

Puglia's Excellence in America

Antonella Iovino (May 06, 2011)



Poet Joseph Tusiani and journalists Antonio Romita and Carlo Brienza are the 2011 recipients of the "Puglia's Italy Awards of excellence"

On Wednesday, May 4, the [John D. Calandra Italian American Institute](#) [2] hosted 'Puglia's Italy Award of Excellence in America', a ceremony that awards people who were born or grew up in Apulia and who reached international success, thereby promoting the image of the region abroad. The prize went to RAI journalist Attilio Romita, vice-director of [RAI International](#) [3] Carlo Brienza, and poet and Latinist Joseph Tusiani.



The prize was offered by the '[Puglia Center of America](#) [4]', an organization which aims to promote the region in all its aspects and help create touristic, cultural and educational exchanges with the United States. The center also supports Italian language promotion activities through concerts and important campaigns, such as the fight against cancer and the [Millennium Goals](#) [5] of the United Nations. The high value of activities gained notice from Italian and international institutions that decided to sponsor part of the initiatives. Among these are the Italian parliament, the province of Bari, the 'Cultura, Turismo, Pace e Mediterraneo' department of Apulia and the Italian UNESCO commission. The center is a member of the Academic Impact of the United Nations and has collaborated with Columbia University and Fordham University.

The president of the organization is Luciano Lamonarca, a young Apulian tenor well known in New York. As he explained during his opening remarks, the prize is given to those who have obtained personal success by working hard, setting an example to everyone else from the region and beyond. I-Italy was able to ask him a few questions.

The organization you represent seems to aim towards a less common group of people, a public interested in cultural initiatives. What is your target and what are the guidelines?

It is a young organization, founded on November 17, 2009, that wishes to create international partnerships between Apulia and academic institutions to promote Italian excellence. Today we face a new kind of immigration: it is America that selects the best brains. The latest project we have been following involves six American universities and six from Apulia; the idea is to develop an educational process of the public to teach them about the region not only for its food, wine, and touristic attractions, but also artistically. In this objective we are supported by people who believe in us, like the Cultural Commissioner of the province of Bari, moved by his passion for his homeland and the will to promote it.

Attilio Romita and Carlo Brienza both were honored to receive this prize in New York, and demonstrated their deep ties to their homeland, convinced that these roots are fundamental to anyone's life. Both have become well known in the Italian and American journalistic world: Carlo Brienza shows Italy abroad every day from RAI International while Attilio Romita was the only Italian journalist allowed into the press office between Bush and Berlusconi that anticipated the war declaration on Iraq. He described the moment when he was traveling in an armored car and listened back to his question from which it was clear that war was going to break out: "Listening to my voice broadcast by an American station, I understood that I had reached my first goal after many sacrifices".

i-Italy asked their opinion on the theme of journalistic information.

We asked Attilio Romita: You reached your first goal because by chance you were in America, but many live abroad as their only option. What do you think of the working world in America?

There is no doubt about the fact that America is in the front line for research and technology, but as far as information is concerned, Italy and America are about equal. In America a journalist's capacity is evaluated with ratings; the paychecks are much larger than ours, but also the risk of losing your job all of a sudden is quite high. In Italy, the order of journalists protects the professionalism of those who work in information.

Brienza agreed with Romita: "It is difficult to compare information in Italy and the United States, and maybe it isn't appropriate to do so. There are different structural elements: in Italy there's a union and an order of journalists, and there are very few pure editors, while America has always had plenty of them. Italian press, taken globally, guarantees pluralist information. There are also different elements of context: the rhetoric used by American journalists is different, and the attention of the public is mainly aimed towards current events, while in Italy it aims more towards opinion news. This

happens in many different aspects.”

The evening ended with the award to Joseph Tusiani, a poet, writer, translator and Latinist. He got his degree in Literature at the University of Naples Federico II and in 1947 moved to New York, turning a trip into a permanent residence. His main literary achievements were the translation of Michelangelo's poetry, since up until then the author was mainly known only as an artist. In receiving the prize, Tusiani said, “I was given this prize also on the Capitol, but this evening the emotion is larger because I receive as an Apulian. I translated Pulci's “Il Morgante” in which Apulia is defined as a ‘land of flies’, but I ask myself what land wasn't at that time. Because of this it inspired the expression ‘my death, the death of a fly in Apulia’, to show the precariousness of human life”.

i-Italy asked him:

From generation to generation of Italian-Americans we inevitably witness the loss of the use of the Italian language. The sons of immigrants speak it very little, and the grandsons don't speak it at all. Do you think this creates a distancing from the cultural roots?

Perfect bilinguals are rare, and we are prone to forget languages. It has to do with personal sensibility. I wrote 15 books in Apulian dialect, and that is my way to remain tied to my culture. Many don't miss their homeland, while some become sick because of their distance. I am convinced, though, that when languages are used creatively, they come back to life. You have to pay attention to the sounds, and it is the creativeness of rhyme or prose that preserves the language.

It feels like Italy is more known for its past than its present. Italy is always referred to in terms of Renaissance culture, but very little is said about the contemporary cultural context. What do you think about the attention dedicated to Italian culture, today?

There is obviously a deficit in the promotion of the cultural heritage. On the other hand, the same thing is happening in Greece: personally I think Nikos Kazantzakis is the greatest poet of the Twentieth Century, but few know who he is. In Italy those same church towers that created differences among people and territories in the past, continue their habit today. In the literary field there is very little reciprocal attention: everyone writes, very few read.

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