Peter Bondanella. *Umberto Eco and the open text*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

Umberto Eco's fame in Italy dates back to his early success with *Opera aperta* (1962) and *Il diario minimo* (1963). The medievalist, expert on James Joyce and philosopher rapidly increased his popularity as he affirmed himself with numerous writings on popular culture and mass media later collected in volumes such as *Sugli specchi e altri saggi*, *Apocalittici e integrati* and *Dalla periferia dell'impero*. In 1973 appeared *Segno*, Eco's first study on semiotics and in 1976 he published *A Theory of Semiotics*—what many still consider a major milestone in the field of semiotics.

The first monographic study on Umberto Eco was published by the distinguished scholar Teresa de Lauretis. Her essay *Umberto Eco* (1981) came out soon after the publication of the unprecedented international bestseller *Il nome della Rosa* (1980) and remains one of the best interpretations of Eco's background and scholarship. In North America in the late seventies the name of Umberto Eco was known mainly by scholars of semiotics and narratology familiar with *A Theory of Semiotics* and *The role of the Reader*; and by medievalists who had appreciated the author's work on Thomas Aquinas and medieval aesthetics. Needless to say it was his overwhelming success as a fiction writer that launched Umberto Eco as one of the most important Italian intellectuals. One of the best overall picture of Eco's achievements is without a doubt the special volume in honor of the author's 60th birthday: *Semiotica: Storia Teoria Interpretazione. Saggi intorno a Umberto Eco*. The essays were edited by three of the author's most faithful students P. Magli, G. Manetti and P. Violi.

English speaking students and scholars of Umberto Eco have been waiting for a long time for a monographic study of the well known professor of semiotics, narrator, literary theorist, and expert of mass culture and communication. Peter Bondanella's *U. Eco and the open text*, an intelligent, well researched and most lucid study on Umberto Eco was certainly well worth the wait.

Written in a style and language that make easy and pleasurable reading, Bondanella's text takes us through eight chapters rich with information and acute observations on practically every major aspect of Eco's outstanding career as media expert, semiotician and narrator. From the opening pages to the last chapter "Inferential strolls and narrative shipwrecks", Bondanella's work reminds us that we are dealing with a most unusual author who is constantly revising his writings: "a continual works in progress." The author explains how and why Eco has revised several of his works and has changed substantially the content of some of his collections of essays and theoretical works at the time that were been translated into English. This is particularly true of *The Open Work*, *A Theory of Semiotics*, *The Role of the Reader*, *The Limits of Interpretation*, and *Apocalypse Postponed*. When these texts are quoted the author makes sure that the reader is informed if the corresponding pages exist in the original version. Moreover, Bondanella provides us with page references from both the Italian and English version of all the texts and novels under scrutiny.

From the days of Eco's doctoral thesis *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* (1956) and his provocative essays *The Open Work* (1962), to his most recent literary observations on narrative strategies, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (1994), Bondanella has carefully documented the author's interdisciplinary interests that have preceded, accompanied and followed the writing of his novels that have been widely accepted by critics and general readers throughout the world: *The Name of the Rose* (1980), *Foucault's Pendulum* (1988) and *The Island of the Day Before* (1994). *Baudolino* came out in November of 2001 and is presently being translated.

Readers will find very informative the comments on the author's pre semiotic years and on how it was primarily Eco's interest in popular culture, aesthetics, information, and communication theories that led him first to consider the applications of structuralism and soon after to study the field of semiotics. Again, Bondanella must be recognized for his comments on some of the lesser known works of Eco that only recently have been translated (and not always in their entirety) —I am speaking of the important essays on different aspects of culture—high and low— in *Diario minino*, *Apocalittici e integrati*, *Il mito del superman*, and *Sugli specchi e altri saggi*.

As mentioned, most academics who have known Eco before he became a best seller of novels had read mainly his theoretical works on semiotics, a few essays on mass media and communication, and the author's contribution to reader's reception theories *The Role of the Reader*. Bondanella makes sure that Eco the semiotician and philosophy of language expert receives plenty of space in this study that truly succeeds in providing "a reliable, thought provoking... brief account of Eco's intellectual development and major theoretical contributions during the past four decades." Indeed, the author provides us with an excellent overall picture of a writer who has a remarkable talent for fusing theory, erudition, humor, and widespread encyclopedic information in such a way that reading his texts becomes a pleasurable learning experience.

Readers who are interested primarily in Eco as a narrator will find in *Umberto Eco and the open text* a plethora of information on the first three novels. Eco's narrative strategies are summarized in the analyses of each novel as Bondanella makes references to palimpsests, intertextuality, anxiety of influence, meta-history, self-reflexiveness, detective novels, pastiche, parodies, *ars combinatoria*, and several other elements that combine in making these works some of the best examples of encyclopedic postmodern fictions. In short, Peter Bondanella's study on Umberto Eco is an invaluable guide for anyone who wishes to appreciate and pursue a research on one of the most witty, erudite, intelligent, encyclopedic, and entertaining intellectuals of our days who continues to excel with each publication in the art of *docere et delectare*.

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