Storia di Piera (1982) as a text which bears the traces of its collaborative genesis: directed by the controversial Ferreri, written by him as well as by Dacia Maraini and the actress Piera Degli Esposti, it bears the earmarks of a male re-telling of the story but also, in its gaps and interstices, of the contradictions that had to be suppressed to make that particular re-telling possible.

The relations between Italian and North American feminism are examined in the collection's last two essays. Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio's "I Don't Know What You Mean by 'Italian Feminist Thought.' Is Anything Like That Possible?" discusses some of the difficulties inherent in attempting to translate Italian feminist thought for presentation to an American audience. These difficulties derive from the vastly different socio-political conditions which spawned Italian and American feminism, as well as from American stereotypes of Italian culture which invariably superimpose themselves on any "understanding" of Italian phenomena.

Renate Holub's "Between the United States and Italy" also addresses Italian feminism, in particular the Diotima group's practice of *affidamento* as a form of social-symbolic practice intended to make it possible to circumvent the impasse created in the process of woman's acculturation to the feminine, which by definition simultaneously blocks her access to the Symbolic order. This essay, too, grounds this philosophy in the time and place which produced it, thus explaining how Diotima came to confront an issue which American feminism all too often elides, that of power relations among women.

In all, this is a very stimulating and informative collection of essays, useful both for the Italianists and for the non-Italianists wishing to acquaint themselves with the cultural specifics of Italian feminism and feminist scholarship. Its theme, that of the "third way" As Italian feminism's specific contribution to a feminist practice which defines itself from within and manages to overcome the dichotomy between femininity and feminism, is more clearly articulated in some essays than others, but generally works surprisingly well and does not seem at all contrived or superimposed. Each essay is accompanied by a bibliography which provides useful and copious markers for those wishing to venture further into this very rich and variegated terrain.

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Anthony Julian Tamburri. *A Semiotic of Ethnicity: In (Re) cognition of the Italian/American Writer.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998; 176 pp; ISBN: 079143916X (pbk.); LC call no.: PS153.I8T36

By suggesting that a critical re-appraisal of Italian American writing be carried out from a postmodern perspective, Anthony Julian Tamburri's *A Semiotic of Ethnicity*

goes far in its noble and earnest attempt to stretch the boundaries of Italian American studies. In defense of his position, regarding a "sustained but fluctuating Italian/American category of creative works", he draws particular attention to "Lyotard's 'incredulity toward metanarratives' (xiv) and the late twentieth century's increasing suspicion of narrative's universal validity, for which artistic invention is no longer considered a depiction of life." (19). In so doing, Tamburri provocatively calls into question many previous notions regarding the literary canon and the formation of sign systems. He makes this explicit with the following statement:

For the modernist reader, therefore, one rooted in the search for existing absolutes, an Italian/American sign system may appear inadequate, perhaps even contemptuous. For the postmodern reader, who is open to, if not in search of, new coding correlations, an Italian/American sign system may appear significantly intriguing, if not on occasion rejuvenating, as these texts indeed may present a sign system consisting of manipulated sign functions which ultimately (re)define the sign. (19)

By dismissing the notion of a uni-lateral literary aesthetic, the canon and its ability to create privileged insiders and outcasts are called into question. At the same time, Tamburri is aware that the creation of an ethnic canon could, by virtue of taking the same stance as that assumed by the mainstream, be equally exclusive. In its place a more dialogical approach cognizant of "heteroglossic culture" (16) is advanced. As marginal texts, Tamburri sees Italian American literature as a *subgenre* that, by nature, questions ideas surrounding canon valorization and dominant culture. A new interpretive perspective, like the one proposed by Tamburri, would cause the marginal to be re-evaluated and question the validity of previously held opinion.

Tamburri declares that this ambitious study on ethnic semiosis grew out of the numerous academic activities in which the author was involved (xi) and, accordingly, it bares the mark of a certain eclecticism and echoes of previous works which a careful and attentive reading would certainly detect.

Tamburri casts his net rather broadly and articulates his study into four main sections: Part I: New Strategies (3-20); Part II: New Readings (21-78); Part III: Further Readings (79-117); and Part IV: Further Strategies (119-132). The stated objectives of the work are the following: to share with all studies of ethnic literature the goals of "debunking of negative stereotypes" (4); to approach studies of other literary traditions described as "third world" or postcolonial literature (5); to question "canon valorization" (6); to interrogate the hyphenate writer (8); to introduce Italian American Studies in the context of graduate Comparative Literature programmes (129); and to develop "a regularized discourse with Italian Canadians [...] who seem to maintain a more direct discourse with Italy" (130).

Of particular interest is the more theoretically-oriented "Definitions and Categories", the principal concern of Part I: New Strategies. This section is dedicated to building on and completing previously conceived tripartite systems from which to analyze the Italian American writer. Tamburri takes as inspiration Daniel Aaron's work on the three stages of the hyphenate writer, Fred L. Gardaphè's Vichian three

ages of the Italian American writer, and Charles Sanders Peirce's three stages or modes of being. As Tamburri tells us, the general categories proposed by both Aaron and Gardaphè are generationally based. Aaron's former's first-stage ("local colorist") stays within certain parameters of the stereotype but manages to humanize it and thus dissipate prejudice; Gardaphè's poetic ("pre-modernist") writer is an expressive rather than paradigmatic writer characterized by a "*vero narratio*" [sic] based more on experiential feelings than analytical thoughts. Aaron's second-stage ("militant protester" writer "abandons the use of pre-conceived ideas in an attempt to demystify negative stereotypes"; for Gardaphè, the mythic ("modernist") writer views ethnicity as a "rhetorical-ideological tool." Aaron's third-stage ("American") writer, like Gardaphè's philosophic ("postmodernist") writer travels from the margin to the mainstream and engages in a self-reflexive stage through parody or a relegation of ethnicity to the background. These are linked to Peirce's cognitive categories of firstness (non rationality), secondness (practicality), and thirdness (pure rationality), or "potentiality, actuality, and futuribility." Tamburri proposes a "reclassification" of these above-mentioned categories as "expressive," "comparative," and "synthetic" (8-13). The critic reminds us that "a writer's opus may, in fact, reflect more than one, if not all three, of these stages" (14). Tamburri then turns his attention to the polyvalent nature of the utterance which is inevitably "rooted in heteroglossia and dialogism, and the interpretive strategies for decoding it will always depend on the specificities of of the reader's intellectual reservoir" (19).

In Parts II and III, Tamburri provides a broad cross-section of contemporary Italian American (and in one case, Italian Canadian) writing to which these theories are applied. The authors treated are Tony Ardizzone, Helen Barolini, Giose Rimanelli, Luigi Fontanella, and Gianna Patriarca. As insightful as each of these analyses is, and quite thought-provoking in the case of the parallel between Luigi Fontanella and Aldo Palazzeschi (111), Tamburri hits on a couple of particularly provocative points relating to the interconnectedness of Italian American literature with other disciplines. Regarding the establishment of "a repertoire of signs, at times *sui generis*", he declares that the different versions that emerge are "dependent, of course, on one's generation, gender, and socio-economic condition" (110). This becomes particularly evident in his treatment of gender and feminist themes in the writings of Helen Barolini and Gianna Patriarca. In the works of these two authors, Tamburri declares, the relationship with dominant culture is even further complicated due to the "duality of gender and ethnic oppression" which inevitably leads to an attempt to flee the "prison house of patriarchy"(64). In particular, the inclusion of such ideas as perceived madness (99) and distance (102) in the poetry of Patriarca is certainly praiseworthy for it points directly to the relationship between gender and ethnic discourses.

As praiseworthy as Tamburri's study may be for the numerous points outlined above, it could still benefit from some clarification in one or two areas. In particular, the parallel between feminism and ethnicity, and the corresponding issues of subjugation, and the *other* voice merits a more profound treatment. Further, regarding

the lack of a clearly defined ethnic sign in the films of Frank Capra, Tamburri writes, "can we not see this *absence*, especially in light of documented secondary matter, as an Italian/American sign *in potentia*? I would say yes" (7). The question of "absence" would seem to point toward a discussion of the *aporia*, especially in light of the critical and philosophical terms laid out by the author. Unfortunately, this point is also perhaps not developed to its full potential.

In *A Semiotic of Ethnicity*, Anthony Julian Tamburri has proposed an intriguing relationship between the "postmodern," "hyphenate," and/or "ethnic" writer with broad literary and social implications. It succeeds in pushing the boundaries of the canon, challenging some preconceived notions, and, consequently, posing additional important questions. In this sense, *A Semiotic of Ethnicity* is a significant contribution to the ongoing discussions surrounding the postmodern condition and the position of ethnic literature within the established canon and in the context of contemporary literary studies. To paraphrase Tamburri, "Can we not see the absence of any conclusive answer to the issue as a sign *in potentia* indicating the validity of ongoing, interdisciplinary study in this field? *I would say yes.*"

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