rimane probabilmente l'opera più celebre dello scrittore lombardo, vale a dire Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana ("A Baroque Mistery"). In questo romanzo, l'abilità di Gadda di vedere e prefigurare l'infinita relazione esistenze tra le cose trova la sua massima espressione: il risultato è una detective-story che, paradossalmente, invece di condurre il lettore ad una risoluzione finale del mistero, si attorciglia su sé stessa, creando un effetto di "perpetual displacement" (p. 97). Il nodo, lungi dallo sciogliersi nelle pagine finali, cresce ad infinitum, dopo ogni singola pagina. In questo processo risiede la grandissima novità del romanzo di Gadda, puntualmente sottolineata da Dombroski che scrive: "Gadda's originality consists less in representing the tangles scheme of things which in traditional detective fiction begs to be, and is usually, unravelled, than in expanding entanglement in such a way that solution and closure are virtually impossible" (p. 98).

Il volume si chiude con un "Appendice" di grande interesse. Dedicata ai rapporti tra Gadda e il Fascismo, questa sezione intende riconsiderare quello che, per molti anni, è stato interpretato come un rapporto occasionale e legato solo a situazioni contingenti. Al contrario, Dombroski riesce a dimostrare, in virtù di un'accuratissima ricerca testuale, come questo rapporto sia stato più forte e importante di quanto non sia stato sostenuto. Tuttavia, a dispetto di questa adesione, Gadda non esitò mai, come nel caso del Pasticciaccio o di Eros e Priapo, a sbeffeggiare la retorica fascista, bersaglio ideale su cui poter liberare tutta la propria carica satirica. Termina così il libro, uno studio veramente interessante e appassionato al termine del quale ci si sente stimolati a tuffarsi nella lettura della pagina più significative di Gadda, autore dalle mille sfaccettature che Dombroski aiuta senza dubbio a comprendere meglio.

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"Aestheticians and scientist are distinguishable from ordinary people not because they have different problems, but because they try to provide more complex explanations or definitions for the problem" (p. 74). However complex the explanations in this book by Luciano Nanni, who has been teaching at the University of Bologna since he got his degree there in 1970, the problem that interests him is fairly simple. What allows artistic communication to refuse unequivocal meaning, inviting interpretation after interpretation? What is it that makes art polysemic? Is it something inscribed its formal structure, or a function of the contexts in which it is read? Nanni's book is a polemic against what he refers to in shorthand as the "structuralist," and emblematises with the semiotician Umberto Eco and occasionally Roman Jacobson, a theorist who explains polysemy by reference to the particular use of signs which are made by an artwork. Nanni's competing theory
(presented, to all appearances, as though it were mutually exclusive of the other) is that linguistic meanings are established by the cultural frameworks determining their use, frameworks that prompt us to see some semiotic acts as clear and others as fuzzy, some as unequivocal, others as polysemic.

The first interest of Nanni’s essays is to establish and justify this polysemia of the artwork against a belief in autonomously determinable meanings of art. Nanni returns again and again to a notion that has not occupied American theorists for some twenty years: the intentional fallacy, or the relative irrelevance of an author’s intentions. If anything, we have come full swing on this issue since the famous New Critical attacks in the 1940s and 1950s, at least since Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michael’s essay “Against Theory” of 1982 convinced us that the search for authorial intentions is inevitably at work in readings. Nanni’s objective, instead, is to stress the extent to which literary meaning is produced extrinsically: “metaphor does not exist as a problem in [a] work … but in the critics who interpret the work. Criticism metaphorizes the reality of the work; the work does not metaphorize the reality external to it” (p. 123). And yet, once the responsibility for polysemia is located outside the text, however, one must wonder how far such polysemia obtains. Was The Iliad as ambiguous to Homer’s listeners as it sometimes is to us? Is there something in that text which has led cultures to read it in differing ways? Nanni properly reaffirms the hermeneutical a priori of discursive situation over textual formalism; but that in itself does not vanquish such formalism, or the effort to understand the composition of artistic languages. For this composition is itself cultural, promoting various degrees of polysemia. It is itself a function of practice and convention, of cultural “readings,” no less than an interpreter’s reading of it.

Nanni’s second large objective is to redirect theoretical attention from a poetics of production to a poetics of use. Logically this would seem to point to the interests and institutions—cultural, historical, ethical, political, commercial—to which artistic practices are subjected. Yet it is not clear whether Nanni would welcome such investigations. Everything in this book points to the pragmatics of artistic consumption as the basis for art’s heightened powers of meaning, but Nanni still appears unwilling to embroil himself in messy matters of artistic reception. Once or twice in this book he indicates that thinkers do exist who recognize an intentio culturae beneath the intentio auctoris, operis, and lectoris that concern the semiotician: to wit, Stanley Fish, Arthur Danto, and Gianni Vattimo, on one page (p. 108). But they are all dispatched. Fish “does not fully realize what he intuit or sees”; Danto “ends up opting for an Aristotelianism by which he confuses effect and cause”; Vattimo, who is admittedly interested in the intentio culturae, is of little use because he “has concerns that are more ethical-political than strictly scientific” (p. 108). Given Nanni’s own principles, one wonders when scholastic, scientific theory should cede pride of place to thick cultural analysis?

Some readers sympathetic to Nanni’s argument may regret that the only recent theorist he does not ignore is his colleague (and apparent nemesis) at Bologna, Umberto Eco. Scores of others have built bodies of work around Nanni’s concerns, beginning with Ludwig Wittgenstein, who amply established that living situations of language-use underlie interpretations of meaning. Since Wittgenstein
many others have argued Nanni's main points in plain rhetoric, thinkers with whom he might have engaged in fruitful dialogue: Fish himself, with his classic transpositions of significance from words to interpretive communities; Richard Rorty, whose new pragmatism locates the construction of meaning in complex culture; Heidegger, Gadamer and reception aestheticians, inspired by a hermeneutical understanding of historicity; Stanley Cavell, John Searle, and speech act theorists; Paul De Man, with his emphasis on the rhetoric that sustains semiotics; American new literary historians, who have actually taken the messy next step after Nanni, excavating a variety of sociopolitical conventions contextualizing the production and reception of art.

This interesting book is Nanni's first in English. Ten of its eleven essays were first published in a journal Nanni directs at the University of Bologna called Parol. Most of them were read as papers at local Italian conferences between 1985 and 1991, and have retained that form of delivery. Virtually each one advances the same argument with equal power of persuasion, on the basis of the same principles of validation, the same moves, and the same discursive examples. In that respect, the book's title and two subtitles are perhaps too wide ranging.

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Giuseppe Antonio Borgese's human and academic weaknesses and strengths are certainly made abundantly clear, albeit in the most polite of ways, in this collection of five previously published studies by Luciano Parisi. The Sicilian writer's assertive nature and boundless confidence in his opinions are among the less attractive aspects of his character. Perhaps his large output of writings in academic and more general spheres engendered a confusion in him between omnipresence and omniscience. Parisi's studies are perceptive, scholarly, and informative, though he tends generally to side with revealed authority rather than to venture original analyses. The chapter headings are: "La critica militante", "Borgese e Manzoni", "I romanzi", "I libri di viaggio" and finally "Gli scritti politici".

Parisi emphasizes the distinction between the two fields in which Borgese's criticism was practised: the academic and the journalistic and argues for Borgese's critical status on the basis of the latter, his "critica militante" in the Corriere della Sera and other newspapers. He sees this criticism as marked by "un'estetica seria, articolata, coerente" and by "una capacità caratterizzante di insolita efficacia" (p. 23). Borgese's intuitive judgements in the Press led to conclusions regarding new writers which were accepted by successive generations. One could recall, for example, that he was one of the first to express enthusiasm for Moravia's Gli indifferen
ti. On the other hand, as Parisi underlines, Borgese's academic criticism failed to produce "ampie costruzioni intellettuali". It is not evident to me, nevertheless, that