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## Carte Italiane

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Samoná, Carmelo, *Fratelli, Il custode*

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### Author

Kidney, Peggy M.

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dramma musicale a carattere corale-popolare e a sfondo storico-nazionale che, insieme con quello wagneriano-espressionistico e quello debussiano-impressionistico, doveva soppiantare il melodramma tradizionale a forme chiuse; a un saggio sulla *Jenufa* del boemo Leós Janáček, tardivamente apprezzata dai critici.

E ancora: il "gigantismo" musicale di Richard Strauss, dagli orrori quasi profetici dell'*Elettra*, a *Il cavaliere della rosa*, in cui, sebbene provvisto da Hofmannsthal, di situazione e personaggi di stampo settecentesco e mozartiano, il compositore non fu tentato dal "pastiche stilistico" o dal recupero settecentista, ma li trattò con la musica di sempre, la sua solita musica dei poemi sinfonici; un'analisi dell'*Angelo di fuoco* di Prokofiev; alcune note sulla *Turandot* di Busoni e sul *Mathis der Maler*, una opera in tre quadri alla quale Hindemith lavorò negli anni immediatamente precedenti l'avvento nazista in Germania, poi rappresentata a Zurigo nel 1938; e due illuminanti articoli su *Il prigioniero* e l'*Ulisse* di Dallapiccola.

Il criterio uniformante, l'approccio privilegiato, sono quelli di una doppia lettura, la lettura combinata dei testi e delle partiture, mai riluttante ad aprirsi alla considerazione di altri—più esterni—fattori, ma sempre preoccupata di chiarire il rapporto fondamentale di parola e musica che fu all'origine dell'opera e ne ha contraddistinto i capitoli più importanti.

Un altro grande pregio di questo volume, oltre a quello di proporsi come modello di intelligente e instancabile ricerca, consiste nel fatto che i saggi che lo compongono seguono un ordine, cronologico e d'ispirazione, restando però assolutamente validi ciascuno per sé.

Francesca Savoia, UCLA

SAMONÀ, CARMELO, *Fratelli*, Torino: Einaudi, 1978, pp. 108;  
*Il custode*, Torino: Einaudi, 1983, pp. 117.

On the scene of contemporary Italian literature the work of Carmelo Samonà certainly deserves our attention. Samonà's first short novel, *Fratelli* (Premio Mondello, 1978), already presented to U.S. readers by Gian Paolo Biasin in an article entitled "Disease as Language: the Case of the Writer and the Madman" (*Italian*

*Quarterly*, Vol. 79, 1980, pp. 77–81), is an intriguing story about the daily life of two brothers who share an old apartment in a nameless city. The work focuses on the relationship between the brothers, one of whom is mentally ill, and on the system of communication they have established—a complex system of signs based on gestures, silences, glances, patterns, and spatial relationships, but only minimally on words. The description of this unusual form of communication is not only an exploration of the system of signs on which it is based, but the meeting of its own two different languages: the language of normality and the language of disease.

The story is told exclusively from the point of view of the “normal” brother whose self-appointed task is to wrench the other from the disease. The “sane” brother painstakingly records and codifies all of his brother’s actions in an attempt to construct the “text” of the disease which he is convinced will ultimately reveal the key to its mystery. But the fine line that separates the two languages becomes less and less evident, especially toward the end of the work when the “sane” brother finally gives up trying to establish the code and patterns of the disease in his desire to control it, and instead, accepts the myriad of unpredictable variants with which his “sick” brother subverts the “text” of his own disease.

The ending of *Fratelli*, in which the reader witnesses a reversal of the two brothers’ roles, and the “sane” brother’s fascination and capitulation to the world of improvisation, unpredictability, innovation, variation, and imagination—the irrational world without a controlling scheme—is unsettling. It raises questions about the meaning of sanity and mental illness and provokes a serious reflection about the distinction between the two. The work can also be read as a reflection on the impossibility of creating a definitive text free of variants and of their influence upon it.

*Il custode* is a further exploration of the search for communication begun in *Fratelli*, but this time the story involves only one person directly (a prisoner), and a second invisible “other” keeper. The narrative develops around the prisoner’s attempts to establish some form of communication with his keeper and his obsession with the interpretation and evaluation of all the information available to him,

the signs of the system in which he is held captive. The information at his disposal, the signs of the system are, however, so limited as to be almost non-existent, and as the prisoner himself suggests, possibly only a figment of his own imagination.

The prisoner's obsessive search for communication and dialogue with his keeper, which is characterized at the same time by his own fear of establishing a relationship with him, is developed through a description of the prisoner's exclusively subjective evaluation and interpretation of all signs: muffled words and sounds that cannot be deciphered, footsteps, sighs, gestures, and small objects. The prisoner's solitary confinement deprives him of a point of reference with any other system, any other reality, thus leaving him in a situation of relative control (even if he is a prisoner!) since there can be no contradiction with his own interpretation and no verification. The prisoner seeks verification of his subjective interpretation but he knows that this verification with the "other," communication with his keeper, might also mean the end of the reality he has constructed and consequently a loss of his own relative control.

*Il custode* treats the question of power and control inherent in systems of communication and language. It is about the need for verification between systems, since the meaning of one system is defined only by a comparison with another system. It is "insanity" that defines "sanity," and vice versa, because the concepts have no value in absolute terms. Since all communication is based on the premise of compromise, the prisoner's contact and dialogue with his keeper is linked to a change in his stance toward him, the prisoner's willingness to yield and accept, to listen.

Both *Fratelli* and *Il custode* are works of a writer and a critic who is interested in the exploration of language and communication systems and the interpretation of the signs on which they are based. They are also works which reveal the author's interest in exploring the psychological aspects of man's existence and for this reason they have generated a great deal of interest even outside the literary field. The ambiguous and contradictory systems described in each work and the lack of any resolution of the ambiguities—even in the conclusions—allow us to characterize both *Fratelli* and *Il custode* as open

works, following Umberto Eco's definition, that is, works that rely on the intervention of the reader in the construction of the meaning of the text.

Peggy M. Kidney, *UCLA*

Samonà was born in Palermo in 1926. He teaches Spanish Literature at the University of Rome and is currently working on a third novel. A recent interview with Samonà, conducted by Gregory Lucente, was published in *Modern Language Notes*, 100, No. 1 (January 1985), 155-170. Also see: Giovanni Hautmann, "la relazione psicotica in *Fratelli*," *Rivista di psicoanalisi*, No. 1 (1981), 48-71; Jon Snyder, "I fratelli e il custode," *alfabeta*, No. 68 (January 1985), 17, and Oreste Macrì's "Il custode di Carmelo Samonà," *L'albero* (1984).