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Edited by Peter Bondanella  
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## NEW ESSAYS ON UMBERTO ECO

There is a wealth of critical commentary on Umberto Eco in scholarly books and articles; this collection provides up-to-date and thought-provoking insights into topics that have attracted a great deal of attention in the past without repeating many of the arguments found in earlier publications on Eco.

Representing the most active scholars writing on Eco from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, the international panel of authors provides sophisticated engagement with Eco's contributions to a wide range of academic disciplines (semiotics, popular culture, linguistics, aesthetics, philosophy, medieval studies), as well as his literary production of five important novels. From the impact of the

evalist, *New Essays on Umberto Eco* covers a variety of subjects that will appeal not only to a wide audience interested in Eco's fiction, but also to the serious student delving into Eco's more esoteric writings.

PETER BONDANELLA is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature, Film Studies, and Italian at Indiana University. He has written or edited many books on Italian literature and film, including *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel* (co-edited with Andrea Ciccarelli, Cambridge, 2003) and *Umberto Eco and the Open Text* (Cambridge, 1997). He is a past President of the American Association for Italian Studies and a member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts.

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## *Preface*

The ten essays in this anthology aim to introduce the reader to the wide range of critical problems associated with Umberto Eco's literary, philosophical, and cultural writings. Only one other Italian thinker has exerted such an enormous influence over Italian culture in the twentieth century – Benedetto Croce – and Croce never turned his hand to fiction. The breadth and scope of Eco's writings qualify him as what the Italians call a *tuttologo* – someone who knows something important about virtually everything. For any student of Eco, it seems that he has read practically everything in print in a variety of original languages and disciplines and, even more amazing, he has remembered it all! His effortless combination of matchless erudition and a wonderful sense of humor sets him apart from equally cerebral Italian writers such as Italo Calvino or Primo Levi, whose postmodern novels lack Eco's wit and sense of irony.

Norma Bouchard's contribution provides a survey of Eco's very early interest in popular culture (comic books, popular song, film, cartoons), a field that was more often identified with Anglo-American scholarship than with Italian writing when Eco began to publish on the subject. It is fair to say that with Eco's treatment of such iconic popular culture figures as Superman, James Bond, and Peanuts, Italian culture began to examine its own popular culture roots. But Eco's interest in cultural theory also produced literary results: his fifth novel (*The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana: An Illustrated Novel*) provides an encyclopedic perspective upon the popular culture of Eco's adolescence during the Fascist period. Eco moved from popular culture to an interest in semiotic theory (the focus of the chapter by Cinzia Bianchi and Manuela Gieri), hoping that the emerging discipline of semiotics would provide a means of analyzing both high and low culture. He became famous for his semiotic writings long before his turn to fiction, yet his five novels are never far removed from his philosophical musings derived from linguistics and semiotics. Like many other contemporary novelists, Eco has assimilated a great deal

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of scientific knowledge into his fiction and philosophy, a topic treated by Guy Raffa.

Of course, thanks in part to the international success of his first novel, *The Name of the Rose*, most readers of Eco identify him as a brilliant medievalist. The fact that Eco always gives his interest in the Middle Ages a postmodern twist is the subject of essays by Cristina Farronato and Theresa Coletti. Literary critics, in fact, define Eco's fiction as the essence of the postmodern approach to literature, a subject treated in detail by Rocco Capozzi. Patrizia Violi's discussion of Eco's most recent semiotic thought outlines ideas that find fictional development in *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*. While it is important to note the links between Eco's fiction and his philosophical, linguistic, or scientific interests, it remains important to analyze his debts to literary tradition. Here different chapters treat two fundamental elements of Eco's thought. Michael Caesar discusses Eco's important debt to James Joyce, who became something of an intellectual and fictional template for Eco's entire career. And Peter Bondanella traces the impact of detective fiction upon both Eco's novels and his epistemology in studying how a literary genre from popular or "lowbrow" fiction plays a crucial role in the creation of Eco's postmodern novels. Finally to round out the collection, Torunn Haaland surveys Eco's writings on the movies (the quintessential pop-culture product of the past century) and discusses how his analysis of the cinema contains crucial concepts related to Eco's semiotic theory and his discussion of human communication.

There is a wealth of critical commentary on Umberto Eco in scholarly books and articles. This anthology attempts to provide new and thought-provoking insights into topics that have attracted a great deal of attention in the past without repeating many of the arguments found in earlier publications. The target audience of this companion volume includes not only students but also scholars and the general reading public who find Eco fascinating as a writer and interesting as an original thinker on historical, cultural, and philosophical questions of a timeless nature.

Before reading the chapters in this volume, it would prove useful to read the introduction to the bibliography on Eco's works contained at the end of this book. Every effort has been made to render our treatment of Eco's literary, scholarly, and philosophical career easily accessible, but the complicated history of the appearance of his works in translation should be kept in mind. In most cases, authors have cited available English translations, but in other cases when the available translations seem flawed or

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*Preface*

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incomplete, contributors to this volume have provided their own, more accurate, renderings from the original Italian editions. At any rate, the bibliography provides an important guide through the maze of editions, translations, and revisions of Eco's published work.

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