

Italian Studies and Its Various and Sundry Challenges...

Anthony Julian Tamburri (June 24, 2010)



Over the past forty years, from high-school teaching to the university, and into the community, working within Italian Studies has had its challenges, to be sure. In spite of the grandeur of Italian culture over the past 800-plus years, it seems that we often find ourselves in an up-hill battle.

Over the past forty years, from high-school teaching to the university, and into the community, working within Italian Studies has had its challenges, to be sure. In spite of the grandeur of Italian culture over the past 800-plus years, it seems that we often find ourselves in an up-hill battle. This may constitute the school or college wanting to hire always in that which is considered a more utilitarian language, or that which it considered—erroneously, I would add—the language of culture. Let us be honest with ourselves, the origins of Western European culture's influence on today's Western culture surely has its roots in that geo-cultural zone that was not yet geo-politically Italy.

The Italian language has always been a cultural vehicle, much more and much longer than it has been perceived as an ethnic language by mainstream thinking and organizations here in the United States. The significant cultural valence of Italian has never been more obvious than over the past thirty-plus years, with the advent of Italian cinema and fashion, first and foremost, and a rebirth in the translation of contemporary Italian writers and essayists such as Italo Calvino, Oriana Fallaci,



Umberto Eco, and Dacia Maraini, among others.

The individual who possesses such social, professional, and, I would add, cultural acumen and insight does not seem to occupy a place on the state Board of Regents. This is, to be sure, part and parcel of the challenge that lies ahead. Such a lack of cultural, ethnic, and racial discernment and mindfulness lies at the base of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s; similar comprehension and acknowledgement eventually led to the classification of Italian Americans as a “protected class” within the CUNY system for comparable reasons, a situation very much still in progress.

Thus, it should not seem a stretch to consider the absence of such ethnic and cultural sensitivity as yet a further stepping stone in this struggle to save the New York State Regents exam in Italian. A language and culture that have given to Civilization the roots of modern western poetry (its origins in Dante and Petrarca, and onto Shakespeare), the template for what we call Modernity (the philosophy and art of the Italian Renaissance), and the matrix for our own modern-day legal philosophy (Cesare Beccaria), should simply not be cast aside because of a budget that has yet to be explained in great detail and/or any other reasons unbeknownst to the public discourse thus far articulated.

We remain hopeful that—with the help of people such as Senator Diane Savino (Staten Island) and Assembly member Robert J. Castelli (Golden Bridge, Westchester County), together with other members of the assembly and senate who have also intervened—this latest challenge to save the Regents exam in Italian will have a successful outcome. As others have already urged other to do and have done themselves, do write to your elected officials in both the state assembly and senate. Individual voices simply must be heard.

Alla riscossa!

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