of frustration, anger and distress, of coping with «il crollo delle mie certezze personali, la minaccia alla mia vita familiare». Never before had his job so completely isolated him.

«Il lavoro era terribile [...] perché imponeva di adattarsi a schemi di lavoro e di pensiero totalmente alieni, a una burocrazia del lavoro che ancora mi angoscia. In quei due mesi, per sopravvivere, la sera andavo ad ascoltare qualche conferenza, o gli scrittori che venivano a Milano. Incontrai Michael Cunningham, Hanif Kureishi... Ma soprattutto *scrissi*».

Everything Avoledo witnessed in the bank, all the machinations and manipulations, would be worked, deftly and engagingly, into the novel, in particular «la noia, le riunioni interminabili, i piccoli soprusi aziendali e le grandi manovre della macroeconomia...». The initial draft of *L'elenco telefonico di Atlantide*, in fact, was completed in just two months.

## II. «*L'elenco telefonico di Atlantide*»

All the above, then, combined to cause a legal adviser, in his early forties, to write a fantastic, yet autobiographically-inspired novel. It is worth pointing out, at this juncture, that it is comparatively rare to find novels set in an everyday ("9-5") business environment. Most writers have little or no experience of that world, being, it would seem, much more oriented to that of lawyers, teachers, doctors, or the police.

After an introduction to the ironically-named "condominio Nobile" (where the protagonist has a flat), and to the grotesquely-drawn figure of Aurelio Fabrici (a fellow tenant), we meet Giulio Rovedo in the first of many crises at the bank: like the author, Giulio suddenly finds himself threatened with a transfer to Milan, in his case to work for the (apparently) conventionally-named "Bancalleanza". This multinational company, however, described variously by reviewers as «potentissima», «fagocitante» or «mastodontica»,<sup>4</sup> sports as its logo "l'Arca dell'Alleanza", or the "Ark of the

Covenant", something that will set in motion a whole sequence of bizarre twists and turns in the plot.<sup>5</sup>

The title of the novel, hinting at both the mythical ("Atlantis" as the epitome of the "lost world", the fabled, wonderful civilization of antiquity) and the modern (the "phone directory", the link or tool listing addresses and numbers) illustrates Avoledo's penchant for confusing time sequences, a facility further developed in his subsequent fiction. The story, indeed, will transport the reader through a flurry of alternating scenes (and dreams) to a world in which nothing is what it seems. Set (apparently) in the year 2000, the novel portrays (apparently) a week in Giulio's life; he "inhabits" a precarious working environment where employees are constantly faced with requests to subvert normal practices, with demands for paper accountability, and with threats of training, re-training, transfer or redundancy. Giulio's outbursts are restrained at first, since he desperately fears losing his job; he limits himself to private verbal exchanges with colleagues, as the following, with its Kafkaesque overtones, illustrates:

«- Sai cos'è che mi manda proprio in bestia? È il loro stile. È come nella barzelletta del sergente e della recluta rimasta orfana. Un giorno magari entro nel mio ufficio e ci trovo un altro seduto alla mia scrivania. [Giulio]

- Non ci guadagni niente, a logorarti così. [Carla]

- E se poi scopro che mentre dormivo mi hanno trasformato in uno scarafaggio?

- Gli scarafaggi fanno carriera, qui.

Suo malgrado Giulio ride. - Pensa se Darwin avesse studiato l'evoluzione da noi, invece che alle Galapagos. Anziché "la

sopravvivenza del piú adatto" avrebbe inventato "la sopravvivenza del piú incapace"». (ETA, p. 12)<sup>6</sup>

Even important personal changes at the bank are communicated in remote, non-personal ways: it is from a fax machine that Giulio learns one evening of his own transfer, just as he is on the point of leaving for home.

«In quel momento il fax si scrolla e sputa un messaggio di quattro pagine, con in alto a sinistra il logo di Bancalleanza - un'arca stilizzata che sembra quella dei film di Indiana Jones - e a destra il marchio della Grimm Consulting, quella macedonia incomprensibile di rune spigolose. Il fax è la bozza di verbale della riunione del giorno prima a Milano, inviata al *dottor Rovedo*.

Giulio scorre velocemente le pagine man mano che escono dalla fessura e cadono a terra [...].

Via via che le ha lette appoggia le pagine sulla grata del termosifone, che le soffia via *comme les feuilles mortes*.

Quando l'ultimo foglio è stato letto, e il contenuto assimilato, le palle del dottor Rovedo rotolano sopra i fogli di carta sparsi sul pavimento». (ETA, p. 62, original emphasis)

Following his transfer, machines (photocopiers, computers, mobile phones) continue to dominate the humans, and his situation deteriorates even further. Giulio is harassed and constrained by all manner of impersonal structures and strictures in a world in which subcontracting is rife, takeovers are opportunities for furthering immoral ends and feathering private nests, and senior colleagues, including Cecilia Mazzi, the new head of personnel (or "Relazioni Umane"),<sup>7</sup> are scheming and duplicitous.

Outside work, Giulio fares little better: he is obliged to deal with eccentric neighbours, Egyptologists and computer hackers, acquaintances with murky pasts, distressed friends and a truculent wife. Giulio, for his part, however, is neither a reliable friend nor a considerate husband.

The "inspirations" are, it should be clear, those of Avoledo, while the "constraints" of my title refer to those experienced by his protagonists - which reflect but exaggerate (partly for comic effect) the author's own at the time.

The many tensions in the novel, especially the fear of redundancy, are emphasized by the many allusions and witticisms.<sup>8</sup> Long service is no guarantee of respect, and experienced employees are forced to take orders from young upstarts as managers, including the significantly-named dottor Amon Gottman;<sup>9</sup> the first impression Giulio has of the latter at the meeting in Milan (before his transfer) is of «un ragazzo altissimo, piú vicino ai venti che ai trent'anni, con strani capelli biondi» (ETA, p. 23). Gottman is always 'busy' dictating or giving orders, and yet sits at «una scrivania dal piano assolutamente sgombro» (ETA, p. 24); he is a middle manager who has no opinions of his own, as he points out to Giulio's legal counterpart at Bancalleanza: «io non ho *opinioni*. Io ho *istruzioni*. Precise direttive. Come tutti. Io non prendo decisioni. *Vo*non prendete decisioni. Noi *eseguiamo*. Punto e basta» (ETA, p. 25, original emphasis). As his role demands, he desires only conformity and uniformity: «Il *masterplan* non prevede margini di disomogeneità», he reminds his marketing officer (ETA, p. 27, original emphasis).

These affronts to intelligence and self-respect are instrumental in provoking Giulio to become involved in a plot, or counter conspiracy, against Bancalleanza; he is persuaded (by certain characters and coincidences) that the bank is carrying out a furtive yet determined search for the Ark of the Covenant - believing it (l'arca dell'*alleanza*, my emphasis)

to be concealed in the basement of his "condominio", the "condominio Nobile".<sup>10</sup>

Flights of fancy, surreal incidents and mystifying exchanges gradually take over from humdrum routines in this modern-day search for the "Holy Graal".<sup>11</sup> And if the Ark is to be found in Giulio's basement (which is where the story began), this simply adds to the suspicion that the search is anything but lofty. Indeed, once news of "la fonte miracolosa" seeps out (water emanating from the sink in the basement, whose properties appear to be curing the terminally-ill Fabrici; see ETA, pp. 366-98), the Nobile building is swiftly turned into a regimented site of pilgrimage and a commercial bottling operation, with various tenants, and representatives from the church and local council, all vying for the rights.

From the tenor and mood of the narrative, as well as from the situations in which Giulio finds himself, it is evident that the author identifies closely with his protagonist. Characters' names in stories, indeed, can often be a "give away" as to their symbolic and/or ideological function: it is hardly a coincidence that "Giulio Rovedo" rhymes so neatly with "Tullio Avoledo", as other critics have already observed.<sup>12</sup> Giulio, however, despite belonging to the anti-managerial coterie, is hardly an efficient or deservedly independent employee: from the beginning of the novel we see him falsifying his department's accounts, to cover up for his failure to keep "proper" records. Furthermore, he rarely manages to be serious, which does not always endear him to others. When his friend Walter tells him «Oggi è arrivato un'altra lettera di dimissioni», he promptly quips «Spontanee o "spintanee"?» (ETA p. 30); and when his legal advice is later sought (to help «un'ottima cliente») by a colleague who foolishly refers to "common sense", Giulio scoffs: «Guardi, se vuol parlare di buon senso, ha scelto l'ufficio sbagliato. Qui ragioniamo ancora in termini di diritto. Poi devo dirle che all'università ogni volta che ho dato una risposta basata sul buon senso mi hanno bocciato» (ETA, p. 116).

Is Giulio's conduct a consequence of, or the grounds for that of others? The causal relationships are anything but clear-cut. Nevertheless, what is clear, is that all the daily restrictions and frustrations, the lack of control, indeed, over any area of his life, cause Giulio to feel trapped. This unfortunate protagonist, however, is in effect trapped in a far more *essential* way than he, or the first-time reader of the novel, realizes... (I will refrain from further comment here, since, in the words of Stefano Baschiera: «Non si può andare oltre nel parlare di questo libro per non rovinare le numerose sorprese e colpi di scena che lo compongono»<sup>13</sup>).

### III. *The question of style*

Turning now to the question of style, the author has indicated that he does not view it as a "constraint", that is, in no sense is he consciously aiming at any version of "bel lettrismo". Avoledo has stated:

«Mi interessano i personaggi e le trame, pochissimo le parole, lo stile. O le elucubrazioni solipsistiche. Mi piace che in un romanzo succedano cose, non che ci siano bellissime descrizioni lunghe una pagina che non fanno progredire di un fotogramma (il termine è voluto) la narrazione...».

Yet Avoledo is no Dan Brown, and if we see style more as an individual way of writing, an attention to mode of expression that requires an ongoing process of rethinking and reformulating, for effect and for a significance that derives as much from the "medium" as from the "message", one that goes beyond the simple recounting of a vertiginous "succession of events", then his assertion is largely misplaced.

In Avoledo's work there is, it is true, a strong sense of both the dynamic and the visual, and films, together with English-language science fiction, appear to exert considerable influence on his use of lexis, his imagery,



allusions and points of reference; Baranelli has rightly referred to the "result" as a «contaminazione di generi letterari e spunti cinematografici».<sup>14</sup> In *L'elenco telefonico*, the references to film, however, convey diverse layers of meaning that transcend the immediate surface one, from seemingly innocuous comments to those that are more obviously consequential for Giulio. The former is illustrated by colleague Saverio's comment to Giulio, regarding a tricky decision: «In ogni caso questo è il *tu*o film»; ETA, p. 171, original emphasis); the latter category can be illustrated by Giulio's remark to Maurilio (a computer hacker) that he feels he is living in a film: «In un *brutto* film, devo dire. Ho paura che il finale non sia meglio, ma sono comunque curioso di vedere come va a finire» (ETA p. 284, original emphasis).<sup>15</sup> The fact that as a film *L'elenco telefonico* would take only a few hours to watch is not irrelevant, indeed, to the intriguing finale of the novel. Similarly, the conflicting time layers in the story and the question of perspective (with whose eyes are we seeing events?) link us back to the ever-compelling Pirandellian notions of art and life, especially the binary problem of 'illusion' and 'reality', the dynamic intersections between them, their blurred and shifting interfaces.

The persistent influence of films and books on the protagonists' "reality" is indeed striking in *L'elenco telefonico* (and, moreover, beyond). Giulio makes explicit reference to this "fact" when he visits his seriously ill friend, Franco:

«Pensavo che è buffo come ricorriamo ai film per spiegare la vita. In un mondo normale dovrebbe essere il contrario. Dovrei dire "guarda, a quell'attore succede una cosa che è successa a mio cugino", oppure "ehi, quell'attrice assomiglia a una mia amica, e parla anche come lei". Invece è tutto il contrario. Siamo noi che somigliamo o non somigliamo agli attori. E le nostre vite le confrontiamo coi film». (ETA, p. 209)

And this is the point. Despite an irritating tendency to over-explain (certain references and allusions, for instance), *L'elenco telefonico* presents some inspired sequences of "false" or "reverse" logic showing the fragile balance between order (negative) and chaos (positive), between cause and justification, between whole series of disparate elements - showing the absurd links we can create, or indeed miss, as we seek to make sense of our lives. Is there a link between Bancalleanza and the basement of Giulio's "condominio"? Between the Ark of the Covenant, Schindler's Ark, and Amon Ra? Between the Ford Ka and the Egyptian spirit ka? Is there a "fonte comune" (other than the communal sink in the basement...)? These factors lead me to demur from the author's professed lack of interest in style.

#### **IV. «*L'elenco telefonico*» and the other novels**

Many of the above themes recur in Avoledo's later work, and here I make brief comparisons with his second and third novels. In *Mare di Bering* (2003) particular prominence is given to the nuclear threat, global warming, and political subterfuge, as well as to the fraudulent "manufacture" of qualifications: the protagonist, Mika, earns his living by commissioning degree theses.<sup>16</sup> Half Giulio's age, Mika seems to be, as Avoledo has recognized, a sort of surrogate son this time (rather than his alter ego, as was Giulio in *L'elenco telefonico*).<sup>17</sup> The tenor of discourse, or "contaminazione di generi", is similar, as are the linguistic subtleties and pointed criticisms; but unwelcome here, to my mind, is the occasional intrusion of a coarseness that seems gratuitous. Walter Giordani has declared: «non è un giallo, non è un romanzo di fantascienza e neppure d'avventura, ma ogni componente è presente e si amalgama perfettamente»; for this critic, its story is more balanced than that of *L'elenco telefonico* («io la "classificherei" piuttosto come commedia, a

volte divertente, a volte dura e cinica, senz'altro ricca di umanità») and so he can forgive the author «alcune sbavature» in the domain of content.<sup>18</sup> In this respect, I remain less well disposed to this novel.

The third novel, *Lo stato dell'unione* (2005), examines, with the same kinds of whimsical humour and sharp wit, the threat to Italy of the Northern Italian separatist movements. The setting here is the fragile world of advertising. Particularly ridiculed, again, are senseless rules, empty desks and time-wasting managerial practices (a theme which characterizes so much of Avoledo's writing up to 2007), not to mention the notion of "unity" itself. The protagonist, Alberto, an out-of-work publicist invited to lead a project for the Fascistic council, ruminates: «Non sopporto il lavoro di squadra. [...] Riunioni e progetti sembravano fatti apposta per insabbiare un'idea, per mummificare e avvolgere in un bendaggio di banalità uno spunto originale» (SU, p. 72). And whilst the appointment of Alberto to lead the new project (with its "persuasive" separatist slogans) is initially puzzling as he had been sacked from his previous position following the company's collapse, once again the narrative gradually exposes darker forces at work, and motivations that are as economic as they are political, as heinous as they are corrupt.<sup>19</sup>

*L'elenco telefonico di Atlantide* - together with *Mare di Bering* and *Lo stato dell'Unione* - represents a powerful criticism of corporate and political greed and malpractice. Subsequent novels broaden their focus further to look at questions of law, public safety and family life (*Tre sono le cose misteriose*, 2005), Fascism, race and love (*La ragazza di Vajont*, 2008), and the Veneto "ecomafie" (*L'ultimo giorno felice*, 2008), while *Breve storia di lunghi tradimenti* (2007) returns to the banking world, with a modified Giulio as protagonist and Cecilia as his *femme fatale*.

In all his work Avoledo exposes, critically, through quite absurd situations and juxtapositions, some of the more reprehensible, damaging and frightening aspects of our business-dominated, contemporary world. He

especially fulminates against injustice, globalization and corruption, but also against managerial idiocy, consumerism, linguistic distortions, and the creeping, totalitarianizing creation and enforcement of rules and regulations in all walks of life. A master of irony, ambiguity and humour, including playing games with his reader - not least with regard to the temporal disjunctions and overlaps - what emerges very strongly is his sense of grave disquiet at the frenetic pace of life, the constant and changing pressures for individuals swung this way and that, with little true guidance, and the dominance of the visual (image) - *all* the empty products ("desks") of capitalistic mass "culture".

To return briefly to literary style and characterization, it must be said that while some stylistic criticisms may be levelled at Avoledo's first three novels, by his fourth (*Tre sono le cose misteriose*) the author had cultivated a style that was reflective as well as fast-paced and dialogue-centred.<sup>20</sup> Not all Avoledo's pages are masterly (there are still instances of verbal redundancy) but the author captures the imagination, reflects and criticizes societal realities, and raises some very serious issues which, I would contend, invite reaction. While his declared intention is to amuse (not least himself) through his creation of eccentric characters, intriguing plots and fantastic situations, which play especially with concepts of time, a pressing motive is to "judge" and condemn; this is effected at times through a serious idealism (if not quite an ideology), at other times with a lightness of touch, an outspoken irreverence. There are, furthermore, myriad inter-textual links between his novels (in relation to characters, places, quotations and images, especially reference to Atlantis), as well as the presence of various conflicting elements. We find an attack on American values, yet a homage to its writers and directors; a parody of certain kinds of contemporary linguistic usage, and yet the use, in effect, of such language. Similarly, there are characters who rail against rules in one environment yet enforce them in another, and characters who criticize

corporate fraud, yet who are not adverse to engaging a home help on the black market. Such inconsistencies and moral deficiencies are epitomized by Giulio Rovedo, «personaggio colorito, sgradevole, sarcastico»,<sup>21</sup> and further developed in Avoledo's subsequent protagonists. I suspect that this forms an important part of what the author is illustrating: that we are all compromised, including the conscious protesters, and that even the "poco simpatico" can take an idealistic stance.

Tullio Avoledo is an inspired writer. He sets up imaginative, surreal, if sometimes over-complex scenarios, and speaks out bravely (because so pointedly) against some of the dehumanizing elements in society, voicing his fears for the future, for future generations. The indications are that the future promises to be no "safer" or "saner" for mankind, and he may be inspired, therefore, to engage along the same battlefield for some time to come. And while it can perhaps be argued that Avoledo is writing too much too quickly, time - human time - is not infinite, and his writing has a keen sense of urgency about it. One of the questions he frequently raises is the relationship between finite man and his supposedly infinite environment. If there are any solutions, perhaps they will be explored in his latest novel, *L'anno dei dodici inverni*(2009), his search for the human in the (time-) machine.<sup>22</sup>

#### **Note:**

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<sup>1</sup> Email Interview, 23 November 2006. Unless specified otherwise, all statements by Avoledo in this essay derive from this interview.

<sup>2</sup> *The Free Radio* is a short story in the collection *East, West*, New York, Vintage, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> He did, however, write a number of book reviews for «Il Giornale» (personal communication, 14 November 2009).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, L. Lipperini, *Un esordio letterario nel segno di internet*, in «La Repubblica», 24 January 2003; S. Baschiera, *Questo è un altro mondo*, «Stradanove.net», 10 February 2003, available at:

<<http://www.stradanove.net/news/testi/libri-03a/labsc1102030.html>> [last accessed 30 July 2011].

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, *L'elenco telefonico di Atlantide*, Turin, Einaudi, 2003, pp. 62, 109; hereafter ETA.

<sup>6</sup> Whilst all Giulio's friends have degrees, in fact, few are "able" to work in the professions for which they have studied; this is not (or not just) because of a scarcity of jobs, but since intelligence and experience are not required, merely various degrees of compliance.

<sup>7</sup> Mazzi asks Giulio petulantly: «Sono o non sono il responsabile del personale?» (ETA p. 198), to which he retorts: «Pensavo che fossi l'addetta alle "relazioni umane"». She merely answers back, «Stessa cosa» (ETA, p. 199). The irony is extended, since shortly afterwards they begin an affair.

<sup>8</sup> These relate not only to the world of banking, but touch wider issues. At one point Giulio goes to visit his neighbour Fabrici at the hospice, where he notices a large sign: «Non aggiungiamo anni alla vita ma vita agli anni»; it occupies a whole wall, «come i motti mussoliniani del ventennio» (ETA p. 410), the description evidently hinting also at more contemporary political associations and slogans.

<sup>9</sup> Amon-Ra is the "Zeus" of the pharaonic pantheon, as well as the Egyptian Sun god. Gottman is the "god-man", a sort of universal orchestrator; his father, we later discover, is named Adolf.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to being run by Grimm Consulting, and financed by the Covenant Foundation of New York (where its headquarters are located), the bank also, as is pointed out much later to Giulio, «nutre un interesse per l'antico Egitto del tutto insolito per una banca» (ETA, p. 341).

<sup>11</sup> Reference to the "Santo Graal" recurs intermittently (eg ETA, pp. 13, 426).

<sup>12</sup> See A. Bianchi, *Vivere dopo la morte. Postmoderno e distopia ne «L'elenco telefonico di Atlantide» di Tullio Avoledo*, in «Narrativa», September 2003, n. 25, *Scrittori del Duemila: Gli esordienti*, pp. 187-200, p. 187; and E. Baranelli, «*L'elenco telefonico di Atlantide» di Tullio Avoledo*, in «Gialloweb», 5 February 2003, <<http://www.gialloweb.net/recensioni/elencoatlantide.asp>> [last accessed 30 July 2011].

Today, Avoledo feels "released" from his close identification with Giulio: «Abbiamo tutti bisogno di vedere le cose dal punto di vista di un altro, prima o poi. Di sentirci sbilanciare dalle nostre certezze. [...] Il relativo benessere economico seguito ai miei quattro romanzi [fino al 2006] mi permette di essere più ottimista e tollerante di Giulio Rovedo».

<sup>13</sup> S. Baschiera, *Questo è un altro mondo*, cit. See also G. Ania, *Apocalypse and Dystopia in Contemporary Writing*, in Ania, & Ann Hallamore Caesar, eds, *Trends in*

*Contemporary Italian Narrative 1980-2007*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, pp. 155-81.

<sup>14</sup> E. Baranelli, «*L'elenco telefonico di Atlantide*» di Tullio Avoledo, cit.

<sup>15</sup> See also ETA, pp. 33, 213-14. The life-film analogy recurs in Avoledo's third novel, *Lo Stato dell'Unione*; protagonist Alberto comments to his friend: «Questo è il mio unico film, Neil», but here he does not want to know the end; see *Lo stato dell'unione*, Turin, Einaudi, 2005, p. 337; hereafter, SU.

<sup>16</sup> At one point Mika is physically bullied into agreeing to procure an honorary doctorate for an important personage; see *Mare di Bering*, Turin, Einaudi, 2004, p. 225; hereafter MB.

<sup>17</sup> We are even told, in passing, that Mika's father has worked in a bank for thirty years (see MB, p. 20).

<sup>18</sup> W. Giordani, review of *Mare di Bering*, in «Gialloweb», 4 January 2004, <<http://www.gialloweb.net/recensioni/marediberling.asp>> [last accessed 30 July 2011].

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of this novel, see G. Ania, *The "corporate" corruption of identity in Tullio Avoledo's «Lo stato dell'Unione»*, in «Specchi di realtà», Quaderni di cultura (Trinity College Dublin & Trauben, Turin), forthcoming.

<sup>20</sup> Avoledo's early experiences of the literary world into which he "projected" himself (or "was projected") are amusingly recounted in his piece *Impressioni di viaggio nel mondo letterario*, in «Il Giornale», 29 January 2004.

<sup>21</sup> M. Mocchi, review of *L'elenco telefonico di Atlantide*, in «Intercom. Science Fiction Station E-zine», n. 14, <<http://www.intercom.publinet.it/ic14/elencoatlantide.htm>> [last accessed 30 July 2011].

<sup>22</sup> Earlier this year (personal communication, 20/21 January 2009), I learnt that this novel was to be set in the year 2035, in Salford (following his visit there in June 2008), where there would be a Chair in Chrono-literature, or the literature of time-travel. The novel was published in November 2009, as this article was nearing completion.

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