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Multiple Consciousness: Rethinking Italian Canadian Women Writers through Susanna Moodie

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Acknowledgments

Perhaps this moment of acknowledgments is making me feel more emotional and vulnerable than I ever felt before in my discovery and appreciation of Italian-Canadian writers. It may be due to the fact that a rather long period of study is coming to an end even as it paves the way for new challenges, hopefully as a teacher.

Mine has been a bonding with Canada as an Italian woman who traveled there in 2019. Living there before embarking on my Master's Degree partly overwhelmed me with those feelings of displacement, loss and duality that Italian-Canadian writers have deeply explored in their work. This lived-experience made the books I read more real and personal.

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Introduction

The English gentlewoman Susanna Moodie epitomizes the immigrant experience in the Canadian backwoods previous to Italian-Canadian women's westward movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Her life story in Upper Canada, titled *Roughing It in the Bush*, helped to stir historians' interest in the pioneer experience and women's efforts to create a space of their own in the country's literature. As the representative of a different country and culture, she does not leave her feelings of displacement and duality unspoken.

Women like Moodie who came to Canada in the 1830s, when emigration westward was at its height, portrayed displacement as the inevitable effacement of stereotypical middle-class notions of gender difference. In effect, displacement, according to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, can be a way out from the impositions of the dominant culture.

Roughing It in the Bush, published in 1852, undermines patriarchal notions of women as wives, mothers, and homemakers and portrays a protagonist taking on 'masculine' virtues. *Roughing It* has also inspired later generations of writers as a multi-genre experiment, "a didactic book, an autobiography, and a sketch-book of pioneer life", as Carl Ballstadt argues. It was no sooner than the mid- to late 1980s that immigrant autobiographies caught the attention of scholars, while for autobiographies by immigrant women it took even longer.

Along with the analysis of *Roughing It*, Chapter One grapples with immigrant autobiographies' unique tensive structure of a double self. By setting forth identity as a defining concern and by traversing and inhabiting two different countries, immigrant

autobiographers must integrate two cultural systems: a culture of the present and the future and a culture of memory.

This intercultural stance stemming from the juxtaposition of two different worlds and informing immigrant life-writing provided women with a textual space for self-representation. Feminist scholars like Regenia Gagnier and Bella Brodski have analyzed the genre of autobiography as a textual space for the redefinition of conventional ideologies addressed to women. Moodie efficiently sabotaged customary gender roles by asserting a new identity resulting from the structural tensions between England and Canada, Old World and New World.

This thesis presents *Roughing It in the Bush* as an important and useful signpost for appreciating other immigrant feminist life-writings that have become a significant part of the Italian-Canadian literary corpus. Arguably, Italian-Canadian literature saw the light of day with Pier Giorgio Di Cicco's 1978 collection of poems *Roman Candles.* Bringing together the work of seventeen Canadian poets of Italian birth or background, Di Cicco paved the way for a new ethnic consciousness and identity, rooted in sentiments of loss, alienation and duality. The impetus behind these poems about straddling the two countries – the Old World of Italy and the New World of Canada – is also a keen concern in the first anthology of Italian-Canadian women writers, edited by Marisa De Franceschi and titled *Pillars of Lace* (1998). Chapter Two briefly discusses the continuities and discrepancies between first and second generation Italian-Canadian women writers, with a special emphasis on Caterina Edwards' *Finding Rosa* (2009) and Mary Melfi's *Italy Revisited* (2009). The enduring effects of their parents' immigration to Canada contribute to make them a landmark in both memoirs: a sense of doubleness, the central question of identity "Who am I," *la questione della lingua*, nostalgia for a

lost past and space never lived or barely experienced. Edwards and Melfi, who identify respectively with the northern Venetian and southern agrarian culture, juxtapose two distinct regional experiences and the Canadian landscape and identity. Instead of placing the Italian-Canadian standpoint within the narrow and biased space of an ethnic minority, Enoch Padolsky positions it within a universal context that embraces mainstream Canadian and global issues.

Accordingly, Chapter Three analyzes the place of Italian-Canadian writers in the perspective of what Antonio D'Alfonso defines as "Italic culture." The tension created between Italian and Canadian cultures has led D'Alfonso to speak of a new consciousness of '"Italics" that attempts to go beyond the linguistic and cultural limitations of the mainstream. Scholars like Antonio D'Alfonso and Pasquale Verdicchio prompt us to consider displacement and the ongoing Italian Diaspora as a point of intersection between different cultures that debunks cultural hegemony in favor of those commonalities that do not leave otherness out of the picture. Their radical critique of cultural and linguistic forms of nationalism, particularly in its Canadian and Italian formations, offers new ground for the recognition of an "Italic culture" not limited to one country. An Italic perspective embraces all things Italian, both in Italy and across the Italian diaspora, in its effort to counteract the external forces of territorial cultures that insist on assimilating immigrant and plural identities.

CHAPTER 1

Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It In the Bush*: A mark for launching feminist works and lives in Canadian literature.

1.1 An Introduction to Susanna Moodie

In the early 19th century many young women of every race, color, and nation tried to forge their roles as writers. After literary careers primarily devoted to the writing of children's books and poems, they began to experiment with longer forms such as romances and biographies. This was the case of Susanna Strickland Moodie, now a well-known Canadian author of English origins whose publications explore the intersection of different genres. A writer of poetry, fiction, and sketches, she epitomizes the immigrant experience in the Canadian backwoods. Her oeuvre helped to stir historians' interest in the pioneer experience and women's efforts to create an inclusive gender space within literature. Gentlewomen like Moodie, who came to Canada from the British Isles in the 1830s, portrayed emigration as the inevitable collapse of stereotypical middle-class notions of gender difference and instilled a broader understanding of women's role. *Roughing It*[1] was published when Britain was in the midst of a women's movement that brought a controversial debate on female work to the fore. Disentangled from roles deemed respectable for their class – as wives, mothers and homemakers – single gentlewomen of the 1850s and '60s started to outnumber single men and shout out their readiness to move beyond the confines of the domestic sphere. Their demands became a major concern in Victorian women's travel writing: "As women became able to travel more independently they had to adopt a position of

[1] [1] Moodie, Susanna Strickland. *Roughing It in the Bush, or Life in Canada*. London: Virago, 1986.

gender ambiguity, taking on the 'masculine' virtues of strength, initiative and decisiveness […]"[2]

Moodie's roots in the post-Waterloo age, when women where on the threshold of making names for themselves and declaring their independence, are an important indication of the revolutionizing process that she helped to launch. Besides a series of prose sketches she published in a London periodical for ladies entitled *La Belle Assemblée,* she is now recognized as one of the main contributors to the most successful and culturally significant nineteenth-century periodical of British North America, namely the *Literary Garland.* In this monthly magazine she published parts of *Roughing It in the Bush* – her account of pioneer life in Upper Canada – which came out as a book in 1852. Carl Ballstadt states the importance of Moodie's multi-genre experiment for later generations of Canadian writers in these words: "*Roughing It* is both a didactic book, an autobiography, and a sketch-book of pioneer life."[3] His recognition of the innovative status of Moodie's book emphasizes its versatility and aptness as a commentary on the hardships of settlement from a woman's perspective.

The importance of her autobiographical work further resides in the recognition of Moodie as an exemplar of the Canadian immigrant: "a one-woman garrison…individualized by accident."[4] Whereas in Northrop Frye's words "Canadian nature was a fearful one against which man fought by erecting his physical and psychological garrisons"[5], in *Roughing It* Moodie flaunts her ability to mount metaphorical walls and to adapt old skills to new needs, driven by her irrepressible need

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[2] Foster, Shirley. *Across New Worlds Nineteenth Century Women Travellers and Their Writings*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf (1990), p.11.
[3] Ballstadt, Carl. "Susanna Moodie and the English Sketch", in *Anna, Susanna, and Catherine. Spec. issue of Canadian Literature 51* (1972), p.36.
[4] Frye, Northrop, "Conclusion" in *Literary History of Canada* Vol.2, ed. Carl Klinck. Toronto University Press (1976), p. 350.
[5] Grace, Sherrill. *Violent Duality*. Montréal: Véhicule Press (1980), p.18.

to make a connection with the land of her adoption. As William Boelhower noted in his study of immigrant autobiography, "*contact* means *contrast*."[6] As the representative of a different country and culture, she is buoyed up in her everyday experience in Canada by the juxtaposition of Old-World reality with New-World reality. By exploring her own personality and life-story in a lively and humorous style, she introduced to early Canadian literature one of the most entertaining and informative works on the subject of British immigration and settlement. And in the process she makes herself over in Northrop Frye's dreaded wilderness. By recounting the hardships of her homesteading experience, *Roughing It* dismisses the popular image of Canada as a new Eden and helps to prepare upcoming settlers for the harsh reality of immigration.

Even in Margaret Atwood's important book of poetry *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*[7], it becomes evident that the immigrants tended to project an imaginary image of Canada as a "promised land", which Moodie debunks in favor of a harsh, recalcitrant reality. Drawing on Moodie's account of pioneer life in Upper Canada as a "touchstone" of the country's literary development[8], Atwood adopts Moodie's voice in order to convey her feelings about frontier life, suggesting the resounding success that Moodie's work has among later generations of writers. In her poetry sequence, Atwood restores to consciousness the feelings of displacement and duality that were viscerally experienced by immigrants. In the Afterword, Atwood moves from Moodie's initial alienation to when she "finally turned herself inside out, and has become the spirit of the land she once hated."[9] The double bind possessing her spirit – that of the Old World and the New World – represents respectively the order of reason as opposed to the unfenced reality of

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[6] Boelhower, William. *Immigrant Autobiography in the United States.* New York: Bordighera Press (2021), p.81.
[7] Atwood, , Margaret. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Toronto: Oxford University Press (1970).
[8] Ballstadt, Carl. Op. cit., p.32.
[9] Atwood, Margaret. Op. cit., p.164.

wilderness. As a character in her life story, Moodie ends up being a woman vexed by unsettling feelings of duality. *Roughing It* also has received considerable scholarly attention for being a complex narrative of home that wavers between a sense of belonging and that of alienation. Especially for women, removal from family and friends and following in the footsteps of their ambitious husbands often caused a sense of desolation and loneliness. Their confinement to the household, Alan Taylor explains, bore hard on women due to the prevailing law of coverture, which gave husbands the right to control the family's property, while wives had no legal standing to own land.[10]

Christa Zeller Thomas asserts that Moodie's condition of marginality was due to her sense of duty as mother and wife,[11] according to which her autobiographical protagonist seems to conform to the "reluctant female pioneer."[12] The concept of home and belonging also involves a sense of obligation to the land as well as the gendered expectations men place on women. All this seems to leave Moodie in an ineluctable state of homelessness and dislocation. Accordingly, she becomes a self-sacrificing representation of one who was led to emigrate as "a matter of necessity, not of choice"[13] – as if she were simply obeying her husband and his belief in the inflated prospects of the British gentility in Canada. But if Frye describes immigration to Canada as a process of "being silently swallowed by an alien continent,"[14] Moodie's immigrant experience

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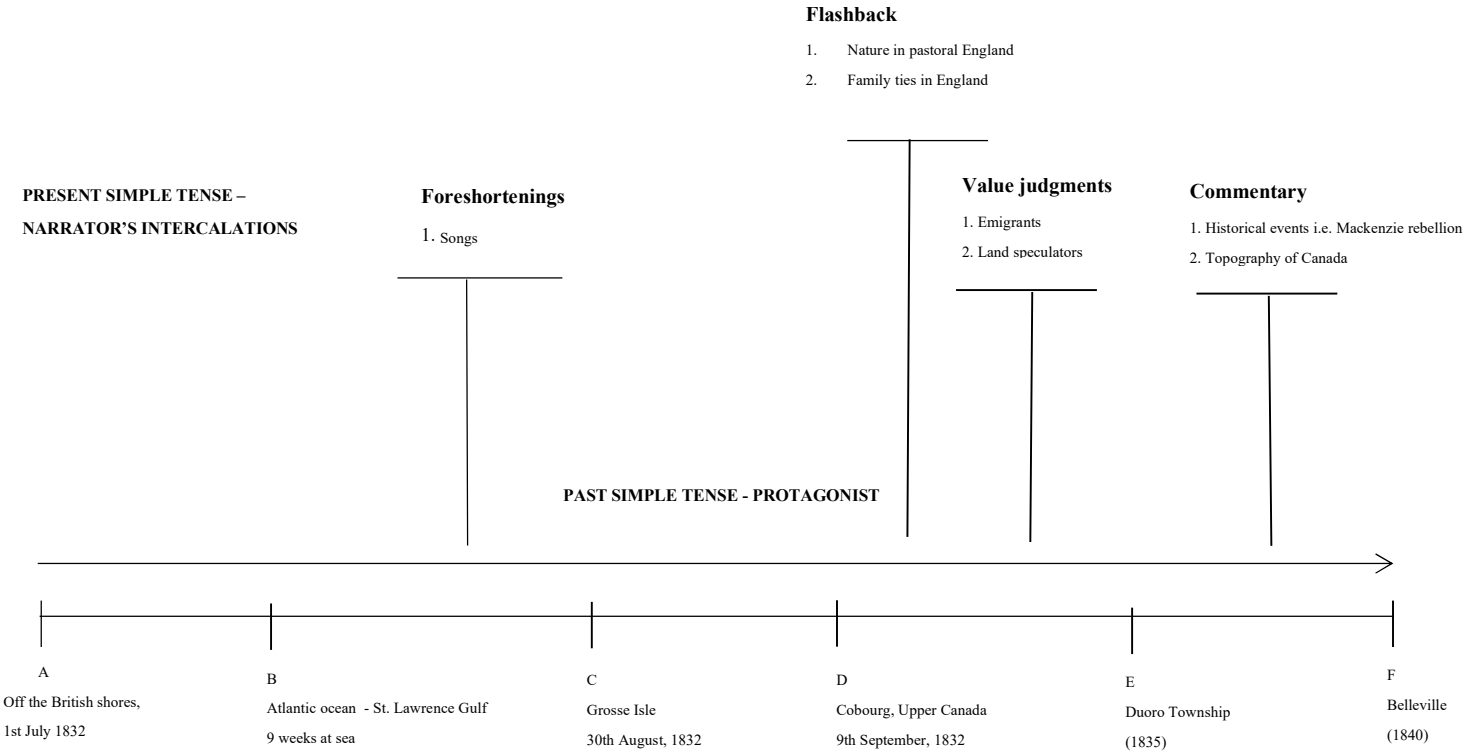
[10] Taylor, Alan. *American Republics: A Continental History of the United States, 1783-1850*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company (2021), p.215.
[11] Zeller Thomas Christa. "'I had never seen such a shed called a house before': The Discourse of Home in Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*." *Canadian Literature* 203 (2009), p.106.
[12] Smith and Watson. Op. cit., p.151.
[13] Moodie, Susanna. *Roughing It In the Bush.* Introduction to the third edition. London: Richard Bentley (1854), p.1.
[14] Frye, Northrop. Op. cit., p. 824.

in Canada "indicates that being enclosed by the land is a somewhat more positive experience, one which demands metaphors of a more erotic and maternal nature."[15]

[15] Buss, Helen. "Women and the Garrison Mentality: Pioneer Women Autobiographers and their Relation to the Land", *Re(Dis)covering Our Foremothers.* Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, p.133.

1.2 Contextualizing *Roughing It*



In the foreword to the third edition published in 1854, publisher Richard Bentley acquaints the reader with the reasons that led the middle ranks of British society to emigrate to Canada: "it's salubrious climate, its fertile soil, commercial advantages, great water privileges, its proximity to the mother country, and last but not least, its almost total exemption from taxation."[16] In the 1830s emigration westward was at its height, leading Bentley to refer to it as an "infection" or "a Canada mania" for homesteading. Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Alan Taylor, in his engrossing account

[16] Moodie, Susanna. *Roughing It in the Bush.* Introduction to the third edition. London: Richard Bentley (1854), p.1.

of America's formative period titled *American Republics: A Continental History of the United States, 1783-1850*, thoroughly retraces the historical context that pushed a chain of British emigrants to Upper Canada – around 159,000 – between 1815 and 1842, where the Anglophone Loyalists prevailed. In effect, two-thirds of the population in Upper Canada (now Ontario), were late Loyalists who fled the American Revolution and settled in Canada after 1790.

Granted free passage, farm tools, six months of rations and 100 acres of land, British families did not think twice about settling in the colony[17]:

> The general interest, once excited, was industriously kept alive by pamphlets, published by interested parties, which prominently set forth all the good to be derived from a settlement in the Backwoods of Canada; while they carefully concealed the toil and hardship to be endured in order to secure these advantages.[18]

A set of equal interests were nourished by discontented Americans: burdened with crippling debts from the Revolutionary War, they discovered lower taxes in Canada, and gladly resumed allegiance as British subjects. At the beginning of the 19th century, a newcomer accounted for his withdrawal from the American Union with this statement: "We fought seven years to get rid of taxation, and now we are taxed more than ever!"[19]

Nevertheless, as the number of British immigrants increased, officials discouraged migration from the United States, while financing immigrants from the British Isles. The consolidation of the border with the United States through reformed immigration policies, was intended to shore up the loyalty of the"Tories," who during the War of

[17] Taylor, Alan. Op. cit., p.140.
[18] Bentley, Richard. Op. cit., p.2.
[19] Taylor, Alan. Op. cit., p.24.

1812 were accused of helping the American invaders. In this same year, Thomas Jefferson declared that the acquisition of Canada will culminate in "the final expulsion of England from the American continent."[20] In *Roughing It* Susanna Moodie recreates the turmoil resulting from the arrival of hopeful immigrants, notably from Scotland and Ireland and the intimidating territorial claims of Canada's southern neighbor, that stretched westward to the Rocky Mountains. Offering sketches of low-down Yankees and repulsive European settlers, she denounces the unscrupulous appropriation of the land:

> When we first came to the colony, nothing surprised me more than the extent to which this pernicious custom was carried, both by the native Canadians, the European settlers, and the lower order of Americans. Many of the latter had spied out the goodness of the land, and BORROWED various portions of it, without so much as asking leave of the absentee owner.[21]

Alan Taylor explains that during the War of 1812, British officials relied on the Indians of the Great Lakes area to help repel the American attacks and expansion, but after the the war they sought to reduce expenditures by discarding the Natives as allies. Besides, since the population grew from 750,000 in 1821 to 2,300,000 in 1850,[22] Canadian officials began to appropriate Native lands in order to provide the new waves of immigrants with farmland. The Indians, known in Canada as "First Nations," were increasingly restricted to the "reserves," where they were forced to adopt European ways and Christian beliefs. In the late 1830s governor Sir Francis Bond Head accused

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[20] Thomas Jefferson to William Duane, Aug.4, 1812, in Looney et al., *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, 5:293-94; Stagg, ed., "Between Black Rock and Hard Place," 418-19.
[21] Moodie, Susanna. *Roughing It In the Bush.* CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (2015), p.28 (Chapter V).
[22] Taylor, Alan. Op. cit., p.289.

Indians of "impeding the progress of civilization in Upper Canada"[23] and passed a Native removal law to relocate them. While Moodie engraves Indians' traits in the pages of *Roughing It* – delicacy of feeling and natural courtesy – as nobler than those characterizing 'uneducated barbarians' from European countries, she reports their indoctrination with these words:

> The Indians are great imitators, and possess a nice tact in adopting the customs and manners of those with whom they associate. An Indian is Nature's gentlemen – never familiar, coarse, or vulgar. If he take a meal with you, he waits to see how you make use of the implements on the table, and the manner in which you eat, which he imitates with a grave decorum […][24]

Besides the truthful sketches of various 'characters,' Moodie provides scenes of historical events such as the Mackenzie rebellion of 1838 in Upper Canada, succeeding the rebellion in Lower Canada, that opposed a system of land grants favoring settlers from Britain. Reacting to the destruction arising from the conflict between the rebels and the loyalists, Moodie once again reiterates the value of writing: "I must own that my British spirit was fairly aroused, and as I could not aid in subduing the enemies of my beloved country with my arm, I did what I little could to serve the good cause with my pen."[25] The political rancor and violence that burst out against the inflexibility of the colony's executive government appalled the British government and led special high commissioner Lord Durham to promote "responsible government"[26] and the annexation of Lower and Upper Canada.

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[23] Taylor, Alan. Op. cit., p. 290.
[24] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p.93 (Chapter XV).
[25] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p.131 (Chaper XXIII)
[26] Taylor, Alan. Op. cit., p.145.

As both Moodie and Bentley point out, for men and women of all classes emigrating to Canada meant a second chance, the hope for a better life that many had failed to achieve in the Old World. But in their adopted country people encountered the harshness of the land, the failure of crops and lack of provisions, backbreaking labor and poverty. Indeed, Bentley notes that "Canada became the great land-mark for the rich in hope and poor in purse", while simultaneously sweeping away differences between the laboring class and the middle gentry. The merging of different social classes and the absence of a hierarchical order mirroring the strict codes of behavior in Britain led Moodie to embark on a process of self-redefinition, exempt from traditional class and gender conventions. While the concept of gentility in Britain was based on education and refinement, by settling in Canada Moodie faced a routine of physical labor in which even gentlewomen had to perform menial duties associated with the laboring class. By representing genteel immigrant women who saw their femininity undermined by the tasks of frontier life, Moodie reinvented the very notion of femininity and the possibilities of recreating the female self.

1.3 Immigrant Women's Life Writing

In her New-World autobiographical work tinged with dread and inquisitiveness, Moodie traces the steps of her family's toilsome journey, including eight years in the bush. In effect, *Roughing It* covers the family's experience as upper-middle class immigrants from their arrival at Grosse Island in 1832 to their departure from the backwoods in 1840. Until several decades ago, literary critics failed to see the educational value and literary significance of life writing, reasoning that it lacked the imaginative power of fiction. Yet, Susanna Moodie's now canonical narrative is as imaginatively conceived as it is historical**:**

> Like all writing, feminist self-writing is informed by the experience of the everyday, of the body, of the sites of contact with and isolation from the read-about and lived-in worlds. But that world as the writer lives it can be imagined, felt, and recognized only from the writing.[27]

Culturally and physically overwhelmed by her immigrant experience, Moodie sets out to map a new territory by combining pioneering skills and narrative talent learned in England to affirm her growing sense of independence. In this way, she turns her condition of exile into a valuable experience that functions not only as a literary conceit but also as a conduit to approach her writing:

> The surprise is to discover that by using yourself, you don't necessarily write a book about yourself. But it can be the pinhole that lets the light of the world in, not because you are so representative but because that "I" becomes a tool in some ways. It becomes a light-and heat-seeking instrument, and so you tell

[27] Smith Sidonie, and Watson Julia. *Women, Autobiography, Theory a Reader*. Madison: U of Wisconsin (1998), p.193

> exactly as much as you need in order to talk about the things out there. You're not writing about yourself, you're writing about that world.[28]

According to Barbara Korte, Moodie's shift from a passive observer to an active participant in both household and farm labor suggests that "the act of self-creation implied in autobiographical writing becomes obvious."[29] Moreover, this shift works hand in hand with the blurring of the gentlewoman's category. Roy Pascal in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* defines autobiography as a literary genre dealing with personal development wherein the self depends on social recognition and not on individuality.[30] In fact, in *Roughing It* Moodie self-consciously traces her own evolution in part as a response to the social environment of backwoods people and her relation to other pioneer women, thereby transforming the merely personal to a representative dimension**.** The tension between external and internal worlds is further described by Stephen Spender:

> An autobiographer is really writing the two lives: his life as it appears to himself, from his own when he looks out at the world from behind his eye-sockets; and his life as it appears from outside in the minds of others; a view which tends to become in part his own view of himself also, since he is influenced by the opinion of those others...[31]

Similarly, in his groundbreaking study on life-writing in the United States, William Boelhower disentangles the characteristics of immigrant autobiography when

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[28] Bair, J., Blew, M., Cantu, N., Hampl, P., Price, J., & Boardman, K. "Western Autobiography and Memoir: A Panel of Writers." *Western American Literature, 37*(2) 2002, p.154.
[29] Korte, Barbara. "Gentle-Women in the Wilderness: Self-Images of British Canadian Pioneer Women." *Difference and Community: Canadian and European Cultural Perspectives*. Amsterdam:Rodopi (1996), p.157.
[30] Shapiro, Stephen A. "The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography." *Comparative Literature Studies* 5.4 (1968), p.425
[31] Shapiro, Stephen A. Op. cit., p.448.

he discusses the genre's tensive structure of a double self. "The protagonist-narrator is both emigrant and immigrant, exile and discoverer […] voyager and hero-adventurer,"[32] a binary opposition that arises from the coexistence of Old World and New World behavioral codes, customs and societal expectations. In the genre of autobiography, the question of identity is a defining concern. Invested in a strict dialogue between self and world, the immigrant protagonist wavers between two culturally formed selves. One is projected into the outside world and therefore affected by people's recognition, while the other self is rooted in her own inner self-conception. By traversing and inhabiting two different countries, immigrant autobiographers must integrate two cultural systems: a culture of the present and the future and a culture of memory.[33] Moreover, through the adoption of this intercultural stance, the protagonist is equipped with the possibility of recounting the interaction of her two lives at a deep-structural level.[34]

In this respect, Boelhower argues that the immigrant autobiographical form "uniquely embodies this virtual dynamism by uniting the two worlds."[35] As immigrant autobiographer Marcus Ravage observes, the newcomer is not a *tabula rasa*: he is "someone who brings with him a deep-rooted tradition, a system of culture and tastes and habits."[36] The opposition of two different worlds normally implies three fabula moments of anticipation, contact, and contrast in typical immigrant autobiographical accounts: Old-World reality vs New-World ideal; New-World ideal vs New-World reality; New-World reality vs Old-World reality.[37] In *Roughing It*, the moment of anticipation presents the prevailing fallacies of immigrants' expectations that intensify

[32] Boelhower, William. Op. cit., p. 44.
[33] Boelhower William. Op. cit., p.38.
[34] Boelhower, William. Op. cit., p.45.
[35] Boelhower, William. Op. cit., p.90.
[36] Ravage, E. Marcus. *An American in the Making*. New York: Harper and Bros (1917), p. 138.
[37] Boelhower Willam. Op. cit., p.47.

the hope for a Utopian land: " I long to see the lovely island. It looks a perfect paradise at this distance."[38] Although the narrator/protagonist is propelled forward by mythic dreams, she will soon go through a process of demythification centered on a translation of illusory expectations into the rawness of reality: "many things look well at a distance which are bad enough when near."[39] Casting anchor off Grosse Island on the 30th of August 1832, Moodie's autobiographical protagonist begins to assume a dialogical perspective as she comes into contact with a rather antipastoral reality:

> But how spoiled by the discordant yells of the filthy beings who were sullying the purity of the air and water with contaminating sights and sounds!. […] You would think they were incarnate devils; singing, drinking, dancing, shouting, and cutting antics that would surprise the leader of a circus. They have no shame – are under no restraint – nobody knows them here, and they think they can speak and act as they please.[40]

Needless to say, it is the complexity of her settlement in Canada, among a series of dramatic and negative experiences of poverty and degradation, that opens the door to her 'soulscape'[41] – and above all, to a new birth and a new self.

It was no sooner than the mid- to late-eighties that immigrant autobiographies caught the attention of scholars. For autobiographies by immigrant women it took even longer to find a readership. Indeed, at the outset of the eighties, the battle between low and high culture still bore hard on this genre of writing, along with neglect of multi-ethnic and non-canonic literary texts: "Their genre status and unique conventions and literary qualities were naturally overlooked, since the collective subjects that created their

[38] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p.9 (Chapter I).
[39] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p.9 (Chapter I).
[40] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p.10 (Chapter I).
[41] Boelhower, William. Op. cit., p.68.

special world view were equally neglected.[…]".[42] In the field of life studies, several scholars have retraced the construction of women's subjectivities in response to their historical and cultural circumstances. When autobiography developed as a Western literary genre in the 19th century, it was structured around a gender ideology in which the white, middle-class woman was imprisoned in a patriarchal society and regularly deprived of the means of self-representation. Literary critic Regenia Gagnier and other feminist scholars acknowledged the power unleashed by the opportunity of self-representation which challenges white, male, middle-class individualism and broadens women's possibilities for resistance to gender prescriptions and other ideologies.[43]

Through autobiographical accounts and other forms of self-representation, women eventually managed to subvert white male dominance while instilling both a refusal of subordination and an awareness of gender consciousness in them. Noting that "autobiographical writing is a discursive and material practice in which gendered subjectivity is constructed, confirmed and sabotaged"[44], Bella Brodski characterizes autobiography as a textual space of negotiations, where women can redefine conventional ideologies of identity. In effect, Susanna Moodie sets out to redefine herself by moving narratively from the private borders of domesticity to the public space of discourse. This intensified sense of belonging is due precisely to a process which decenters Old World conventions and endorses a growing sense of pride in her own pioneering achievements, which counter the delicate-lady and submissive woman stereotype.

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[42] Boelhower, William. Op. cit., p.29.
[43] Woollacott, Angela. "The fragmentary subject: feminist history, official records, and self-representation." *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol. 12 (1998), p.333.
[44] Smith Sidonie, and Watson Julia. Op cit., p.165.

1.4 Translation of the Self into the Canadian Wilderness

"Emigration, however necessary as the obvious means of providing for the increasing population of early-settled and over-peopled countries, is indeed a very serious matter to the individual emigrant and his family. He is thrown adrift, as it were, on a troubled ocean [...]"[45]

Moodie reverses her position as a passive spouse and immigrant by exploring a wide variety of social situations that place the protagonist in multiple and flexible positions. A fixed and stable self is replaced through a process of displacement, which according to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, allows marginal subjects to escape the interstices of the dominant culture, redefine their location and reject common places.[46] Similarly, Minnie Bruce Pratt in her essay "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" asserts that the feminist practice of moving away from "home" to question the taxonomies of social privilege and power, represents a possibility for positionality within literature and society.[47] Mapping the course of her life in the bush as a pioneer woman, Moodie transgresses the stereotype of the delicate middle-class woman and learns to operate in both the masculine and the feminine spheres. She asserts and exchanges power, using her new subjective space to deconstruct the image of herself as a gentlewoman.

In this respect, the importance of location sheds light on the Greek word *ethos* which fuses the concepts of identity and site. Both the individual agent and the location from which a person speaks and writes set up the opening for new positions of authority that are inclusive of the margins and the voices of the unheard. In a newly appropriated

[45] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p.69 (Chapter XII).
[46] Kaplan, Caren. "Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse." *Cultural Critique* 6 (1987), p. 188.
[47] Kaplan, Caren. Op. cit., p.192.

land, Moodie progressively shifts from the imperial eye to the eye of the anxious immigrant, conscious that the cultural values of her mother country ceased to have the force of authority in the Canadian wilderness. To inhabit the new territory, she acts upon the land with a desire to assert power through her participation in pioneering activities that pave the way for a rooted settler, rather than an uprooted exile. Although the most concrete meaning for the term *ethos* is "a habitual gathering place"[48] – people acting upon the virtues valued as most important by the culture for which one speaks – it does not necessarily suggest that the cultural context is conflict-free.

On the contrary, *ethos* as a source of discursive authority covering different experiences of a shared location leads oppressed groups like feminist writers to reclaim a new site in which marginal positions overturn the centrality of a male-dominated culture. Acknowledging their differences and establishing their identities and locations, they challenge the dominant discourse and transform *ethos* into an open-ended site imbued with multiple perspectives and identities:

> Many feminists –and, in fact, some composition scholars – have argued for the epistemological and theoretical advantage of the margins […] Individuals can see differently when they are on the margins or borders of particular groups; it is easier to observe from the outside, where the perception is broader, keener, or productively different.[49]

On the one hand, family is central to the structuring of Moodie's life, but on the other she challenges conventional prescriptions that consider women as the site of subordination and domesticity: she casts a "female traveler as a persona who can live up

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[48] Reynolds, Nedra. "Ethos as Location: New Sites for Understanding Discursive Authority." *Rhetoric Review* 11.2 (1993), p.328.
[49] Reynolds, Nedra. Op. cit., p.331.

to a popular masculine model of adventurous travel with many hardships to endure."[50] Moodie renegotiates patriarchal gender ideology by deploying a form of irony that defies the optimism of earlier accounts of immigration while also recounting the roughness of a pioneer life. Entertaining both the negative and positive aspects of immigration, Moodie writes back to the imperial center and counters the immigration propaganda that was inundating Britain at that time. In addition, she not only elevates her role as a mother and wife but begins to move beyond the designated place of the conventional gentlewoman.

Jeanne Perrault calls Moodie's use of irony a form of "deferential humour"[51] which "allowed women both to show a correctly gendered face to the reader and to reveal some of their own courage and adaptability while 'roughing it in the bush.'" If at the beginning Moodie seems to rely on her status of a gentlewoman unfit for domestic chores, she soon begins to operate in the masculine sphere of non-ladylike tasks such as field work. As she goes about undermining gender stereotypes, she also breaks down the strict codes of behavior of the Old World and promotes the inscription of a rooted and independent pioneer in the Canadian landscape.

In the first half of the book, set in the Douro backwoods, Moodie's upfront inability to gain control over her surroundings through daily chores – bread-making, washing clothes and milking – corroborates her distance from a newly appropriated land that confines women to domestic duties. Unacquainted with even the simplest household affairs – she had never known what it was to soil her hands – Moodie seems unfit for the rough life of a backwoods settler. The newly appropriated land now seems pervaded with the trope of death – "it was everywhere," "perhaps lurking in our very

[50] Korte, Barbara. "Travel Writing in 'The English Woman's Journal' (1858-1864): An Arena of Leisure in the Context of Women's Work." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 45.2 (2012), p.164.
[51] Smith, Watson, Smith Sidonie, and Watson Julia. Op. cit., p.227.

path"[52] – due both to her lack of survival skills and the presence of the cholera epitomizing the devastating effects of colonization. These deficiencies, however, do not by any means detract from the effectiveness of her narrative. On the contrary, they place *Roughing It in the Bush* in sheer opposition to all those writings that induced her family and others to emigrate to Canada. In fact, one of the purposes of her book is to warn prospective settlers about the hardships of displacement – the fears of the bush, pestilence, the unscrupulous land promoters. She achieves this by casting doubt upon the optimism of previous immigration accounts. Looked at from a distance, Canada seems like "a perfect paradise," but once she reaches the Quebec shore, the cholera plague becomes a fitting example of the New World realities that Moodie meticulously documents.

In a settler society where the garrison mentality has governed appreciation of the Canadian wilderness, Moodie declares: "For the first time, I felt I was a stranger on a strange land; my heart yearned for my absent home. Home! The word had ceased to belong to my present – it was doomed in the past."[53] These words undermine the notion of "home" which now represents spatial discontinuity and doubleness deriving from the merging of the past with the present and the Canadian setting with the memories of England's pastoral landscapes. Her first years in the colony are characterized by a feeling of homesickness, nostalgia, the fears of the wild – "I felt terrified at being left alone"[54] – while nature becomes the main source of her attachment to England. On the one hand, her first impressions of an urban environment like Montreal are of "an infected city," "dirty and ill-paved."[55] On the other hand, being surrounded by the

[52] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p. 17 (Chapter III).
[53] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p. 15 (Chapter II).
[54] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p.29 (Chapter V).
[55] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p.16 (Chapter III).

grandeur of the Canadian scenery, her eyes mirror the seeming impregnability of nature that not even the settlers succeed in taming. In fact, the portrayal she provides of the Indian ("one of Nature's gentlemen – he never says or does a rude or vulgar thing"[56]) diverges from her consideration of immigrants as uneducated barbarians "far behind the wild man in delicacy of feeling or natural courtesy."[57] On her arrival, Moodie tries to hide her repulsion – "all was new, strange and distasteful,"[58] especially when she realizes she has been thrown among uneducated people. The newly arrived settlers are portrayed as miserable, deprived of decency and shame and their display of presumption and vanity: "They talked loudly of the rank and wealth of their connections at home, and lamented the great sacrifices they had made in order to join brothers and cousins who have foolishly settled in this beggarly wooden country."[59]

As Marian Fowler notes, Moodie writes with a "bifocal vision," with one eye on England and the other on Canada.[60] In Minnie Bruce Pratt's words, the back and forth movement is a crucial dynamic in Moodie's autobiography, which cannot settle down in only one location.[61] As Moodie explores different social relations, she also creates different locations central to the construction of unfolding identity. In fact, Moodie explores the porousness of gender and class boundaries, by considering women who soil their hands and servants who have more privileges and personal freedom than in England. Although the English, the Yankees, the Irish, and the Native peoples are defined as less social and friendly than people of home, she learns that they are:

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[56] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p.9 (Chapter I).
[57] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit.,p.9 (Chapter I).
[58] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p.26 (Chapter IV).
[59] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p. 13 (Chapter II).
[60] Fowler, Marian. *The Embroidered Tent: Five Gentlewomen in Early Canada*. Toronto: Anansi (1982), p. 184.
[61] Caplan, Karen. Op. cit., p.193.

> allowed in this country a freedom enjoyed by few of the more polished countries in Europe; freedom in religion, politics and speech…and they can lead a more independent social life than in the mother country, because less restricted by the conventional prejudices that govern older communities.[62]

In the second half of the book, the gap between Moodie and her Canadian surroundings is mitigated through her progressive knowledge and development of abilities needed to survive in the bush. Indeed, according to Stephen Shapiro, adaptation is one of the autobiography's implicit themes: "an autobiography recreates a [woman's] struggle to adapt to the demands of [her] environment or to transform that environment and adapt it to [her] own needs."[63] It is both an attempt for self-definition and a mirror of human possibilities that create connections between one's self image and the way others define an individual, becoming a world of opposing tendencies that bring forward a perpetual evolution of the autobiographer's characterization and surroundings. Moodie inscribes herself within her own invention of Canada and enacts a subjective transformation of herself that is faithful to her Old World writing skills and the laboring demands of the New World. Being a British lady harnessed to old values, she steadily shapes her life around her direct participation in the survival of her family and labor in the fields alongside or without her husband.

In setting forth the imbrications and oppositions between domesticity and the career of writer, Moodie portrays a society that seems to be reluctant to embrace both of them together. It is precisely due to the conventions of feminine self-effacement, that she has to conceal her literary ambition and pretend merely to foreground her role as mother and wife. She is a bluestocking prevented from exhibiting her literary

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[62] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p.170 (Appendix B).
[63] Smith, Watson, Smith Sidonie, and Watson Julia. Op. cit., p. 449.

accomplishments so as not to blatantly defy those conventions that belittle women as illiterate. In apparently accepting and respecting the limitations imposed on women, she manages to implement strategies of subversive communication that promote a new outlook towards femininity. For instance, she retreats into the stereotype of feminine self-effacement by suppressing her desire to speak on political and economic matters – " I will leave my husband who is better qualified than myself, to give a more accurate account of the country, while I turn to matter of a lighter and a livelier cast."[64] By doing so, she elicits empathy in her readers, giving way to her own voice. Moodie also disrupts gender roles and stereotypes by comparing herself to Canadian women who reflect a patriarchal mindset. Tangled in their love of dress, exceeding beauty and limited education, marriage at an early age "takes from them all awkwardness and restraint." [65]

Moodie repeatedly faced contempt for her interest in literary subjects. She cites an instance in which a lady told her that "it would be better for me to lay by the pen, and betake myself to some more useful employment; that she thanked her God that she could make a shirt, and see to the cleaning of the house!"[66] Plunged into an environment imbued with prejudices and old prescriptions, she confronts the reader and her community with a deceptive acceptance of a pervasive narrow-mindedness. People-in-place are crucial in her process of self-definition and self-representation. Despite her desire to write, she informs the reader that "she had never been able to turn my thoughts towards literature during my sojourn in the bush. When the body is fatigued with labor, unwonted with strength, the mind is no condition for mental occupation."[67] Evidently,

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[64] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p. 66 (Chapter XI).
[65] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p. 65 (Chapter XI).
[66] Moodie, Susanna. Op cit., p. 65 (Chapter XI).
[67] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p.133 (Chapter XXIII).

her physical and mental bondage to the land and family proves an unfavorable environment for intellectual delight.

In effect, the environment she evokes has an adverse impact on her and on women in general: they must endure extremely cold temperatures, hard work in the fields, and all the traditional household work. Exposure to harsh weather and hard labor disconnect women from their former pleasures and pursuits to the extent that they risk losing control over their bodies and minds. Moodie realizes that she has become an unconventional Upper Canadian woman, who on the eve of her return to town life in Belleville reports: "For seven years I had lived out of the world entirely; my person had been rendered coarse by hard work and exposure to the weather. I looked double the age I was and my hair was sprinkled with gray."[68]

But all the hardships deriving from climate and a life in the woods eventually become a means toward feminine emancipation. Moodie pictures herself as a woman struggling to make a life and earn a living. During her first years in Canada, she fails to adapt or belong and seems unable to do what it takes to survive. There is an unsettling gap between Moodie and the land which she progressively overcomes as she develops the necessary skills and learns to adapt to the Canadian landscape and Canadian life. Catching ducks, gardening and running the farm on her own are all activities that suggest her ability to fit into her new surroundings. Despite a crisis in which they are in danger of being buried alive, such near-tragedies represent for Moodie a means to self-affirmation and belonging to the rawness of "the land of my adoption." Christa Zeller Thomas asserts that *Roughing It* proves "Moodie's lasting discomfort with the notion of home in Canada,"[69] but I prefer to see it as part of her journey of self-discovery in

[68] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p. 152 (Chapter XXVI).
[69] Thomas, Christa Zeller. Op. cit., p.106.

which the privations and hardships of a settler society offer further self-awareness of the notion of being-in-the-world. For instance, when she alludes to "my forest home" and the "birthplace of my three boys," she is positioning herself within a territory that she cannot but circumscribe in the meaning of "home." She gradually transforms a hostile space into a familiar place, by engaging in non-traditional class and gender activities that reassess her genteel attitudes towards work and the laboring class. In fact, despite the often somber hues that color her outlook on Canadian life, it is in the so-called dreadful bush that she gives birth to her four children and asserts:

> When I say that Canada is destined to be one of the most prosperous countries in the world, let it not be supposed that I am influenced by any unreasonable partiality for the land of my adoption. Canada may not possess mines of gold or silver, but she possesses all those advantages of climate, geological structure, and position, which are essential to greatness and prosperity.[70]

It is worth noting that Moodie never made the return trip. Her book ends with the family's move from the bush to Belleville, where her husband is offered the post of sheriff. Although in chapter 27, "Adieu to the woods," Moodie describes their move in somber tones, it represents an advancement for the poor gentleman who in the backwoods of Canada "can neither work so hard, live so coarsely, nor endure so many privations." The poor gentlemen is "totally unfitted, by his previous habits and education, to be a hewed of the forest and a tiller of the soil."[71] The Moodies' final inscription into a bourgeois lifestyle represents an accomplishment of the settler's ideology of progress and conquest.

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[70] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p.158 (Chapter XXVIII).
[71] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p. 156 (Chapter XVII).

> That was the last night I ever spent in the bush – in the dear forest home which I had loved in spite of all the hardships which we had endured since we pitched our tent in the backwoods. It was the birthplace of my tree boys, the school of high resolve and energetic action in which we had learned to meet calmly, and successfully to battle with the ills of life. Nor did I leave it without many regretful tears […][72]

Borders between culture and nature are traced throughout the narration to mark those spaces where she is undergoing trials of estrangement. The motif of mapping – "our bush-farm was located on the border-line of a neighboring township, only one degree less wild, less out of the world than the famed 'English Line', the boast and glory of this terra incognita"[73] – stems from her need to convert alien space into familiar place. The relation she establishes with the wilderness is of a simultaneous attraction and aversion: it is both inspirational and dreadful.

Through the transformation of wilderness into a productive land, Moodie seeks to transform her feelings of exile into a sense of belonging. It is precisely the conventional pattern of separation between men and women and Moodie's having to assume the role of her husband, that give her the strength to overcome the trials of immigration, reverse her perspective on the Canadian surroundings and sabotage customary gender roles. She renegotiates a sense of femininity that cannot but be considered intrinsically linked to a literary career long denied to women. Writing for a magazine, she deviates from those practical tasks imposed on mothers and wives and promotes the value of her literary profession in order to persuade a male audience that writers should not be judged by their gender. As soon as her husband – Lieutenant J.W. Dunbar Moodie, an army officer

[72] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p.154 (Chapter XXVII).
[73] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p. 141 (Chapter XXV).

on half-pay – leaves their family, Moodie's writing becomes an opportunity for economic maintenance, which purposefully conceals a much more revolutionary objective: advocacy of women as professional writers. Moodie aims at overturning all those domestic ideals that were considered the only source of respectability and pride in a patriarchal society, by juxtaposing her fears of cattle with her readiness to write:

> I actually shed tears of joy over the first twenty-dollar bill I received from Montreal. It was my own; I had earned it with my own hand . […] I no longer retired to bed when the labors of the day were over. I sat up, and wrote by the light of a strange sort of candles.[74]

[74] Moodie, Susanna. Op. cit., p. 133 (Chapter XXIII).

CHAPTER 2

The Dawning of Italian-Canadian Women's Writing

2.1 *Pillars of Lace* and *Roman Candles*

The breakup of families in the history of immigration to the New World and the memories that revolve around it, are part of the inheritance of Italian-Canadian writers like Caterina Edwards, Maria Ardizzi and Mary di Michele who retrace the life patterns of separation and deepen the condition of individual freedom of the immigrant mother or the immigrant daughter. In effect, Italian-Canadian writing emerged from writers whose families had migrated in the 1950s and 1960s, mainly from rural areas of Southern Italy. Much like Susanna Moodie, these Italian-Canadian writers explore immigrant women's state of isolation and the condition of Italian women in Canada. According to Joseph Pivato – a Canadian writer who helped to establish the critical recognition of Italian-Canadian literature – the condition of "men without women who left at home women without men, and children without fathers,"[75] became a *fil rouge* in the history of dismembered families, that exemplifies a signpost in the collective memory of Italian immigrants. These patterns of separation are commonplace in the work of women writers, and have their roots in the migration of Italian men to Canada without their wives. In fact, following upon the Italian unification and the subsequent mass movement of men from the regions of Calabria, the Abruzzi, Molise, Basilicata and Friuli to Canada, the immigrant history of Italian-Canadian writers began. While few Italian men came with their wives, when they were flanked by women in the Atlantic crossing, gender biases left no open-ended prospects: women were often

[75] Pivato, Joseph. "Italian-Canadian Women Writers Recall History." *Canadian Ethnic Studies = Etudes Ethniques Au Canada* 18.1 (1986), p.2.

relegated to the role of servant and 'angel in the house.' On these grounds, female authors could not but center their narratives on those role restrictions that characterized immigrant families and curtailed women's freedom of movement. Such culturally restrictive limitations led to an imprisoned female body domestically trapped in the paradoxes of a modern society in which women must struggle alone to win a modicum of personal liberty.

Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* is a milestone for the launching of feminist works and lives in Canadian literature. A forerunner, she now stands for all those women who out of unquestioned duty followed their husbands to the New World and tackled the trials of migration in an atmosphere of beleaguered solitude. The first anthology of Italian-Canadian women writers, edited by Marisa De Franceschi and titled *Pillars of Lace,* exemplifies the perfect starting point from which to consider the rise of a new ethnic women's tradition:

> These women do not restrict themselves to the concerns of ethnicity, womanhood, politics, morality, or any other theme. They are true writers who take on the world and address issues relevant to us all: relationships, oppression, liberty and freedom, sexuality, love […][76]

Already in the title of her collection De Franceschi emphasizes the defining role of women writers of Italian descent in Canadian literature who have been publishing since the 1950s. The pillar and the lace epitomize, respectively, the two intertwined facets of femininity – strength and sensitivity. They remind us that their duty as wives and mothers has both reinforced their central role in the household and their

[76] De Franceschi, Marisa. *Pillars of Lace the Anthology of Italian-Canadian Women Writers*. Toronto: Guernica (1998), p.24.

vulnerability within society. In this "groundbreaking text,"[77] as Licia Canton defines it, the editor seeks to cover the writing of first-generation and second-generation Italian-Canadian women writers as well as explore the bonds and continuities between the voices of these two generations. Elena Maccaferri Randaccio (under the pseudonym of Elena Albani) and Maria Ardizzi are two of the leading figures of the first-generation who explored in Italian the motifs of linguistic and cultural displacement. Conversely, Mary Melfi and Mary di Michele best represent those writers who write in English.

Whereas the first works by these writers aimed above all to depict their condition as immigrants, the novels of Maria J. Ardizzi mark a turning point in Italian-Canadian literary production: documentary facts are replaced with a poetics of realism, paving the way for meanings that more subtly reflect the human condition. A first-generation Italian Canadian writer, Ardizzi investigates the motifs that framed the writing of a later generation and the gaps resulting from the immigrant experience. In *Made in Italy*, through the first person voice of the protagonist Nora, Ardizzi presents a woman's whose identity is shaped by the hardships of being culturally uprooted and having to start over again in another country. Indeed, rather than solely shaping their literature in terms of gender and ethnicity, Italian-Canadian women writers explore the temporal and spatial ruptures created by the immigrant experience. Above all for writers of the second-generation, the heritage of a cultural background relegating women to the margins, has contributed to a specific gendered and ethnic tradition in the field of Italian-Canadian literature. Women who struggle to rebuff the restrictions of patriarchy, tell their own stories and express their link to Italy by questioning the hierarchies of a privileged male space:

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[77] De Franceschi, Marisa. Op.cit., p.13.

> These writers are not bound to their cultural backgrounds with rope and wire; they acknowledge their heritage and often use the images it has given them, but their intelligence makes them soar above their familiar terrain and from that vantage point they are able to see it and judge it while also being allowed to peer farther afield.[78]

For writers of the first generation, Italy played a prominent role in their writings, and they vividly recall and dramatize their displacement. Second generation writers no longer know Italy as the homeland of their birth. Their connection to Italy is tenuous and their knowledge of the immigrant experience comes to them second hand. On the other hand, this same sense of distance has prompted these writers to dig into their Italian roots in an attempt to bridge the old world of Italy with their social and cultural life in Canada. In the 1980s and 1990s there was a shift of emphasis from the "uprooted and displaced Italian immigrant" to those "of integrated and acculturated Canadians descent" [79] who sought to integrate the traditional values of their ancestry into their Canadian experience. As De Franceschi clarifies, "integration" meant keeping the old values and customs of the Italian family while adopting those of Canada; while "acculturation" consisted in the dismissal of the old in favor of the new culture. In later Itaian-Canadian women writers, these processes often coexist. These writers are not exclusively constrained by their immigrant families. On the contrary, they seek to rise above family in order to address universal issues: personal relationships, ethnic and gender discrimination, personal freedom, sexuality, love, and the entire gamut of themes that make up a delicate fabric bound together by the threads of their talent.[80]

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[78] De Franceschi, Marisa. Op. Cit. p.24.
[79] De Franceschi, Marisa. Op. cit., p.13.
[80] De Franceschi, Marisa. Op. cit., p.24.

Among the women writers who have helped to expand the multi-ethnic canon of Canadian literature, Elena Albani, Maria Ardizzi and Caterina Edwards explore what it means to be Italian Canadian. On the one hand, Albani and Ardizzi's women protagonists, while remaining in Canada, long to explore their Italian roots. In Edwards's works, her female protagonists often experience a 'homecoming' journey to Italy in search of their family's past. The stories they recount are central to the construction of their own identity and to the definition of Italian-Canadian literature. While defining the place of Italian-Canadian writers' identity, De Franceschi also reflects on the Prairie novelist Robert Kroetsch's words: "we haven't got an identity until somebody tells our story. The fiction makes us real."[81] Frank Paci, Mary di Michele, Dino Minni, Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, Mary Melfi and others seek to decenter their Italian ethnicity without however sacrificing it. They seek to give Italian Canadians an identity as Canadians while adding a cosmopolitan context to their works. In effect, editor Marisa De Franceschi argues that in the end "we cannot escape our heritage, our roots. Intentionally or not, they seem to infiltrate our writing and so be it. They add the delicate spice flavour to our work which makes it stand apart."

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The talented poet Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, born in Arezzo in 1949, and raised in Canada, is a prominent figure in Italian Canadian writing. Editor of a groundbreaking collection of poems titled *Roman Candles*,[82] he brought together the work of seventeen Canadian poets of Italian birth or background, two of them being Mary Melfi and Mary

[81] De Franceschi, Maria. Op. cit., p.19.
[82] Di Cicco, Pier Giorgio. *Roman Candles: An Anthology of Poems by Seventeen Italo-Canadian Poets*. Toronto: Hounslow Press (1978).

di Michele. The poems's titles in themselves – "Casa Mia," "Venezia," "Across the Atlantic," "The Exile," and "The Wanderer" – indicate the volume's overriding themes. In "Casa Mia" Mary di Michele sees her inheritance as a "prodigal rebellion" or "drive into hell,"[83] reflecting on the fact that mainstream Canadian culture has often feared the invention of parallel cultural systems. Getting critical recognition in the 1960s and academic support in the 1970s, Canadian literature has strangely enough rejected the creation of parallel worlds in favor of distinct and well-defined bodies of literature.

In *Duologue,*[84] consisting of a dialogue between Antonio D'Alfonso and Pasquale Verdicchio, women are defined as "the generators of the body of diversity"[85] since they occupy a space of difference: as women and as representatives of different ethnic identities. These two prominent Italian-Canadian writers urge their readers to consider ethnicity as a domain for mutual and parallel efforts that go beyond one's ethnic background. They rebuff rigid categories, separate entities, and exclusive systems that privilege the abstraction of a dominant, mainstream culture and hope for correspondences within and beyond the boundaries ethnic groups. Nonetheless, Italian-Canadian women writers have often lacked self-representations of their ethnic identities due to the dominance of a masculine perspective. That said, the literary historian and writer Joseph Pivato acknowledges the unique role of Di Cicco in establishing a literary circle that attracted writers ignored both in Italy and Canada. In the Preface to his anthology, he sets forth the sheer force of 'Canadianism' and nationalism that limited the emergence of writers who were marginalized for their "bicultural sensibility."[86]

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[83] Di Michele, Mary. "Casa Mia" in *Roman Candles*. Op. cit., p.58.
[84] D'Alfonso Antonio, and Verdicchio Pasquale. *Duologue: On Culture and Identity.* Toronto: Guernica Editions (1998).
[85] D'Alfonso Antonio, and Verdicchio Pasquale. Op.cit. p.52.
[86] Di Cicco, Pier Giorgio. Op. cit., p.9.

Published in 1978, *Roman Candles* sought to recount the Italian-Canadian experience in verse. It represented a shared and fertile ground for those writers who had previously been culturally isolated: "I found isolated gestures by isolated poets, isolated mainly by the condition of nationalism […] However pluralistic the landscape seemed to be to sociologists."[87] Propelled forward by the tension between wanting to belong and not-belonging that is at the core of their poetry, they focus above all on the dilemma of duality and double consciousness. Living with two cultures provides the impetus behind their poetry as well as their search for recognition in Canadian culture:

> And she cries out caught
> with one bare foot in a village in the Abruzzi,
> the other busy with cramped English speaking toes in Toronto,
> she strides the Atlantic legs spread
> like a Colossus.[88]

This and other poems in Di Cicco's collection express a shared eagerness among women and men writers to create a bridge between Canada and Italy. This in-between place is where Italian-Canadian literature and identity begins: "with a self-awareness about our writing"[89] and the search for a new, self-representative identity. As the novelist, publisher and literary critic Antonio D'Alfonso explains, the turning point for Canadian writers of Italian descent was 1978. The year *Roman Candles* was published, a considerable group of writers like D'Alfonso, Melfi, di Michele, Di Cicco and

[87] Di Cicco, Pier Giorgio. Op.cit.,p.9.
[88] Melfi, Mary. "Enigmatico." *Roman Candles.* Op. cit., p.62.
[89] Pivato, Joseph. "A History of Italian-Canadian Writing." *Athabasca University: Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences*, July 23 (2015).

Franticelli discovered that "Italianità, as Paul Valéry put it" was their reality.[90] Before that watershed year, writers were either unconscious or ashamed of their Italian connections. Raised in French Canada, D'Alfonso reveals that it was 1984, at the age of 31, when he first discovered he was Italian.

Isolated and without a voice, Di Cicco revived a little-known history of a lost generation: men and women who were not emigrants, as he clarifies in his "Preface," but who grew up in Canada as second-generation Italian Canadians. Although these young writers in the New World contributed significantly to the Canadian economy and their families benefited Italy by sending money to their relatives, isolation and exclusion from both cultures was often the case: "We were just trying to survive in a new, ever-changing society; we were working to learn the language and to fit in somehow."[91] Often discriminated against as belonging to a backward race and hovering between two worlds, Di Cicco in his early poetry expresses sentiments of loss and alienation, after his first return trip to Italy in 1974:

> I went, biased against a legacy that had made growing up in North America a difficult but not impossible chore (or so I thought). I went out of curiosity, and came back to Canada conscious of the fact that I'd been a man without a country for most of my life. And I became bitter at the thought that most people carry on day after day deeply aware that they do so on the land upon which they were born.[92]

Perhaps the first to realize that a new and distinct body of literature could emerge in Canada, Joseph Pivato ascribes to Di Cicco the coming-of-age of

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[90] D'Alfonso, Antonio. *In Italics: In Defense of Ethnicity*. Toronto: Guernica Editions (1996), p.24.
[91] Pivato, Joseph. "The Poetry of Pier Giorgio Di Cicco." *Athabasca University: Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences*, February 12 (2015).
[92] Di Cicco, Pier Giorgio. Op. cit., p.9.

Italian-Canadian literature. Aside from gathering new writers scattered across Canada, who were at the threshold of publishing with small presses and in equally small literary magazines, Di Cicco changed the understanding of English Canadian poetry by sprinkling Canadian poems with Italian words. With *Roman Candles* the Italian language entered these poets' poems and helped to inaugurate a multilinguistic paradigm in Canadian literature. Language was crucial in the process of these poets' self-awareness and they used it as a weapon against the dominant culture's biases towards the Italian-Canadian community. Indeed, it was the children of the immigrant generation who were born in Canada in the late 1940s or early 1950s who took up the challenge of creating an Italian Canadian literature with a voice of its own. Language was on the front line in the search for a cultural identity. The connection of language to names is often crucial in their work: it was commonplace to bear an Italian name at home and an English name at school. This culturally hostile and prejudicial environment is revealed in a poem by Filippo Salvatore:

> Giovanni, they erected you a monument,
> but they changed your name;
> here they call you John…[93]

Di Cicco's generation of Italian-Canadian writers resisted the Anglicizing influence that translated Giovanni Caboto's identity into John Cabot and the silencing of ethnic

[93] Salvatore, Filippo. "Three Poems for Giovanni Caboto." *Roman Candles.* Op. cit., p.14.
Giovanni Caboto, was an Italian explorer who landed in what is now Canada, in 1497. He was the first to report through writing what he saw.

identities. They represented the first significant Italian-Canadian ethnic movement, rooted in the drive towards a form of self-definition hovering between two cultures.

Antonino Mazza, albeit paradoxically, encourages Italian-Canadians to use their voices like "canaries," even when confined to their cage:

> Don't try to reject your mother tongue,
> in our cage, it is wrong;
> do canaries smother their
> private song?[94]

The Italian words that aggressively emerge in Di Cicco's collection evoke the mythic sense and emotional sphere of language. They speak on behalf of a lost generation of immigrant children compelled to cast aside their regional dialects in order to leave space for English, accepted on a wider scale. Emotional ties to the speech of Italian Canadians at home are thereby created by placing Italian words in an all English-Canadian context:

> *Italia bella*; I return to you.
> There is no question of lateness
> for I was taken from you and cannot
> remember the parting.[95]

Through "Italian-Canadianness" these poets use their ethnicity and minority status to call for a politics of recognition. Enoch Padolsky argues that it is a mistake to confine Italian-Canadian authors within the narrow and biased space of minority and ethnic

[94] Mazza, Antonino. "Canadese." *Roman Candles*. Op. cit., p.39.
[95] Di Cicco, Pier Giorgio. "Man Without a Country."*A Burning Patience*. Ottawa (1978), p.25.

writing, since they use their standpoint to address mainstream Canadian issues: for instance, "the feminism of Melfi and di Michele is of interest not only for the ways in which it relates to their Italian-Canadian experience."[96] Pointing to the conceptual drawbacks of categories such as 'ethnic literature,' ' ethnicity,' 'Canadian mainstream,' and 'minority,' Padolsky attempts to define the place of Italian-Canadian writing in the country's literary canon. A usable conceptual and critical framework requires attentiveness to those issues that dominate Italian-Canadian literature and whose writings "demonstrate similar themes, values… concrete affinities."[97]

As in autobiographical writing,[98] the first major and shared theme is the broadly discussed and prevailing perspective of Italian-Canadian double consciousness: a consciousness split by the double pull of Old World (Italy) and New (Canada). In an essay on the "ethnic voice" in Canadian writing, Eli Mandel identifies doubleness as an existential condition that on a daily basis takes hold over all immigrants.[99] This condition of cultural duality is entangled in manifold and complex issues: the experience of emigration, the situation of the immigrant in her adopted country, a new questioning of identity, a search for cultural roots, and generational and community tensions.[100] The writers' responses to this double consciousness are often articulated in the light of their generational belonging. Whereas for the older generation, the shock of emigration may lead to a refusal to assimilate through themes such as "separation from family and friends, guilt or regret at leaving home, nostalgia for an ideal past, inability

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[96] Padolsky Enoch. "The Place of Italian-Canadian Writing." *Revue d'études canadiennes* Vol. 21, No. 4 (1986-87), p.149.
[97] Pivato, Joseph. *Contrasts: Comparative Essays on Italian-Canadian Writing*. Montreal: Guernica (1985), p.31.
[98] See William Boelhower *Immigrant Autobiographies in the United States*.
[99] Mandel, Eli. "The Ethnic Voice in Canadian Writing." *Figures in a Ground: Canadian Essays on Modern Literature Collected in Honor of Sheila Watson*. Eds. Diane Bessai and David Jackel Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books (1978), p.265.
[100] Padolsky, Enoch. Op cit., p.139.

to communicate because of language problems and loss of identity,"[101] writers of the second generation (those born in Canadia) attempt to adapt more willingly to the new Canadian cultural context. In fact, finding their place in North America means redefining the self without denying their Old-World family heritage.

To be sure, ethnic subjectivity pivots on how this doubleness of identity, culture and language is received in Canada. Conceptualizing resistance to the dominant culture and a sense of alienation, Italian-Canadian double consciousness still defines "the experience of those of any 'different' ethnicity and race – different from the English and French white majorities."[102] On this ground, Pivato encourages the rethinking of ethnicity via Werner Sollors's book *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*. While arguing that ethnicity is a "sacred asset," Pivato attributes to ethnic and racial minorities a visible role in the postmodern reality that deconstructs centers into multiple peripheries.[103] Similarly, George Lipsitz argues that their "exclusion from political power and cultural recognition has enabled them to cultivate a sophisticated capacity for ambiguity, juxtaposition, and irony – all key qualities in the postmodern aesthetic." [104] This may hint at the extraordinary event of Italian-Canadian writing's arrival in Canadian literature.

Another watershed event in the dawning of Italian-Canadian literature was the founding of Guernica Editions by Antonio D'Alfonso in 1978-79 which became in time the major Italian-Canadian-American press in North America. Publishing writers working in English, French and Italian, D'Alfonso was initially unconscious of his and

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[101] Pivato, Joseph. Op. cit., p.174.
[102] Pivato Joseph. *Pier Giorgio Di Cicco: Essays on His Works*. Toronto: Guernica Editions (2011), p. 25.
[103] Pivato , Joseph. Op. cit., p.28.
[104] Lipsitz, George. "Cruising around the Historical Bloc: Postmodernism and Popular Music in East Los Angeles." *Cultural Critique No.5, Modernity and Modernism, Postmodernity and Postmodernism* (1986-1987), p.159.

other writers' Italian background: being Italian came later. It was no sooner than year 1984 during a meeting of Italian-Canadians in Rome, that he discovered that Mary Melfi, Marco Franticelli, Filippo Salvatore, Fulvio Caccia were Italian. Nonetheless, the impetus behind the founding of the publishing house, namely bridging cultures, remained unchanged: traversing and connecting various voices on a bitterly divided Canadian soil.

A point of contention between D'Alfonso and other Italian-Canadian writers was marked by the still undefined parameters that shaped their literature. Is content or consciousness the hallmark of these writers? D'Alfonso encouraged his fellow writers to consider the shift from being unconscious to becoming aware of one's ethnic background as the major node in their literary production.

Caterina Edwards's *The Lion's Mouth*, Mary Melfi's *Italy Revisited,* Maria Ardizzi's *Made in Italy,* Gianna Patriarca's *Italian Women and Other Tragedies,* and Marisa De Franceschi's *Pillars of Lace* are some of the Italian-Canadian women's works published by Guernica Editions. Established in the city of Montreal and operating in Toronto since 1994, D'Alfonso's press promoted not only ethnic minority writers also women writers who stepped out of the shadows. Not a coincidence, the press's name alludes to the first blatantly anarchist city in Europe. D'Alfonso chose it to indicate a breakthrough in the exclusive and restricting notions of nationalism, assimilation and multiculturalism.

2.2 Memoirs by Contemporary Women

Memoir: personal history; the personalizing of history; the historicizing of the personal. Memoir: the personal act of repossessing a public world, historical, institutional, collective….The memoirs are of a person, but they are "really" of an event, an era, an institution, a class identity.[105]

Among the genres of novel, poetry, drama, the essay and the short story, memoirs offer writers a form of representativeness based on a contract between author and reader: both are invited to explore the interiority of a historical subject. The relational pact between writer and reader in the memoir is, in effect, one forging identification, cross-identifications and disidentifications – "conscious or unconscious, across a broad spectrum of so-called personal experience."[106] Through the self-representation of the author's existential experiences she accomplishes "the foregrounding of the personal and political through authorial ethos, which becomes a powerful dimension of contemporary rhetorical engagement as readers debate both the reliability and value of experiences documented."[107] Marisa De Franceschi, in her anthology of Italian-Canadian women writers gathers various kinds of literary works to argue that not only gender and ethnicity but also temporal and spatial matters have contributed to shape the feminine perspective in Italian-Canadian literature.

Evoking the role played by time and space in shaping women's perspectives, Helen Buss notes that "in writing the two versions of my mother's story of my birth and inviting the reader to mediate, I wanted to point to the way in which all recollections are

[105] Hart, Francis Russell. "History Talking to Itself: Public Personality in Recent Memoir". *New Literary History* Vol. 11, No.1 (1979), p.195.
[106] Mack Katherine, and Jonathan Alexander. "The Ethics of Memoir: Ethos in Uptake." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol 49, no.1 (2009), p.56.
[107] Mack, and Jonathan. Op. cit., p.59.

profoundly influenced by contexts in the present moment."[108] She identifies memoirs as narratives that intermingle the personal with the historical and suggests how they change when read through women's lives. Even more significantly, "the memoir is a form in which history must come into concourse with literature in order to make a self, a life, and to locate that living self in a history, an era, a relational and communal identity."[109]

According to Francis Russell Hart, the memoir is "a personal act of repossessing a public world." These words are extremely important because they combine personal history and collective history, as if neither the private nor the public alone were sufficient. Moreover, the often traumatic/silenced experiences recalled in memoirs offer their writers a space in which to move beyond dislocating feelings and repossess the self-in-the-world: "By writing about those times I felt I would be 'repossessing' my childhood self as a psychological entity and reclaiming a female identity from the male-based disciplines of medicine and psychology, history and literature that had "possessed" femaleness."[110] To sum up, memoir as a form of narration integrates official history with one's personal trajectory, neither of which can stand on its own. Both official history and personal history depend on each other, have to be called into question, explored and affirmed.

Memoirs entail the setting aside of forgotten parts of the self and the incorporation of new performances of the self in the present: "it is a form in which one cannot be entirely in control of self-construction, but must come to see that act of self-making as a

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[108] Buss, Helen M. *Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women (*An Autobiographical Preface.) Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier UP (2002), XV.
[109] Buss, M. Helen. Op. cit., XIV.
[110] Buss, M.Helen. Op. cit., XII.

process of performing the self."[111] As evinced in the memoirs of Caterina Edwards's *Finding Rosa* and Mary Melfi's *Italy Revisited*, the self cannot be isolated from their mother's traumatic experiences, which in turn are tied to the collective history of immigration to the New World. Their self-making is, in fact, profoundly inflected not only by gender, nationality and class, but also by their personal reading and recollection of private and public facts.

Centered on a brief but significant period of time, memoirs often play down narrative linearity in order to enhance their dramatic nature :

> [M]emoir assumes the life and ignores most of it. The writer of memoir takes us back to a corner of his or her life that was unusually vivid or intense - or that was framed by unique events. By narrowing the lens, the writer achieves a focus that isn't possible in [traditional] autobiography; memoir is a window into a life.[112]

Drawing the reader into often radical changes in consciousness and the recreation of lived experience, memoir deploys imaginative reconstruction to create new realities that stem from an untold history.

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[111] Buss, M.Helen. Op. Cit., XIV.
[112] Baker William, and Zinsser, William. "Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir." *The Antioch Review 46* No.1 (1988), p.21.

2.3 Caterina Edwards' *Finding Rosa: A Daughter in Search of the Past*

"My Italian identity started to come out more and more. By the end of the summer I started to dream in Italian."[113]

One of those second-generation, Italian-Canadian women writers who began publishing in the 1980s is Caterina Loverso Edwards, born in England of an English father and an Italian mother. Known as the first Italian-Canadian writer in western Canada, she represents a pioneer in the field of Canadian ethnic writing. Joseph Pivato notes that when Edwards began writing about her experience as an Italian-Canadian in the 1970s, there were no readily available literary precedents for her to follow.[114] Although she was born in England, she has lived in Canada since the age of seven and is therefore deeply rooted in the land of her adoption. For many years, she has been a teacher of English and creative writing at the university in Edmonton and has succeeded in combining the private act of writing with the public role of teacher. Being a writer of the second generation, her family memoir *Finding Rosa: A Mother with Alzheimer's, a Daughter in Search of the Past* (2008)[115] recounts a pilgrimage to her mother's homeland that creates "connections between multiple forms of memory and multiple sites of belonging."[116] It is fitting here to behold this family memoir as a chronicle that investigates the ties between family history and personal identity.

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[113] Pivato, Joseph. "The Poet's Voice: An Interview with Mary di Michele." *Aurora Online* (2008). Last Visited: 6/2/2021, http://aurora.icaap.org/index.php/aurora/article/view/77/89.
[114] Pivato, Joseph. *Caterina Edwards: Essays on her Work*. Vancouver: Greystone (2000), p.7.
[115] Edwards, Caterina. *Finding Rosa a Mother with Alzheimer's, a Daughter in Search of the Past.* Vancouver: Greystone (2009).
[116] Delisle, Jennifer Bowering. "'Genealogical Nostalgia': Second-generation Memory and Return in Caterina Edwards' Finding Rosa." *Memory Studies* 5.2 (2012), p.1.

The cross-cultural study of Canadian literature and the shared experience of emigration and the resulting effects of immigrant double-consciousness are recurrent tropes in Edwards that seek to bridge the national with the multi-ethnic. Works like Moodie's *Roughing It* and Caterina Edwards' *Finding Rosa* share in a general the above challenges. Edwards' memoir begins with an epigraph from Shakespeare that points to dislocating sentiments of living between two cultures and countries:

"Viola: What country, friends, is this?

Captain: This is Illyria, lady.

Viola: And what should I do in Illyria?".

As in Susanna Moodie, in Edwards's memoir the feelings deriving from the experience of emigration besiege and torment the newcomer. In "Caterina Edwards: Essays on Her Works," Pivato concludes, "She explores the central question of identity 'Who am I' and its many ramifications as a woman, as an immigrant, as a Canadian on the prairies and as a writer."[117] By retracing the story of her mother, Rosa, Edwards seeks to shedding light on her personal history and on the suppressed history of the Italians who once lived in Istria and whose voices were silenced until recent times. To retrieve what may be called a form of unofficial or oral history, Edwards embarks on a complex journey in search of her mother's Istrian past, and reconstructs a plethora of biographical details revealing concealed connections with her family. Similarly, Bronwen Wallace in her poem "Into the Midst of it" spurs the reader to "search for the

[117] Pivato, Joseph. *Caterina Edwards. Essays on Her Work*. Op cit., p.7.

narrower, unpaved roads," the 'unbeaten tracks' forgotten in favor of the highways that "anyone can read."[118]

Jennifer Bowering Delisle asserts that memoirs like Edwards's revolve around the dual forces of traumatic postmemory and "genealogical nostalgia," namely a yearning for the places and times that outline one's ancestral past:

> All the world is a village lost
>
> in time, suspended
>
> in space
>
> even a Continent's
>
> so much jetsam.
>
> Pronto, I hear my mother cough
>
> across the Atlantic.[119]

Nostalgia, from the Greek *nostos*, to return home, and *algia,* a painful feeling, was first named and described in a 1688 thesis by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer. Often identified as a debilitating affliction, it was initially detected in soldiers longing for home, who could be cured only by a return to their country. At a later date, nostalgia was extended to the meaning of "loss", taking on "a new life as a cultural, and especially a literary, mode."[120] In this regard, nostalgic memory tends to deal with a lost relationship to a past time and place. These traumatic memories undergo a process of

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[118] Wallace, Bronwen. "Into the Midst of It." *Anything is Possible*. Op. cit., p.173.
[119] di Michele, Mary. "Across the Atlantic."*Roman Candles.* Op. cit., p.60.
[120] Atia Nadia, and Jeremy Davies. "Nostalgia and the Shapes of History: Editorial." *Memory Studies 3.3* (2010), p.182.

renegotiation through the geographical and temporal re-experience of members belonging to the so-called second-generation, who strive to recollect the fragments of their relatives' experience in their native land.

As Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer argue, "[W]e of that generation have very peculiar relationships to the places from which our families originated and from which they had been removed or displaced."[121] Often, children of the exiled inherit their parents' knowledge and silences about the place. Only by actually visiting the site of exile does the emotional force of separation from what has been lost come alive. Recent historians of this field have argued that nostalgia is not merely a state of mind, but also a source capable of shaping historical consciousness.

Along with nostalgia, postmemory is generated by the affective heritage of diaspora, a term first used by Hirsch in an article on Art Spiegelman's *Maus* in the early 1990's. In an interview, she defines postmemory as follows:

> "Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively, as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. As I see it, the connection to the past that I define as postmemory is mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.[122]

Caterina Edwards' memoir *Finding Rosa* is driven by both "genealogical nostalgia" and postmemory inasmuch as they inform the author's quest to discover her

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[121] Hirsch Marianne, and Leo Spitzer. ""We Would Not Have Come Without You": Generations of Nostalgia." *American Imago 59.3* (2002), p.261.
[122] https://cup.columbia.edu/author-interviews/hirsch-generation-postmemory. Last Visited: 4/22/2021.

mother's family history. She explores the central question of Rosa's identity ("Who am I"), and she does so as a woman, a hyphenated Italian and as the daughter of a first-generation immigrant.[123] At the center of the work of many Italian-Canadian women's writers there is, in fact, a driving need to explore parental role models – models informed by the tensions between Old World values and modern Canadian feminist awareness. For Marco Micone, the situation of Italian immigrant women is doubly troubled: "*J'suis deux fois coupable, comme femme, comme immigrante*."[124]

As a mother and immigrant to Canada who was born in Lussino, Istria, a region that is now part of Croatia, Rosa is also saddled with Alzheimer's disease, which makes the recovery of her past all the more difficult for her writer-daughter. As Rosa begins to lose her memory and a sense of herself, Edwards travels to her mother's birthplace with the intention to gather clues to her mother's story and to the murky history of the Italians from Istria. She also intends to speak of the ethnic cleansing to which they were subjugated. Home to people of both Slavic and Italian descent, Lussino was administered by different governments that have long contended the ownership of the territory. Lussinpiccolo (Little Lussino) was the bigger town, while Lussingrande (Big Lussino) was the smaller town where the author's mother was born. In her memoir Edwards explains that nowadays, under Croatian rule, Mali Losinj is still called Small Losinj and Veli Losinj the big part.[125]

Edwards acquaints the reader with the shifts that have radically affected the landscape of the place and people's identities. Rosa herself grew up in a multi-ethnic environment, where in the past minority groups have been persecuted and their history canceled. Despite the fact that Rosa's family belonged to the Italian speaking

[123] Pivato, Joseph. Op. cit., p.7.
[124] Micone, Marco. *Addolorata*. Montreal: Guernica (1984), pp. 81, 75.
[125] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.56.

community, in 1910 the Island of Lussino was part of Küstenland, a province of Austria. Only with the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo by Italy and Yugoslavia in 1920, did Italy govern Istria. Thus, until after World War I, Lussino was still a part of the Austrian Empire, although during the twentieth century Istria changed hands six times. Geopolitical tensions began with Italian *Irredentismo*, a movement which propelled Italy to enter World War I and sought to take back the territories of Istria, Alto Adige and the Dalmatian coast. Edwards mentions Dante's *Divina Commedia* and Verdi's "Và Pensiero" as examples of nationalist expressions of a lost homeland.[126] In the 1860s Italians were eager to complete the unification of the nation, which led to the desire to recover lost territories. When Italy withdrew from the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the United States, Britain and France decided not to grant Alto Adige and Istria to Italy, as promised in 1915 in the Treaty of London.

In Istria, under Fascist rule, Croatian and Slovenian schools were closed and Slavic names were Italianized. Then, after WWII, Istria became a part of Yugoslavia and the former imposition of all things Italian was reversed: Italian schools were closed and Italian names were Slavicized. Due to the resentment that Fascists sparked, *Italianità* was inevitably connected to the Fascist ideology. Under Tito's communist regime many Italian Istrians were indiscriminately killed for their ethnic identity. To this day, Istria is ethnically divided among Italians, Croatians and Slovenians.

Edwards opens her memoir with a prologue that presents background details concerning her mother. In the opening lines, the reader is promptly confronted with a tense and conflictual relationship – "I was afraid that I would turn into my mother." But then the narrator adds that she wants to discover more about her mother's past. Early on

[126] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.128.

in the memoir, Edwards expresses both detachment and rejection towards Rosa, but at the same time she confines these feelings to the past, to what she considers "an old story."[127] From the very beginning, we are introduced to a story of loss that reaches its climax in 2001, when Rosa dies. Nevertheless, the narrator omits any sense of mourning. Indeed, the narrator-protagonist and her adopted sister Corinna are on the verge of bursting into giggles. To be sure, the author's reaction here does not concern her mother's passing away, but the priest's mistake of substituting the daughter's name for her mother's: "In Baptism, Caterina received the sign of the cross…"[128] Unexpectedly, Edwards has become her mother, sharing her destiny and feeling deprived of her mother's history. While initially the narrator as daughter is a relatively passive observer of Rosa's decline into dementia, she gradually assumes an active role as the daughter who wants to seek "the truth of my mother's life."[129] Thus she asserts that she has become both the executor of her father's estate and her "Mum's" caretaker. [130]

Her desire to escape Rosa's fate is reinforced when she utters the words "not me, not yet"[131] as she feels she must try to fill in the gaps left by her mother's lost memory and lost history. She uses the past progressive tense "I was arriving at the forgotten"[132] to stress her ongoing detective-like search for the facts missing from the official history. The prologue is tinged with loss, fears and mystery, since the reader is not yet aware of the historical events that the author will unearth during the course of the narrative. Throughout her journey of discovery, Edwards reflects not only on cultural history, but

[127] Edwards, Caterina. Op.cit., p.29.
[128] Edwards, Caterna. Op. cit., p.2.
[129] Edwards, Caterina. Op.cit., p.2.
[130] Edwards, Caterina. Op. Cit., p.27.
[131] Edwards, Caterina. Op. Cit., p.2.
[132] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.2.

also on her 'troubled genealogy' and its role in the development of her identity as a second-generation Canadian.[133]

The memoir begins in Canada, although the name of the place from which Caterina speaks is initially omitted. This decision generates a sense of placelessness often tackled in immigrant narratives. In Chapter One, "Hurricane Rosa," we learn that her mother and father live three hundred kilometers away from her. A distance she prefers, due to her tumultuous relationship with her mother. In fact, Edwards details Rosa's overwhelming presence as both a child and an adult. She recalls that Rosa frequently demands, "Quando diventerai donna?" (When will you become a woman?). By naming her Hurricane Rosa, the narrator gives us a portrait of an intrusive and domineering woman who is even capable of invading Caterina's place: "I found my mum in the closet"[134] throwing out clothes she deemed inappropriate. As for her daughter's interest in writing, Rosa derides and belittles her literary ambitions, but it is precisely through her career as a writer that Edwards insinuates herself into her mother's life. As a response to Rosa's evasiveness about her past, Caterina considers her quest a form of filial duty: "I wanted to find my mother out. But also to know the child, the girl, and the woman she had been. That was how my search into the history and the culture that shaped her began."[135]

The memoir unfolds as a series of temporal shifts centered on the narrator's tense role as her mother's caretaker, her investigations and personal memories, and sections on Rosa's lighthearted childhood in Istria – a back and forth movement that mirrors the loss of memory on two different levels, that of Rosa's advancing dementia and her buried history. Within a single chapter "Hurricane Rosa",the narrator shifts from Rosa's

[133] Bowering Delisle, Jennifer. Op. cit.,p.132.
[134] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.4.
[135] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.37.

sixties to her mid-seventies, during which she experiences a quick physical and mental decline. Towards the end of her life she is no longer the lively, combative woman she once was.

As Rosa and her husband Frank grow older, they decide to move to Edmonton to be near their daughter. Now "they are only six blocks from our house" [136], so that Caterina ends up having to care for her ailing parents. When her father dies, in the lobby of the condominium building on November 2, 1997, Caterina takes on full responsibility for her mother's care: "He was gone, and he had left my mother behind, left her to me."[137]

In the opening of Chapter 3, titled "documents," Edwards inserts the following Lussignan proverb: *Di sicuro e di vero, non ci sono che le stagioni* which prepares the reader for the atmosphere of lies and betrayal that follow. The author begins her journey to discover her family's past by examining her mother's passport. This personal document, together with the Canada Act of 1982, acknowledged freedom of movement within the nation's borders: "Every citizen of Canada has the right to enter, remain in and leave Canada." The categories it encompasses – nationality, gender, race, class – defines individuals through identification, which Rosa struggles to accept: "she would be able to recognize some of the words: Canada, Italy, sex, height, hair, eyes, but she would not understand others: identification, immigration. And most important, she would not be able to read the passport, to read its purpose."[138] Similar sentiments of rebellion are evoked through the words of Mary Melfi:

> Here, my scream is my passport [...]

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[136] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.10.
[137] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.23.
[138] Edwards, Caterina. Op.cit., p.25.

We are all citizens of make-believe.[139]

While digging through her mother's cache of keepsakes, Edwards comes across other records and unexpectedly discovers the gaps in time and place created by the hurried destruction of documents during Tito's takeover of Istria: Rosa Pia Edwards née Pagan, born August 30, 1910 in Lussingrande, Italy.[140] Rosa has always asserted that she was born in 1915. Caterina suggests that her mother's invented birthdate is due to a "perverse will"[141] to erase certain biographical facts. While reading Carlo Sgorlon's novel *La Foiba Grande*, centered on the burning of birth registers after the Great War, Edwards meticulously unveils the facts that have sent her off in search of her mother's history and culture. Starting with her mother's passport, Caterina begins to question the reliability of other documents as well.

Moreover, the inconsistencies and gaps in Rosa's past come into sharp contrast with her father's public life:

> There are grammar school reports, apprenticeship papers, records of his enlistment in the Royal Engineers and promotions to the rank of captain, war medals, immigration papers, postsecondary school transcripts, and so on. […] In contrast, almost nothing in my mother's life was documented. The papers that did exist were suspect.[142]

Edwards then outlines the differences between her father's birthplace, England – "it meant you were cool, you were happening, you were now"[143] – and her mother's birthplace, Istria, which is regarded as a far-flung place belonging to an ancient past. Istria appears as a small and forgotten corner of the world, disconnected from

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[139] Melfi, Mary. "The Wanderer."*Roman Candles*. Op.cit., p. 64.
[140] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.32.
[141] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.33.
[142] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., pp. 35-36.
[143] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.29.

everything else. Indeed, as the narrator notes, it did not appear on any modern map.[144] It becomes a place intertwined with illusory images, too distant to be considered a real location like England:

> Throughout my youth, Istria was a fantasy, a mental construct, a sequence of images incubated by my dreams. It existed in my mother's mind, in the reminiscences she exchanged with friends, as the beloved, lost homeland, the wellspring of nostalgia.[145]

As J. Delisle claims, Istria becomes a fantasy of the past, because of the disconnectedness between narrative and experience.[146] Despite the imaginative construction of the place, it is by traveling there, on a sort of homecoming journey, that Edwards can transform fantasy into lived experience and challenge the rigged legacies of diaspora. In fact, the power of postmemory and Edwards's trip to her mother's homeland pave the way for "the encounter between generations, between past and present, between nostalgic and traumatic memory."[147]

After her first visit to Losinj, sometime in the 1960s, Edwards learned that during World War I Rosa's family was first deported to an internment camp in Sicily by the Austrian government. She tells of the family's forced migration after World War II, when the Italian-speaking community of Istria suffered a form of ethnic cleansing. However, as she confesses, at a young age such facts were emptied of "the context, the history, the meaning."[148] A return journey to the island where her mother was born becomes the necessary path to revelation and redemption.

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[144] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.29.
[145] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit. p.29.
[146] Delisle, J. Op. cit., p.133.
[147] Hirsch Marianne, Spitzer Leo. Op. cit., p.274.
[148] Edwards, Caterina. Op.cit., p.39.

Recounting her visit to Istria in 2001, Edwards notes the changes that have hit the place, starting from the place names – from Lussino to Losinj – and the surroundings: "Once, the archipelago was completely covered with trees. Once, Robert Graves claims, Lussino was the island of Circe, lush and seductive."[149] In this sense, the experience of returning to her mother's birthplace forces the author to reassess it, and in the process she notes how she herself has changed as she compares past memories and present events. In addition, she reflects upon how her knowledge of the place and its history has evolved since her first visits as a child:

> Time was my defensive herb (my moly) that repelled any possible spells and ensured that such enchantment, such carefree happiness, would never possess me again. Thankfully, middle age made the self-absorption and ignorance equally impossible.[150]

Edwards's return to Istria allows her to retrace the changes in the landscape, the milieu in which the stormy history of her mother and her people has unfolded. German painter and sculptor Anselm Kiefer accurately conveys the hopelessness of staring at a landscape without some knowledge of its history. Edwards' moving account explores how the physical environment becomes the central witness to the past and present lives of her Istrian relatives. Her investigation of the political events that have engraved such radical changes in the territory and people leads her to draw comparisons and contrasts. The portrayal of contemporary Lussino clashes with the former Lussino of memories and carries with it a sense of nostalgia for a home that has been stolen. While walking down the streets of what has now become Losinj, the narrator feels as alienated as Rosa

[149] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit. p.41.
[150] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.51.

is fragmented by trauma and dementia. In fact, she sharply expresses her alienation from a place that once was a gathering place for tourists and whose streets are now empty and many of the houses in ruins.

During Second World War it was the Italian Fascists who persecuted the Istrian Slavs by exiling their leaders and banning the use of Croatian and Slovenian in the schools and government offices. Then, under Tito's Communist regime, it was the Italian community's turn. Edwards sheds light on the diaspora of Italian Istrians in the late forties and early fifties, and on those who remained (*I Rimasti*), to whom she wants to give voice:

"The white towns of Istria were left empty, abandoned, until settlers from the interior and from other states of Yugoslavia arrived. Some of the villages were never repopulated."[151] For the narrator, there is a pervasive atmosphere of immutability bound to the place – "the cafès, the houses, the Venetian tower up the hill on the right, even the paving stones were the same"[152] But her mother's home town also bears the marks of the larger geopolitical shifts, as the narrator reflects further. While the scene seems familiar to her, there is also a feeling of disconnectedness and foreignness, as she seeks to come to grips with the unrecorded atrocities committed against the Italian community there.

Thus she learns about the *foibe*, the deep natural caves and ravines interspersed in the Istrian landscape, where thousands of Italian Istrians were thrown to their death. Some were handcuffed to those already dead. Edwards defines these horrendous actions of Tito's henchmen (Titini) as a plague that killed people and consigned them to the sinkhole of the *foibe*. In her memoir the narrator reports the history of these atrocities,

[151] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.50.
[152] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.47.

the so called *foibe* massacres that came to epitomize the violence unleashed against Italian people in Istria. In this regard, Erminio Fonzo insists on the "explosion" of memory that in recent times has led to an official recognition of the massive flow of Istrian refugees escaping their region after it was annexed by Yugoslavia. It was only in the early 1990s, with the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the collapse of the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI), and a new framework of foreign policy, that the exodus and news of the *foibe* became a central issue of Italian history. Fonzo claims that the personal memory of exiles and their heirs is more alive than other official commenorative initiatives and should serve as the basis for the construction of collective memory.[153]

Edwards plunges the reader into a reality that in the 1990s the Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was trying to conceal. At times, both the exiles and the Croatians have even sought to deny the existence of those who remained. The Croatian newspaper *Glas Istre* has defined Istria as a territory that has always belonged to Croatia. Conversely, Edwards desperately wants to come closer to those who were forgotten and their children, who as she claims, were in a sense part of the *Rimasti* themselves. During the quest for her mother's past, she soon realizes that there are few books on Istria and its dark history of ethnic cleansing. Papers documenting her mother's family tree or birth certificates are either absent or seem makeshift. Yet the very lack of records speaks of Tito's attempts to purge the territory of its long ethnic Italian presence. While searching for books on Istria in a library in Venice, Edwards's narrator soon becomes aware of the many gaps in the historical documents, both here and in the libraries at

[153] Fonzo, Erminio. "Use and Abuse of History and Memory: the Istrian-Dalmatian Exodus and the Current Refugee Flows." *Journal of Mediterranean Knowledge-JMK,* 2(1) 2017, p.68.

home: “Istria was ignored, denied, forgotten, misunderstood – dark.”[154] In the absence of historical traces, she claims that Istria exists, less ostentatiously, underwater, in the pavements and stones of Venice which marked for nearly a thousand years its domination of the Adriatic. It lives in the voices of witnesses whom she records and, further, through the discussion forum of a site called Istrianet.org. Its Webmaster, Marisa Ciceran, asserts that the site’s purpose is “to celebrate and thus preserve”[155] the multiculturalism rooted in the Istrian Peninsula. By mentioning these resources, Edwards encourages the reader to consider the utmost importance of collecting testimonies on the Italian-Istrian exodus and the *foibe* massacres, even as she summons us to question “the unreliability and imprecision of memory.”[156]

Rosa’s loss of memory becomes a metaphor of the untold history of the *foibe,* which the author reconstructs through the personal vicissitudes of her mother, her surviving relatives in Istria and the cultural history of her people – “judged too insignificant, too inconvenient, to remember or record.”[157] Migration becomes an analogue of Alzheimer’s disease: it irreversibly damages the domestic order, separates families, and “communication is often impossbile, due to the language barriers, or the sense of shame preventing migrants/patients from expressing their anxieties, fears, sense of marginalization, and in some cases loss of dignity.”[158] Writing becomes a cathartic process that enables Edwards to thwart the destructive narrative caused by mass trauma and, on a smaller scale, by her mother’s neurodegenerative disease. By placing herself physically in Istria, the narrator counters the force of exile through her

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[154] Edwards, Caterina.. Op. cit., p. 201.
[155] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.181.
[156] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.214.
[157] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.178.
[158] Rorato, Laura. “Narratives of Displacement: The Challenges of Motherhood and Mothering in semi-fictional works by Laura Pariani, Mary Melfi, and Donatella Di Pierantonio.” *International Journal of Comparative Literature & Translation Studies*, 6 Issue:1 (2018), p. 76.

body's material presence and assigns herself the role of secondary witness of an exodus that was barely documented: "A people had been uprooted, cities had been emptied, a culture that went back a thousand years had been obliterated, and the reaction of the world was indifference and silence. Even in Italy, in schools and universities."[159]

Still in 2004, in Italy, Edwards recounts the resentment and historical neglect of the Istrian exodus. In fact, the number of people directly affected by it was still vague – estimates varied from 20.000 to 350.000. And the tally should begin with 1945, when the Yugoslav army gained control of the region Rijeka from the Nazis.[160] Consequently, with the ratification of the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, the exodus became a flood, continuing through the signing of the Memorandum of Intent in 1954, which granted Trieste to Italy.

While traversing the streets of Lussinj/Lussino, Edwards acquaints the reader with a territory that seems unmapped, since the crossroads and paths did not correspond to those on the map: "Several times, I lost my way. […] Several people answered in English, and two, a woman wearing a headscarf and a young man, walked past as if I hadn't spoken."[161]

Edwards's physical disorientation, which mirrors her mother's alienation from her homeland is doubled through language. When she asks for directions in Italian, she recalls that the Communist authorities in Istria considered speaking Italian or Istro-Veneto dialect a 'subversive act.' Since Istro-Veneto has been placed on the UN list of endangered languages, Edwards transforms the dialect into her 'magic wand' and counteracts physical disorientation through language, a means of belonging to a place and a culture. As Marilyn Bowering reflects in her poem "Leavetaking":

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[159] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit.p.182.
[160] Edwards, Caterina. Op.cit.p.182.
[161] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.63.

At any moment language abandons camouflage

and describes the world clearly:

you embrace it like snow drifting over

a winter night.[162]

Despite the linguistic barrier existing between her and people on the streets of Istria, as soon as the narrator meets one of the *Rimasti,* she deploys dialect to claim space and asserts: "The wand exposed not just their true selves but mine; I was changed from a stranger to a daughter of the exile."[163] Nevertheless, on her return to Lussino (now called Losinj), she is confronted with a place that seems abandoned and where those who remained feel estranged. This feeling of alienation is exemplified through the words of an Italian-Istrian poet, Quarantotti Gambini, mentioned in Chapter Seven, who in an interview states, "I feel I am a stranger in my own country…the wrong kind of Italian."[164] On her return to Lussino, Edwards lingers in front of the vacated houses with their scattering of broken glass and missing doors and ruins, claiming that she "was searching for Lussino, not Losinj, for what and who remained, for shards, traces, echoes, glimmerings."[165] The notion of returning plays an important role not only in comparing and contrasting the town's past and present: it implies juxtapositions of the narrator's self in the very process of self-fashioning.

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[162] Bowering, Marilyn. "Leavetaking" in *Anything Is Possible* by Mary Di Michele. Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press (1984), p.33. *Anything is Possible* is a collection of a new generation of women writers, published by the first prize winner for the CBC competition in 1980. It encompasses the work of eleven poets who introduce their particular voice, view and hope for a new and less limiting consideration of women.
[163] Edwards, Caterina. Op.cit., p.63.
[164] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.74.
[165] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.56.

For Edwards, ruins become representative of the untold history of the exodus of the town's Italians, who did not choose to leave out, as many people would later claim. The impressive material and metaphorical role of ruins in activating and recollecting memories from the past is further explored by Rosemary Sullivan in her poem "At the Ruins of the Capuchinas":

Ruins always move us

more than the standing structures

it is the poignancy

of one more human thing lost

how beautiful this naked stone

stripped and exposed

domes like mouths open to sky

archways holding up air

cracks snaking their surface

with rumours of final disintegration. (…)[166]

Sullivan sets forth the powerful presence of ruins that, according to her, speak: "domes like mouths open to sky." They cannot be replaced because traces will always remain:

So rich with ruins

is the land

[166] Sullivan, Rosemary. "At the Ruins of the Capuchinas." *Anything is Possible.*Op. cit.,p. 151.

that when a man decides

to build a house, he has simply

To find traces of an old foundation,

Clear the débris

And build on it or beside it.

This is the inheritance of sons;

To be rooted in their father's faith.

To rediscover hewn stone.[167]

The decay which is present all over Istria points to a tumultuous past that the present has not erased. Dylan Trigg, in an article on traumatic memory and place, focuses on the meaning of "ruins," claiming that it "designates location of memory, in which trauma took place and continues to be inextricably bound with that location in both an affective and evidential manner."[168] Ruins are dynamic and polymorphous, since the viewer is invited to enter their damaged materiality through imagination and to reconstruct what remains from what is missing. Trigg asserts further:

> the ruin has a persistence, in which the sleep of memory collides and co-exists with the consciousness of daylight. Where identity has suffered under the tribunal of an 'unclaimed experience', the ruin has survived as a manifestation

[167] Pignataro, Tony. "Archeology."*Roman Candles.* Op. cit., p.50.
[168] Trigg, Dylan. "The Place of Trauma: Memory, Hauntings, and the Temporality of Ruins."*Memory Studies 2.1* (2009). p. 2.

> of this process, and this unexpected survival underpins the ruin's radical spectrality.[169]

The ruin, therefore, is part of the past's ongoing presence, which is elusive and complex, but still mediates between these two temporal dimensions. Although Edwards's account of Lussinj/Lussino's ruins is necessarily fragmented, the stones remain and lead her to create an Istrian city made up of a sequence of images and apprehensions.[170] These traces are placed in a broader narrative that seeks to bridge the gaps in knowledge through the the testimony of people's voices and Edwards's own imaginative gaze.

Trigg stresses the centrality of ruins as a means to approach the spatio-temporality of trauma not in terms of continuity, but in terms of voids and hauntings. Through these the viewer can negotiate the tension between the experience of place and the traumatic memory rooted in the past. Since "sites of trauma articulate memory precisely through refusing a continuous temporal narrative,"[171]Edwards attempts to separate Lussino and Losinj, by focusing on the place of her mother's past as it contrasts with the present unfamiliar location. The connotation of 'site' as a liminal space which sets apart the fragmentation of trauma and connects postmemory with the lived experience of place, is central to the narrator's understanding of what now becomes a more complex historical reality.

As Edwards struggles to shift away from the Lussino she has imagined and her earlier refusal to acknowledge the irreversible passage of time, she seeks to re-imagine to the place of her family's past by immersing herself in it:

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[169] Trigg, Dylan. Op.cit., p.97
[170] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.276.
[171] Trigg, Dylan. Op. Cit., p.87.

> I imagine a city as silent and still as a graveyard. […] And I am overcome by the sense of eeriness of absence in the light and the dark. A city of white stone and long shadows. I imagine only one city, though there were many – one city, reduced to the sounds of sea, wind, and rain, reduced to a landscape of futility and ruin.[172]

However, speaking as a second generation immigrant, her imaginative recasting of Lussino is affected by her progressive realization of the losses and changes that prevent her from considering her mother's place as home. For this second-generation narrator, a perfect return to origins is broken by the ambiguous and shifting meaning that 'home' now bears:

> I don't belong here, I tell myself – I don't look behind the broken doors, don't peer into the cavernous entrances, do not mount those stairs. They lead nowhere; that floor is gone. Like the people who used to live here, gone – like an old woman's past, gone.[173]

Edwards's alienation from the place is both alluring and unsettling, but it is through research, imagination and family photos that Edwards recreates her mother's childhood in Lussingrande before the Great War.[174] In doing so, she achieves a profound connection with the place. As the poet Roo Borson observes in his poem "Flying Low,"

> Families are all the same. They talk to one another

[172] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p. 275.
[173] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.276.
[174] Edwards, Caterina. Op.cit.., p. 110.

inside their heads, thinking the others can hear.[175]

Cynthia Sugars explains that the "allure of genealogy" is imbued with "mystery and is therefore haunting, while it also offers an illusion of reassurance and continuity."[176] Edwards acknowledges the absence of 'home' in her genealogical quest, but simultaneously resuscitates Lussino from its ruins. While the ruins suggest how hard it is for second generation narrators like Edwards to directly experience a lost past, they also make necessary the playfulness of the imaginary. As Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer assert, "Since no literal return in time is possible, nostalgia became an incurable state of mind, a signifier of 'absence' and 'loss' that could never be made 'presence' and 'gain' except through memory and the creativity of reconstruction."[177] Indeed, Edwards's memoir presents an idealization of a past time and a lost place. This mental construct drives her to consider Lussino as the main source of memory traces where she hopes to gather testimonies, tales, and bits and pieces of a broader and as yet untold history. As the poet Bronwen Wallace writes:

You'll take a map, of course, and keep it

Open in front of you on the dashboard,

Though it won't help Oh, it'll give mileages,

Boundary lines, names, that sort of thing,

But there are places yet

Where names are powerless

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[175] Borson, Roo. "Flying Low."*Anything is Possible.* Op. cit., p.21.
[176] Sugars, Cynthia. (Dis)inheriting the nation: Contemporary Canadian memoirs and the anxiety of origins. In: Kanaganayakam C (ed.) Moveable Margins. Toronto: TSAR (2005), p.193.
[177] Hirsch, Marianne, and Leo Spitzer. Op. cit., p.258.

And what you are entering

Is like the silence words get lost in

After they've been spoken.[178]

Edwards's imaginative vein emerges when she narrates scenes from Rosa's childhood that she filters by entering her consciousness through free indirect speech. Recounting a summer day in 1914, Edwards evokes the scene through her mother's childlike perspective and free indirect discourse: "Little Rosa is happy when Papa takes her down to the piazza. She is happy he chooses her and not her sister Conda – who is too little, a baby, so there."[179]

This external perspective allows us to see the character from the outside and to consider the interior voice as entirely imagined by Edwards. After narrating the scene, she intrudes with her own first-person interjection: "I see her: Rosa Pia Pagan, Rosina they call her, a little girl in a photograph, but alive and in color: the impudent dark eyes, the pink lips that smile and pout, the light brown bobbed hair."[180] Several times throughout the narration the author emphasizes the imaginative work that she implements to emobdy past memories. The words "I see her" foregrounds her attempt to bridge the past with the present and to make the forgotten actual. An ambivalent process of reconnection that she deploys on different occasions, such as when she visits the house where her mother was born. In this passage, the word "once" becomes a refrain that connects the reader and Edwards to her family history. In a further move, "once" is soon replaced by "still," thereby setting the stage for a scene in which the past and the present are intertwined and generations reunited:

[178] Wallace, Bronwen. Op. cit., p.172.
[179] Edwards, Caterina. Op. Cit., p.77.
[180] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p. 78.

> I see children, my aunts and uncles, under the boughs of the tree. Two of the boys wrestle, howling, rolling back and forth over the roots. […] I look back at the silent, shuttered house. In a bedroom on the second floor, I see my grandmother, her black hair soaked in sweat, her face twisted in pain.[181]

The orange tree in her grandparents' garden that she was told about and which "led to their name in Lussino, Ponaronzo,"[182] is still in the same place. In its presence Edwards wonders whether it is another tree or "the replacement of an offspring."[183] Hirsch and Spitzer's define the concept of "crossroads" in relation to the postmemory generation as "a transitional space where the encounter between generations, between past and present, between nostalgic and traumatic memory, can momentarily, effervescently, be staged."[184] They further explain that crossroads are "a point of intersection between time and space, personal and cultural recollection. Puncturing layers of erasure and oblivion, it opens a portal of discovery for those who return to find vestiges of a vanished past."[185]

As Edwards gathers up the fragments and flashes of light in which her mother survives,[186] she is fully conscious that they may be the only traces of Rosa's true self and should be preserved. As Jan Conn puts it in her poem "Footfalls in the Dusk,"

> The holes in the universe
>
> Are not black, they are only

[181] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.76.
[182] Edwards, Caterina. Op.cit., p.75.
[183] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.76.
[184] Hirsch, Marianne, and Leo Spitzer. Op. cit., p.274.
[185] Hirsch, Marianne, and Leo Spitzer. Op. cit., p. 274.
[186] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit.,p.89.

The absence of all known things.[187]

Edwards progressively comes to realize that Rosa's detachment from her past and manifestations of Alzheimer are also tied to the hardships of exile, war and internment: "the uprooting explained not everything about my mother but something – the hysteria that lurked under the surface of her daily manner […]."[188] Cathy Caruth offers a definition on trauma that throws light on Rosa's experience: "trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena."[189]

Susan Brison discusses the role of trauma narratives in remaking the self which was undone or altered in trauma survivors. She asserts that "trauma undoes the self by breaking the ongoing narrative, severing the connections among remembered past, lived present, and anticipated future."[190] Nevertheless, while recounting memories to others (or more precisely, to empathic listeners), survivors succeed in falling back on personhood and restoring a sense of narrative broken by fragmented and traumatic memories. She goes on explaining that "in trauma, not only are one's connections with memories of an earlier life lost, along with the ability to envision a future, but one's basic cognitive and emotional capacities are gone, or radically altered, as well."[191] The vulnerability of Rosa's feelings is emphasized by Edwards in Chapter 9 "Hide and Seek," when she states:

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[187] Conn, Jan. "Footfalls in the Dusk."*Anything is Possible.* Op. cit., p.54.
[188] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p 212.
[189] Caruth, Cathy. "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History." *Yale French Studies*, no. 79 (1991), p. 181.
[190] Brison, Susan. "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self." *Acts of Memory*. Eds. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer. London: UP of New England (1999), p.41.
[191] Brison, Susan. Op. cit., p.44.

> The connections between her memories and emotions and understanding were tangled or severed."[192] While playing *ciaparse* – hide and seek – Edwards' search becomes symbolically challenging, due to a mother who is gradually disappearing. Only "now and then […] I caught a glimpse of the little girl still inside the aged body.[193]

What drives Caterina in her journey through the gaps in knowledge and cultural loss is a strong desire to discover the ethnic violence towards her mother and the Italian community of Lussino, but also a feeling of nostalgia that leads her to search for connection with a place that has been lost. In the act of recollecting traumatic events, she realizes that the exiles "are tormented by nostalgia. Like a stone in their hearts."[194] In the memoir, nostalgia seeps into every street and corner of Lussino as the narrator calls on memories and dreams to define the place. For instance, while remembering her first visit with her mother to Zia Cecilia's house when she was only four years old, Edwards states that her memories of that house and first visit seemed like "fragments from dreams"[195].

Des Esseintes, the protagonist of Joris-Karl Huysmans's novel *Against Nature* distinguishes two types of nostalgia:

> [I]n some cases there is a return to past ages [*retour aux ages consommés*], to vanished civilizations, to dead centuries; in others there is a pursuit of dream and fantasy, a more or less vivid vision of a future whose images reproduces, unconsciously and as a result of atavism, that of past epochs.[196]

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[192] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.89.
[193] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.89.
[194] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit. p.65.
[195] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p. 52.
[196] Huysmans, Joris-Karl. *Against Nature*. Oxford University Press (2009), pp. 181-182.

Edwards combines her description of Lussino with a sense of magic, for it incorporates intrusive flashbacks that came to her from those she loved:

> I carried my memories of their memories. I carried this time and the visit before that (my first time in this place), and my mother's time and my aunt's time, when they were young until they were old, and my grandmother's time and her mother's time.[197]

Jennifer Bowering Delisle, defines these connections between generations through memory as "genealogical nostalgia," since it exemplifies the gaps between personal memory and ancestors' remembrances. The fondness of nostalgia is evoked through the second generation's non-experience of events that feels tied to the places and times of their ancestors' stories.[198] In Hirsh and Spitzer's words, owing to the second generation's relationships to the birthplaces of their families, their return expresses a need to bring the inherited postmemories back to the place. This strong genealogical bond motivates Edwards to try "to repair the ruptured fabric of a painfully discontinuous, fragmentary history."[199] Indeed, the narrator keeps repeating "I carried" their memories as if she were responsible for this oppressive "weight" that, according to Hirsch and Spitzer, sets off a conflict between "home" and "hostile territory."[200] In fact, the children of exiles are familiar with their diasporic roots and are therefore prepared to experience the transitory acts of memory of their parents once on place.

Edwards responds to the distance between time and place transmitted by her mother and others, not merely through the inherited postmemories, but also by taking into account the here and now with all of its sensory aspects: "I caught whiffs of sharp rosemary, sweet broom […] and under my feet, the same gray stones, though these were

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[197] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.50.
[198] Delisle B., Jennifer. Op. cit. p.138.
[199] Hirsch M., Spitzer L. Op. cit. p.262.
[200] Hirsch M., Spitzer L. Op. cit., p.263.

shiny and slippery from use."[201] The awakening of all of the narrator's senses helps to shape an evocative setting. This act of immersion leads Caterina and the reader into the mechanisms of claiming space and into a reality begging to be explored. The narrator's sensory description creates an intimacy with the place while simultaneously connecting the past with the present. At one point Edwards hears a man calling out to another man, and she writes, "nothing and everything had changed […] I knew the Lussino of dreams and memories, the backdrop to and focus of stories, the home that had been lost, stolen." [202]

Throughout her journey and quest to retrieve Rosa's past, Edwards realizes that her family's losses have become her own, inasmuch as she too now feels disconnected from the place and the memories she carries. As Marilyn Bowering says in her poem "This Is the Last Time":

> The sadness of centuries fills me.
>
> It was a poison seed we grew,
>
> And it has taken all rest,
>
> All gentleness.
>
> I can hardly believe the loss.[203]

Edwards's feeling of foreignness as she longs to know more of Rosa's past can in part be explained by Michel Foucault's claims that the purpose of history guided by geneaology is "not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit itself to its

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[201] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit. p.61.
[202] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.47.
[203] Bowering, Marilyn. "This is the Last Time." *Anything is Possible.* Op. cit., p.37.

dissipation." And he adds, "It does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us.[204]

The gaps in Edward's knowledge suggest the impossibility for members of second generation to gain full access to their family history. Foucault claims that "history becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being."[205] Indeed, in Chapter Eight, *"Who Remembers,"* while the narrator is trying to recreate the details of her mother's house, she reminds us that her access to the past is limited and discontinuous: "My imagination, fed by research and interviews, erects the rooms of the house, as it once was."[206] Through the unsettling and yet therapeutic sentiment of nostalgia, Edwards attempts to heal the personal loss caused by her family's mourning and cultural loss to which trauma survivors are inextricably tied. Edwards herself calls nostalgia "*le mal du pays*, exile, homesickness,"[207] a profound longing for the past that produces severe implications across generations: "Freud defines *unheimlich* as 'the uncanny…all that is terrible'".[208] The nostalgia of the second generation is not only a sentimental idealization of the past, but a means to link their ethnic heritage with their own identity.

In an important observation Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davis consider nostalgia as: "a negotiation between continuity and discontinuity: it insists on the bond between our present selves and a certain fragment of the past, but also on the force of our

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[204] Foucault, Michel. " Nietzsche, genealogy, history." In Bouchard DF (ed*.) Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews with Michel Foucault*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press (1977), p.162.
[205] Foucault, Michel. Op. cit., p.154.
[206] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.81.
[207] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.319.
[208] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.319.

separation from what we have lost."[209] In a further move, Atia and Davis note nostalgia's role of critical self-consciousness, which gives people awareness of the most hidden and diverse parts of one's identity.[210] If on the on hand Edwards's memoir broadly covers her mother's life and mental trials resulting from Alzheimer, on the other hand it plunges the reader into a world of sleuthing and imaginings that transform the personal into a universal quest of a suppressed history and identity.

It is precisely Edwards's troubled relationship with her mother and desire to know more about her life that drive her to uncover a past unfairly removed and suppressed. In this cathartic process of recovery and reconstruction, Delisle claims that "second-generation memoir in turn reflects the complex and shifting negotiations that the children of immigrants encounter in constructing their sense of self."[211] In fact, Edwards uses the metaphor of the 'shell game' to define identity and is therefore baffled over the positive outcomes of her search into her family's past and former home in Lussino:

"Round and round, this shell game, find-the-identity, was both dizzying and foolish. Round and round, faster than the eye could see or the heart could know. And yet, the wager had been a home, a country, a life."[212]

As Hirsch and Spitzer explain, for those of the postmemorial generation:

> 'returning to the place' could not serve as a means of *reparation or recovery*. Having inherited shards of memory, positive and negative, we could not hope to reunite the fragments. Instead, our journey remained a process of searching – a

[209] Atia, Nadia, Davis, Jeremy. Op. cit.,p.184.
[210] Atia N., Davies J.. Op. cit., p.184.
[211] Bowering Delisle, Jennifer. Op. cit., p. 142.
[212] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.327.

creative vehicle with contact and transmission enabling an encounter between nostalgic and negative memory.[213]

In Edward's memoir, a sense of reparation and recovery only surfaces in the process of searching and writing. The journey she undertakes is both physical and symbolic. Since the memoir itself is transformed into an odyssey of sorts, several chapters open with epigraphs from Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey.* In this respect, there is an epigraph that connects the exhausting effects of caring for Rosa's mental decline with Edwards' leap of faith into her quest to find her mother's buried past:

Alzheimer's disease proceeds in stages, gradually destroying memory.

Early Symptoms: *The sufferer will hide*

an object to keep it safe from thieves

and then forget that she has hidden the object. Also she will search without

knowing what she is searching for.[214]

Her mother's mental estrangement and lost physical capabilities epitomize the impossibility of a perfect return to origins for Edwards and second generation members as a whole. Rosa's increasing disorientation is both the result of her lifelong displacement – exiled from Lussingrande, she settled for a spell in Caltagirone, Chioggia, Padua, Earls Barton, Kathyrn, Stettler, Edmonton, Calgary, Nanaimo, and Edmonton[215] – and is exacerbated through her memory loss. She describes her condition in these words: "[T]hey do not 'get lost'. They are lost, permanently. And since

[213] Hirsch M, Spitzer L. Op. cit., p. 86.
[214] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.110.
[215] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit. p.320.

everything around them is unrecognizable, they search for a place of certainty and familiarity that they (and we) call home."[216] Edwards, like her mother, undergoes the existential condition of not feeling at home and tries to overcome her sense of hopelessness and homelessness by pouring her knowledge into writing.

When her mother dies, she still feels the nagging need to understand her story and recover her memories. In fact, she glosses the significance of remembrance by citing the Triestine writer Claudio Magris: "Memory is a fundamental value: it is not nostalgia for the past but a defense and rescue of a life, a sense of the presence of every life and every value." [217] By the end of the memoir, with her mother already having passed away, we realize that her quest is not yet over. She must hang on "until I arrived at Rosina Ponaronzo. Until I knew her. Until I wrote this book."[218] Symbolically, she evokes her mother's name as the place and home at which she seeks at arrive. Despite having reached the core of her mother's history, she knows that she will never be able to fill in all the gaps: "my presumptions about my grandfather were even more circular, even more confused."[219] Some of the details she collects are clouded and form part of a broader framework of connections remain mysterious. However, it is through the 'collaborative art' of writing that Edwards can dig into the facts and gaps that have shaped her identity and that of her children. As she declares at the outset, "the journey was a personal one"[220] because both her mother and Lussino are sources of her identity. Immersing herself in the writings of authors such as Carlo Sgorlon, Claudio Magris, Fulvio Tomizza and stories passed along by her relatives, Edwards finds her own identity by listening to other voices.

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[216] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit. p. 318.
[217] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit. p.325.
[218] Edwards, Caterina. Op.cit. p.334.
[219] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit. p. 327.
[220] Edwards, Caterina. Op. cit., p.39.

It is no coincidence that Edwards' works, including *Finding Rosa: A Mother's with Alzheimer,* revolve around her preoccupation with identity, stemming from the need to bridge the old culture and country with the new. Retracing and reshaping identity proves to be a toilsome journey that requires her to consider and weave together family stories and social history. The act of writing makes her aware not only of history but also of place. In fact, in her narratives, characters' identities are always inextricably linked with a sense of place. Her preoccupation with identity leads her to combine ethnicity with feminist questions and then the search for answers to yet another chain of questions: "What is the relationship between life writing and fiction? Is creative writing only a private act or does it have a social role to play in society? Is writing in a realistic manner *passé*?[221]

According to Joseph Pivato, "in their imaginative reconstruction of Canadian society as an ethnic mosaic writers have concrete ways of straddling the barriers of time, space and culture. They tell stories to make us real."[222] In her memoir about Rosa, Caterina Edwards, as part of a minority community in western Canada, succeeds in recounting the life of an Italian-Istrian-Canadian woman who has finally been given a voice.

[221] Pivato, Joseph. Op. cit., p.10.
[222] Pivato, Joseph. *Contrasts: Comparative Essays on Italian-Canadian Writing.* Op cit., p.32.

2.4 Mary Melfi. *Italy Revisited: Conversations with my Mother*

My country is my name.

My heart is my language and my weapon

I borrow so many words, e.g., reality.

(N.B. I am without a country, speechless)[223]

The impact of migration on family dynamics is a major concern in the works of another prolific Italian-Canadian writer, Mary Melfi. The dismembering of the family unit has not only ignited an unhealthy relationship between mother and daughter, but more dramatically it has trapped the children of immigrants in a legacy of resentment, loss and mourning. Mary Melfi's book *Italy Revisited: Conversations with my Mother* (2009)[224] explores the traumatic consequences of migration to "la Merica" on family relationships.

A first-generation author, Melfi was born in a small mountain town in Molise, Casacalenda, and immigrated to Montreal with her family at the age of six in 1957, as part of the wave of immigrants leaving Europe after WWII. After completing her studies in 1977, Melfi has written over a dozen of books of poetry, fiction, and stories for children. As an Italian-Canadian woman writer, Melfi has experienced ethnic marginality that marks her distance from mainstream Canadian literature. Traversing and inhabiting a space of difference and resisting gender and ethnic marginalization,

[223] Melfi, Mary. "The Wanderer" in *Roman Candles.* Op. cit., p.64.
[224] Melfi, Mary. *Italy Revisited: Conversations with My Mother*. Toronto: Guernica Editions (2009).

Melfi often injects the trope of the body as a country in her writings, as in the line "my country is my name."

Caterina Edwards's *Finding Rosa* and Mary Melfi's memoir *Italy Revisited* are both narratives about the gaps and truncated heritage resulting from the waves of Italian emigration recalled and reconstructed by first and second-generation Canadian writers of Italian descent. Melfi's memoir was published in Canada and translated into the three different languages that make up the body of Italian-Canadian literature: English, French and Italian. It was translated into Italian by Laura Ferri and published by Iannone Editions under the title *Ritorno in Italia*, while the French translation by Claude Bèland was published under the title *Là-bas en Italie, conversations avec ma mère*. Italian-Canadian writing – in English, French and Italian – as a whole grapples with both multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Mary Melfi's work presents an unconventional approach to autobiographical writing: it is written as a dialogue with her mother, thus serving as a double memoir. As the literary historian Joseph Pivato has noted, the sons and daughters of the first-generation Italians developed a keen interest in using the act of writing to reenact memory of a silenced cultural past.[225] Italian-Canadian writers cover the various facets of the immigrant experience and often share similar themes and values. According to Pivato:

> In many cases, these authors are using their work to speak for the generation of their parents – that silent group of immigrants who came here to work, people who have remained inarticulate because of language, education and struggle. By consciously giving the earlier generation a voice in their work, these writers are

[225] Pivato, Joseph. *Echo: Essays on Other Literatures.* Guernica Editions (1994), p.121.

> demonstrating some Italian values: a concern with personal identity, with family and with community […] Given the richness of their backgrounds these writers will never become primarily English, French or Italian writers. Their work will always contain cosmopolitan elements.[226]

In effect, in studying the literary works produced in Canada, one is immediately faced with new languages and cultures. Thus, texts written in Canadian English may have traces of Italian or Southern Italian dialect. The use of multilingualism or code-switching – Pivato argues – draws attention to the challenges Italian-Canadian writers when trying to translate emotions that are engraved in their mother tongue.[227] In an interview with William Anselmi, Melfi asserts:

> Language divides. It creates barriers. Language isn't as blessed as we want to believe. Immigrants are aware of this: we find ourselves in the Tower of Babel; a place of punishment where people can't understand each other. Language is also part of the violence of being human. Not a therapy but a form of aggression.[228]

As Melfi reports in her memoir, Italy is a country where the "*real* Italian"[229] is often negligible in comparison to the country's many different dialects. Most Italian-Canadians know their regional Italian dialects better than standard written Italian. Considering the variety of regional cultures and dialects in Italy, Edwards identifies with the Veneto and Venetian culture, while Melfi and di Michele are southerners: respectively, from Molise and Abruzzo. These three writers represent an interesting

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[226] Pivato, Joseph. "The Arrival of Italian Canadian Literature". *Canadian Ethnic Studies* (1982), p.132.
[227] Pivato Joseph. *Echo: Essays on Other Literatures*. Op. cit., p.125.
[228] Anselmi, William. *Mary Melfi: Essays on her Works.* Toronto: Guernica Editions (2006), p.39.
[229] Melfi, Mary. Op. cit., p.310.

cross-section of Canadian regional experiences. Their fragmented and meagre knowledge of Italian is, therefore, a source of division. As Melfi confesses, "Our relatives from Italy see us living in nice big houses and are impressed, but when we speak, they look down on us. They call what we speak, *Italianità* – part English, part Italian."[230]

Michela Baldo and Joseph Pivato, stress the need of Italian-Canadian writers to incorporate Italian in their texts as a written sign of their bond with Italy. Melfi abruptly expresses the barriers of language by citing her mother: "You think you know your life story. The fact that you're in this country is just a little piece of it. A short chapter. What if it's the whole story, one you can't read, because it's in a language you don't understand?"[231] Language together with nostalgia recreate a landscape of return burdened with a sense of loss imagined through the eyes of immigrants' children. The sentimentalist rhetoric of nostalgia often leads to a fantasized context that Melfi criticizes as follows: "Nostalgia also works better than RAID, it's a real bug killer. An effective pesticide. Use too much, and it's poisonous. It kills more than bugs. It kills the truth."[232]

A sense of longing for an ideal past is a leitmotif in *Italy Revisited* and other Italian-Canadian works that often seeps into their construction of a landscape of return. Although the return can burst into even more exacerbated feelings of alienation, it can also become a gateway for second-generation immigrant writers' appreciation of their roots and a defense against mainstream prejudices. Michela Baldo has noted the pervasiveness of return as a literary topos in diasporic writing and explains the powerful meanings unleashed by return: it is not solely linked to the physical journey, but also to

[230] Melfi, Mary. Op. cit. p.311.
[231] Melfi, Mary. Op. cit., p.105.
[232] Melfi, Mary. Op. cit., p.17.

imagined ones, as well as to the expectations and fantasies related to it.[233] In *Italy Revisited* Melfi plunges into the Italian landscape of return, no longer with an irksome sentiment of shame as during her first trip. Now Italy becomes the "Master Sculptor," the "tourist Mecca," "a museum of a country," a "living masterpiece," where an outcast Melfi opens up a new trajectory of pride and amazement in her roots.[234]

The landscape in Italian-Canadian writing is dominated by a consciousness of the immigrant/ethnic duality: the influences of Italy collide with those from Canada and North America. Immigrant double consciousness and the experience of emigration are the comparative terms or Baudelairean *correspondances* that connect Italian-Canadian writing with the broader framework of Canadian literature and other ethnics literary traditions. Works of other European immigrant writers in Canada inevitably share some of the same cultural challenges as Italian-Canadian works, particularly when it comes to the metacultural interplay of New and Old World push and pull.

Being the daughter of immigrants who was born in the agrarian South and grew up in Montreal, Melfi – in *Italy Revisited* – considers language and knowledge of the dominant culture as instruments to separate herself from Old-World beliefs and inherited practices. Nevertheless, despite the tension between mother and daughter and the writer's resistance to her linguistic and cultural roots, the past cannot but be considered "like the North Star" since it "helps one navigate; find one's way home."[235] But her occasionally fraught journey is not to know more about her ancestors, "we do it for ourselves."[236] As she declares, "I want to to re-visit my childhood [...] because I want to meet that little girl I once was. I want to go back, because the mirror no longer

[233] Baldo, Michela. "Landscapes of return: Italian-Canadian writing published in Italian by Cosmo Iannone Editore." *Translation Studie*s (2013), p.205.
[234] Melfi, Mary. Op. cit., p.315.
[235] Melfi, Mary. Op.cit., p.19.
[236] Melfi, Mary. Op. Cit., p.106.

reflects who I am."[237] Alienation and a split identity do not lead merely to Melfi's vexed relationship with the rural context of her birthplace, but are the outcome of a turmoil rooted in the Canadian urban context: "I spent over a quarter of a century living on the same street, in the same house, with the same man by my side, and two loving children and still I'm unsure of where I belong."[238]

The works of both Edwards and Melfi throw light on the difficulties the daughters of immigrants have in identifying with both their Canadian and their Italian heritage, as a result of various conflicting gender and cultural influences. Genni Donati Gunn, an Italian-Canadian writer, lingers on the concept of duality experienced by Edwards and Melfi: "Second-generation Italian women have grown up in this dual environment, oppressed from inside and outside. Not surprising, then, are the recurrent themes of duality and alienation present in their literature."[239] Indeed, the psychological effects of a split identity can be found in common threads such as displacement, ethnicity, class and gender. On this matter, Melfi observes that:

> The politics of gender plays a role in my writings. So does displacement. At the start of my career, young and deeply involved in the mating game, identity conflicts were seen through the feminine lens. Now that I'm older, I see the world more and more through the eyes of an immigrant. […] The big questions are not about being male or female, or being an immigrant, but about *being*.[240]

In her opinion, feeling displaced is not merely the result of moving to another country, but goes much deeper. In conceptualizing displacement and migration, Oliver

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[237] Melfi, Mary. Op. cit., p.322.
[238] Melfi, Mary. Op. cit., p.309.
[239] Donati Gunn, Genni. "Avoiding the Stereotypes" in *Writers in Transition*: The Proceedings of the First National Conference of Italian-Canadian Writers (1990), p.143.
[240] Anselmi, William. Op. cit., p.19.

Bakewell suggests that displacement as a condition "results in a continuous state of being displaced that can be maintained over tie and reproduced through generations."[241]

By retrieving her family's past and retracing the experience of migration, Melfi sought to understand the old world and map out her own identity. She hoped to learn how it influenced her upbringing in North America. What she discovers is that migration and the family's displacement were not only an escape route from poverty but a chance for her family to find a voice: "We didn't speak up until we came to l'America. In la *terra vecchia* we did not dare go against our parents' wishes."[242] Her memoir hereby becomes a tool to mine her mother's memories about life in Cascalenda and to trace a framework where she can fit in. "Who am I?" Why am I here?"[243] she asks. Aware of her daughter's quest, the narrator's mother occasionally resists sharing her memories: "'You can't even put on an apron', my mother tells me. 'How can you tell my story.'"[244]

Such moments of refusal are symbolic of the trauma experienced by those who emigrated not out of choice but poverty. In fact, Melfi reports, "When we started this dialogue my mother told me remembering the past would be painful for her, I did not suspect for one moment that I too would be hurt."[245] The search for her roots, takes her on an exploratory trip that shifts in time between the twelfth century and the first half of the twentieth century, when millions of Italians left their country: "In the 1920s the United States government made it very hard for Italians to enter the country. But

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[241] Bakewell, Oliver. "Conceptualising displacement and migration: Processes, conditions, and categories." New York: Berghahn Books (2011), p.22.
[242] Melfi, Mary. Op. cit., p.26.
[243] Melfi, Mary. Op. cit., p.309.
[244] Melfi, Mary. Op. cit., p.40.
[245] Melfi, Mary. Op. cit., p.232.

Canada needed men to work on farms, anyone who was willing to do so for a year was allowed in."[246]

Drawing out her mother's childhood memories, Melfi seeks to recreate life in the countryside of Cascalenda, evincing the obsession of Italian-Canadian writers with the return journey. The rural and yet fantasized representation of Southern Italy is described through the customs that have forged her mother's identity and her own: from matrimonial and mourning traditions to recipes of peasant cuisine. Although her mother repeatedly refers to Italy as "*la miseria*," Melfi discovers that the people of Cascalenda had a unique culture that she comes to admire. When describing the small mountain town of Cascalenda, she intertwines the way it once was with the way it now is:

> Cascalenda looks like any other hill-top town in Southern Italy. Its buildings are clustered together; from afar they seem to be part of one structure – a big castle. It's picturesque. Nowadays, the place is emptied out. Its lords and ladies have long gone; even the peasantry have abandoned it; some to the Americas, some to the cities. Its current population hovers around two thousand. Before the war it was four times as much.[247]

A genealogical impulse drives Melfi to question the immigrant experience of her parents.[248] Somewhat of an outcast, Melfi – like other daughters of immigrant mothers – resorts to education and creative expression as a form of dissent against Italian or Italian-Canadian womanhood. Not unlike the English gentlewoman Susanna Moodie, Melfi deviates from the ethical experience of

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[246] Melfi, Mary. Op. Cit., p.103.
[247] Melfi, Mary. Op. cit., p.99.
[248] Boelhower, William. "Italo-Canadian poetry & ethnic semiosis in the postmodern context." *Shaping Texts. Spec. Issue of Canadian Literature 119* (1988): 171-178.

honest hard labor and deploys in *Italy Revisited* a social and critical function through writing that goes against the current and challenges ingrained stereotypes. "I bought a *Little Big Book of Memories,*"[249] Melfi asserts - which becomes a *mise en abyme,* a story within a story of a silenced cultural past. When di Michele, Edwards and Melfi represent daughters as writers or artists, they are investing in autobiographical allusions that set up parallelisms between personal and fictional history.

Equally important points of intersection in the economy of their narratives is the significance of subjectivity, multiple identities and marginalization. In different ways these elements informing their work create a submerged plot of rebellion in which the quest for identity also becomes a tool for calling into question patriarchy and the male-dominated literary canon.[250] In his book *Echo: Essays on Other Literatures*, Joseph Pivato alludes to the unwritten history of Italian immigrant women as one told not through the voice of the historian but through that of the imaginative writer.[251]

Re-examining her disenfranchised female and Italian traditional culture, Melfi wonders: "Everyone else can live in the real world. Why can't I? Why do I have imaginary conversations with my mother?"[252] Propelled forward by her desire to understand her position as an immigrant and a woman, Melfi (among other Italian-Canadian writers) counterbalances the silence imposed on confined bodies.

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[249] Melfi, Mary. Op. cit., p.10.
[250] Gardiner, Judith Kegan. "On Female Identity and Writing by Women." The University of Chicago Press: *Critical Inquiry* Vol.8, No. 2 (1981), p.359.
[251] Pivato, Joseph. *Echo: Essays on Other Literatures*. Op. cit., p.141.
[252] Melfi, Mary. Op. cit., p.314.

CHAPTER 3

Voices Beyond the Mainstream

3.1 Italic Culture

> I believe that the most interesting expression of the Italian Canadian as expatriate comes from the instigation of cultural dialogue, and from the antagonism that it represents for the official culture. Writers such as Antonio D'Alfonso, Marco Micone, and Dore Michelut seek to shake culture at its linguistic roots, an act which opens the possibility of knowledge to those who undertake the challenge of making a language new to suit their expression.[253]

Antonio D'Alfonso coins the unique term *Italic* to define his "Italian" culture. "Italic culture, not Italian culture,"[254] he argues, eludes the noxious and biased grounds of nationalism and the mainstream to embrace the ethnic. The term was first introduced in *In Italics: In Defense of Ethnicity*,[255] his collection of essays advocating the recognition of an ethnic collective imaginary. Grounded in a post-nation and post-nationalist perspective, 'Italics' are writers who seek to transcend nationalist, territorial an genealogical limitations: "The Italic experience irreparably involves a movement within – parallel, comparable to the complimentary worlds which friends create together during their evening walks on the streets of Rome, Buenos Aires, Sao Paolo, Paris. [...]"[256]

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[253] Verdicchio, Pasquale. *Devils in Paradise*. Toronto: Guernica Editions (1997), p.19.
[254] D'Alfonso Antonio, Verdicchio, Pasquale. *Duologue: On Culture and Identity.* Toronto:Guernica Editions (1998) p.34.
[255] D'Alfonso, Antonio. *In Italics: In Defense of Ethnicity*. Toronto: Guernica Editions (1996).
[256] D'Alfonso, Antonio. Op. cit., p.113.

Italic as a concept rejects language restrictions inflicted on writers, since what remains are the non-verbal aspects of a given culture. The visual recounting of an ethnic group's identity, according to D'Alfonso, is the main source of understanding between different cultures. D'Alfonso rails against the media and their authoritarian and prejudicial imperatives, whereby language equals civilization and territory equals culture. The expression of a cultural identity under the label of Italian-Canadian, among other ethnic groups searching for reterritorialization, has very often instilled the terror of nationalism in a linguistically and culturally divided Canada. The so-called founding peoples, the English and the French, have adopted a coercive apparatus to defend the mainstream culture against Italian-Canadians and their customs and histories. Invented in the 1970s, multiculturalism was among those imposed abstractions that seemed to promise recognition of other recently arrived ethnic groups. In fact, Joseph Pivato explains, "Even after Multiculturalism became official government policy there was still pressure on newcomers to blend in with the majority culture."[257]

Attempting to complicate and enrich the English language by the inclusion of Italian syntactical forms and linguistic elements explicative of the immigrant culture, Italian-Canadian ethnic literature earned for itself the label of "bad writing." D'Alfonso urges Italian Canadians to recognize what a country is: "a creation determined by years of encounters and exchanges among peoples with complex histories and languages for their own."[258] Equally important, their

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[257] Pivato, Joseph. "Problems for the Italian-Canadian Writer and Critic: A Discussion in Three Parts." *Reflections on Culture*, eds. Licia Canton, Venera Fazio & Jim Zucchero. University of Toronto, Iacobucci Centre (2010).
[258] D'Alfonso, Antonio. Op.cit., p.77.

linguistic experiments were perceived as a threat to majoritarian French and English communities in Canada, who are still unable to cope with historically unresolved tensions. Canadian nationalism emerged as an expression of resistance to minority ethnic communities who continue to produce their own literary talents.

Italic culture was inevitably overshadowed in favor of the American melting pot ideology, severely attacked at the outset of the twentieth century by Randolph Bourne in *Trans-national America.*[259] In his collection of polemical essays *Devils in Paradise: Writings on post-emigrant culture,* Pasquale Verdicchio argues that Canada as a "multicultural mosaic" represents an official strategy of containment cutting of the country's immigrant populations: the dominant culture's objective is to preserve its power identity.[260] According to Verdicchio, the end result is the privation of individuals' right to self-representation, which poses the issue of voice appropriation and the external imposition of non-authentic identities. Such coercion has irreversible effects on the personal and collective development of ethnic groups within the host country, favoring abstractions such as nationhood and nationality.

But are we able to articulate a compelling definition of what a nation is? In 1983, the historian Benedict Anderson developed the concept of an "imagined community" to analyze nationalism. He described the nation as follows:

> I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know

[259] Bourne, Randolph. *Trans-national America*. *The Atlantic Monthly* (1916).
[260] Verdicchio, Pasquale. *Devils in Paradise*. Op. cit., p.17.

> most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion […][261]

Building on Anderson, Verdicchio and D'Alfonso developed a radical critique of "multiculturalism" and the "Italian" and "Canadian" nationalities as ideological categories suppressing and silencing the alternative meanings emerging from minority and ethnic communities. In Verdicchio's trenchant words:

> Italian Canadian writing represents a site of reterritorialization tending toward the formation of a historical bloc, even if the writers share only a partial history and their linguistic histories are dissimilar in their initial deterritorialization. Within this context, Italy is an abstraction that cannot be given dominion, just as the English language cannot.[262]

Although displacement represents a point of intersection between different cultures, the mainstream tends to debunk past and present history and to impose the parameters of de/reterritorialization. Challenging cultural hegemony would mean "to look back at those commonalities, those causes and conflicts"[263] in displaced lives sharing an experience of history. D'Alfonso and Verdicchio jointly call for parallel worlds created through the interlocutory position of ethnic subjects that could decenter and subvert territoriality, nationalism and other monological systems.[264] In effect, one of the salient features of Italian-Canadian writers is their desire to renegotiate their subjectivity through the act

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[261] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*: *Reflections on the Origin and Spread Of Nationalism.* London: Verso Books (1983), p.6.
[262] Verdicchio, Pasquale. Op. cit., p.15.
[263] D'Alfonso Antonio, and Verdicchio Pasquale. *Duologue*. Op. cit., p.58.
[264] D'Alfonso Antonio, and Verdicchio Pasquale. Op. cit., p.38

of writing, so as to cast doubt upon external forces that have distorted their immigrant identities. Their weak position and antagonism radically questions the centripetal impulses of mainstream culture and the suffocating force of Canadian nationalism.

In 1983, Italian postmodern philosophers Gianni Vattimo and Aldo Rovatti launched the philosophy of *il pensiero debole* (weak thought). Marked by the "crisis of reason," this philosophical position sought to undermine the foundational certainties of modernity – the "strong thought" of an optimistic eurocentrism. In doing so, it pursued the ontological critique of western metaphysics articulated in the philosophy of Nietzsche or Heidegger. Vattimo's 'weak' ontology turned away from the grand narratives of the past (Marxism, Freudian psychoanalysis, Enlightenment scientific optimism) and encouraged a hermeneutic approach to being-in-the-world. As Rovatti argues:

> '[W]eak thought' stands for a scientific or knowing attitude [atteggiamento conoscitivo]. 'Weak thought' intends to impair the act of knowing in its entirety, both on the side of the knower and the side of the known. Subject and object are by now worn-out terms.[265]

By advocating a certain lightness of being, their nihilistic reading of the world and history endorsed and sought to legitimize the pluralism of worldviews. "Local" and multi-fold entities - ethnic, sexual or cultural minorities - are hence given the right to scream out their word:

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[265] Vattino Gianni, and Rovatti Pier Aldo. *Weak Thought*. State Univ of New York Pr (2012), p.64.

> The experience with which we may begin and to which we must remain faithful is above all and largely that of the everyday, which is also and always historically qualified and culturally dense. [...]The conditions of possibility for experience are always qualified. [266]

Monological and systematic ethics have to be replaced by the dimensions of everyday normality, *normalità quotidiana*, so as to overturn the presuppositions of what is called common knowledge. Vattimo and Rovatti's "weak thought" became a perfect fit for Italic culture's dismissal of *clichés* and imposed meanings.

In order to favor the flourishing of parallel systems, the personal experience of history should not be transcended or forgotten, since cultures in general are informed by migrations and the intermixing of peoples. As D'Alfonso argues, "Most writings by Italian writers are based on being exiled. From Ovid all the way to Calvino."[267] The Italian intellectual and political leader Antonio Gramsci also articulated an understanding of history in terms of the experience of the everyday, as a common denominator and foundation in one's process of self-fashioning:

> The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is and knowing one's self as product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. It is therefore imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.[268]

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[266] Vattimo Gianni, and Rovatti Pier Aldo. Op. cit., p..40.
[267] D'Alfonso Antonio, and Verdicchio Pasquale. Op. cit., p.49.
[268] Gramsci, Antonio. *Prison Notebooks* (1930-32).

Given its long history of emigration, in which millions of southern Italians left for South and North America, until rather recently Italian historians seem to have overlooked what was happening under their nose. In *Finding Rosa* Caterina Edwards casts light upon the buried history of Istria and the rejection of exiled Istriani as Italians in Italy. Mary Melfi similarly digs into the abject misery of rural Casacalenda, a Southern village in Molise, in order to document the reasons and constraints that pushed Italians to emigrate to North America. Along with the former defamiliarization of a common ground for Italians - the Second World War – the guardians of Italian culture continue to resist promoting a linguistic paradigm that would echo Canada's combination of *La Francophonie,* English-speaking people *Anglophilia* or the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP). *Italofonia* refers to people using Italian as a standardized language but does not embrace those full-fledged Italians *fuori d'Italia* or on the Italian peninsula who speak dialect, English, French or other foreign languages. The dismissal of dialect as a form of cultural expression has particularly undermined diversity in favor of a nationalist program of cultural and linguistic homogeneity.

Receiving intellectual nourishment from the Italic, the French and the English cultures, Italian-Canadians embody and stand for a *de facto* image of Canada. According to D'Alfonso and Verdicchio, "it is neither French nor British, it is Other."[269] Publishing in three different languages, Italian-Canadians (or Italics) go beyond the English or French mainstream and avoid situating themselves wholely in Italy or in Canada. Italian-Canadians'

[269] D'Alfonso Antonio, and Verdicchio Pasquale. Op cit., p.85.

investment in Canada's many immigrant and ethnic communities and in a variety of geocultures was, in fact, the main thrust behind the inaugural collection *Roman Candles.* Similarly, Guernica Editions, founded by Italian-Canadian writer Antonio D'Alfonso started as a trilingual press, publishing coming-of-age writers of diverse ethnic backgrounds. La *questione della lingua* (the language question) is a central conditioning element for Italian-Canadian writers which presupposes the following parameters: 1) a challenge to the linguistic standardization within Italy; 2) an oppositional aesthetic promoting the interplay of English, French, and Italian (along with its dialects). The main target, of course, is cultural nationalism.

Language, for D'Alfonso and Verdicchio, is understood as the result of an interplay of linguistic systems – English, French, Italian and its dialects – by which the Italic writer creates a new, inclusive language experiment: a post-emigrant and post-nationalist one at that.

The reception of Italian-Canadians also has been based on class barriers. The bulk of Italian-Canadians are the offspring of lower class families and it is not unusual to come across references to peasants or unskilled laborers in their writings: "Ours is a vision that is not easily available in literature."[270] The same held true when it came to Italian-Canadian women writers such as Mary di Michele, Mary Melfi, Caterina Edwards , Marisa De Franceschi. In fact, during the 1960s, there was little support in the Italian-Canadian communities for young women who dreamed of going to University. [271]

[270] D'Alfonso Antonio, and Verdicchio Pasquale. Op. cit., p.91.
[271] Pivato, Joseph. "Italian-Canadian Connections at 33." *Canadian Literature* 236:173, March 2020.

Eager to speak for themselves, these Italian Canadian writers had to fight against restrictions in both Canada and Italy. In his engrossing book on the complexity of minority and nationalistic ideologies *Bound by Distance: Rethinking Nationalism through the Italian Diaspora*[272], Pasquale Verdicchio reflects upon the process of national unification and emigration as two correlated phenomena. Both reflect a colonial enterprise. Italian Southerners were often considered racially inferior and thus beyond the pale of national unity. The Italian government did little to stop them from emigrating. Vilified, alienated, categorized as racially inferior and internal "others" by their home country, southern emigrants created a diaspora and "an integral component of nationalist and imperialist agendas."[273]

A sense of displacement is in fact a common condition in the lives of subaltern subjectivities, as is the case of Pasquale Verdicchio. While questioning the homogenizing cultural policies of Italians' colonial condition and the following Unification of the country, southern Italians have also an incontributed greatly to a once invisible population abroad. Not surprisingly, upon their arrival in Canada they quickly became marginalized as an "ethnic group" and an "invisible minority."[274] Opponents to this cultural ghettoization arose when Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, in the *Preface to Roman Candles,* brought this sense of displacement among Italian-Canadian writers to the forefront.

The Italian-Canadian poet and critic Pasquale Verdicchio, born in Naples in 1954, moved to Vancouver in the late 1960s. His position of "emigrated

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[272] Verdicchio, Pasquale. *Bound by Distance: Rethinking Nationalism through the Italian Diaspora*. New York: Bordighera Press (2016).
[273] Verdicchio, Pasquale.Op. cit., xix.
[274] Verdicchio, Pasquale. Op. cit., p.115.

body," Verdicchio states, burdened him with an inescapable and sometimes unbearable sense of displacement. Many Italian-Canadians, like Antonio D'Alfonso and Fulvio Caccia felt caught between the English/French Canadian tug-of-war and their own cultural background. The result also be be described as a center/margin relationship in which every single act and thought entails a continuous switching of subject positions from the center to the margins and back again. As many of the contributions to *Roman Candles* indicate, such circumstances engender a play of multiple personalities and unstable subject positions – and the languages of thought and expression do not necessarily match. Intellectual and social life conflict and opposition to a dominant Anglo-Canadian or French-Canadian culture may manifest itself as an internal rather than an external experience.[275]

Responding to displacement with a series of "returns" to his native country, Verdicchio, like Edwards, Melfi, Di Cicco, D'Alfonso and other Italian-Canadian writers, realized that the sense of feeling out of place was true both in Canada and in Italy. It was nonetheless during one of those moments of departure and arrival exemplified by emigration and immigration that these writers' "integrated duality" was reinstated through group self-recognition: the 1984 meeting of Italian-Canadian writers in Rome and the 1986 conference in Vancouver. From this former meeting, the Association of Italian Canadian writers (AICW) was founded to sponsor readings and talks and provide a sense of community among writers who had been totally ignored by the official Canadian culture.

[275] Verdicchio, Pasquale. Op. cit.,pp. 141-142.

As Antonio D'Alfonso notes in *Gambling with Failure,*[276] a shared sense of community and communication within the field of Italian-Canadian literature did not flourish as it might have: "Some men and women preferred to take the path to nationhood, instead of trying to bridge the Italic communities around the world, Italy included."[277]

On this ground, in a 2018 interview with Marco Manzoni, Piero Bassetti brings in a significant contribution on the unprecedented opportunities given by 'Italics.' As he claims, 'Italics' can be ascribed to a similar sensitivity, hence to a set of values and convictions that are not bound to *Italianità*, but to the thriving historical presence of Italian culture throughout the centuries.[278] The Italic culture, D'Alfonso comments, does not only need a worldwide recognition, but it depends on Italians scattered all over the world.[279] It is not limited to one country; its global perspective envelopes all things Italian, both in Italy and abroad.

[276] D'Alfonso Antonio. *Gambling with Failure*. Toronto: Exile Editions Ltd (2005).
[277] D'Alfonso, Antonio. *Gambling with Failure*. Op. cit., p.13.
[278] Bassetti, Piero. "Italics as a Global Commonwealth" di Marco Manzoni. *Globus et Locus*. Gennaio 2018.
[279] D'Alfonso, Antonio. *Gambling with Failure*. Op. cit., p.47.

3.2 Interview with Caterina Edwards

Caterina Edwards, writer and teacher of Canadian literature and creative writing at post-secondary institutions in Edmonton, was born in the village of Earls Barton, England, of an English father and an Italian mother. After graduating from the University of Alberta, she published her first short stories in literary magazines and a few anthologies. Her works include *The Lion's Mouth* (1993), *Finding Rosa: A Mother With Alzheimer's, a Daughter in Search of the Past* (2009), and *The Sicilian Wife (*2015). She published a play titled *Homeground* (1990), a collection of short stories *Island of the Nightingales* (2000) and a volume of two novellas *Whiter Shade of Pale/ Becoming Emma* (1992).

FF: *As the first Italian-Canadian woman writer in western Canada, how would you describe your efforts to be published and recognized in Canada? Did you ever experience a sort of double marginalization due to ethnicity and gender?*

CE: I feel I have been marginalized for different reasons and in different ways. I live in the West, far from the literary centres of Canada: Toronto and Montreal. The senior editor of one of the biggest independent book publishers was asked by an aspiring writer, "what can I do to get my work published?" The editor answered: "attend literary events, readings and talks. Get to know the editors. Make friends with other writers. Even if you live outside Toronto, you can drive in." In other words, live in Southern Ontario and get to know those who can be useful to your career. I live thousands of kilometres away: I cannot easily become a familiar presence in the writing and publishing world. I have found it difficult and sometimes impossible to arrange a reading or a launch to promote a new book in Toronto or Montreal. Still, who knows if

my books would have been taken up by one of the larger presses, and thus more recognized, if I lived down East? I have been shaped by living in an isolated city, far from the cultural centres.

(I will return to this towards the end of the interview.)

My marginalization as a woman writer:

I wrote my second book *Whiter Shade of Pale/Becoming Emma* while my daughters were young. The second novella, *Becoming Emma,* in particular, arose from my struggle to justify myself as a writer. I was busy trying to be a good mother, wife, and professor at the University of Alberta. And I was also searching, needing the mental space (the room of one's own) necessary to write creatively. My community seemed to view my writing as a trivial pastime. One of my closest friends called it selfish.

Becoming Emma is a retelling of *Madame Bovary,* set in Edmonton during the 1980s. My Emma longs for a different life. She longs to be an artist; she always expected she would be. And she channels her frustration and longing into an affair. The story is told in fragments by a self-conscious narrator, who reflects on the differences between her writing life and that of Flaubert. My Emma feels isolated and stuck in the provinces. She grew up in New York and craves its cultural milieu.

I explored the idea of the male genius versus the ordinary woman and what is allowed and possible for each. Emma was taught at her ivy league school to believe in art with a capital A. (Her teachers were abstract expressionist painters.) She has rejected her ethnic background instead of using it to find another way of creating.

The reception of this book of novellas almost destroyed my ability to write. It received positive reviews, but those were all written by women. The reviews in what

were then the important and national organs for literary criticism were vitriolic. Of course, I forgot the good ones and remembered every word of the bad ones. Every year, poorly written books are published, but I have never seen another review suggest that every word in a work was worthless. I fell into a depression and could not write for years.

When I shared my experience with Antonio d'Alfonso, he noted that the intense anger showed that the book threatened them. Another writer suggested that the reviewers found it safer to attack me rather than more prominent and mainstream feminists, so I became an easy scapegoat. Ironically, *Becoming Emma* eventually was a required text for two different courses in different universities. Twenty-five years after it was first published, it sold out.

Marginalization as an Italian-Canadian writer:

In the early 1980s, a respected poet/professor claimed that being categorized as an ethnic writer was a kiss of death. This was particularly true during the time I was finding my focus as a writer. The culture was awakening to the need for Canadian art to tell Canadian stories and to define the country. Canadian meant Scottish, Irish, English, and French ethnicity. It did not include the members of the first nations or the Metis. To write of other peoples was considered narrow and the work inevitably inferior. One of the most powerful men of Canadian letters, for example, made fun (in a national newspaper) of the idea of Italian-Canadian writing.

FF: *Would you consider your current status as an Italian-Canadian woman writer different from your early struggles to win recognition? Was the mosaic metaphor and governmental subventions already in place when you first started out?*

CE: The situation for women writers has changed, partly because women fought for recognition. And my work is now appreciated, rather than attacked, for being feminist. The mosaic metaphor and subventions were being put into place around the time I published my first book, *The Lion's Mouth.* I began to benefit when I was invited to attend a conference on Italian-Canadian writing organized by the Canadian Cultural Centre in Rome. I have also benefitted in that *The Lion's Mouth,* originally published by NeWest Press, was republished by Guernica Editions. Guernica also published a collection of my short stories, *The Island of the Nightingales,* and my play, *Homeground.*

FF: *Did the breakthrough publication of the anthology of Italian-Canadian women writers Pillars of Lace, edited by Marisa De Franceschi, make it any easier for Italian Canadian women to get published? (In the US Helen Barolini's anthology seemed to create new opportunities for Italian American women.)*

CE: It did not have the same effect as Barolini's anthology, *The Dream Book.* The quality of the selections in *Pillars of Lace* is high, yet the book did not receive many reviews or even mentions. I suspect that *The Dream Book* was promoted and supported in a way that Pillars wasn't. Helen Barolini's introduction is long, detailed, and convincing. She lays out, with evidence, how the writing of Italian-American women has been unrecognized and unappreciated, even in ethnic anthologies. The book won the American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation. There is no equivalent in Canada.

FF: *The history of Italian Canadian women has often been silenced. What changed this?*

CE: Often it was the second generation who first had the courage to speak, to write. There were a few cases of women in the first generation who began to write novels and memoirs. These works were usually in Italian, and the women often had received a literary education before they arrived. But first or second generation women who wanted to speak their truth often had to challenge the patriarchal assumptions of what their lives should be. Immigrant families often clung fiercely to the rules and beliefs that were prevalent in their village when they left. Meanwhile, in Italy, many of those beliefs about gender roles and practices within family life had changed. And in Canada, once women in the broader society began to write in detail about their lives, Italian-Canadian women also gradually began to tell their stories. Still, even now, there is subtle pressure against a writer exposing the flaws of a member of the community or the community itself to outsiders.

FF: *Two of the main figures in the development of Italian Canadian literature are Pier Giorgio di Cicco and Antonio d'Alfonso. Did you know them back when all of you were starting out? Weren't you, too, part of that initial group? Were there gender conflicts amongst you?*

CE: I went to a reading by Pier Giorgio di Cicco in Edmonton when I was still working on my first novel. He was on a tour publicizing *Roman Candles.* I introduced myself. I met him again in Rome during that first conference on Italian-Canadian writing. He seemed to hold himself apart from the rest of us. He certainly showed no interest in my work. The only thing that I can remember his saying to me was, "You cannot be a writer and live in Edmonton." Conversely, I did get to know Antonio d'Alfonso in Rome. I was impressed by his energy and enthusiasm. Guernica Editions brought Italian-Canadian writers from the shadows into the literary light. I am grateful for his

publishing three of my books. Years after Rome, from the best of intentions, I questioned him, and we had a falling out.

FF: Guernica Editions began as a bilingual press, publishing works in English and French. In 1994 Guernica moved operations from Montreal to Toronto and focused on English language books. Mary di Michele noted, "I took English to be my own and wanted it because it seemed to me an escape from the kind of emotional morass of the Italian family […] I wanted an intellectual life too, so I embraced English."
Is the issue of having to resort to English limiting for Italian-Canadian writers? Does it prevent writers and readers from feeling citizens of the world? Are there Italian Canadian writers currently writing in Italian?

CE: A writer needs to write in the language in which they are most comfortable. Of course, if one writes in Italian and is not translated, you will not have a career in Canada. There is not a big enough audience for books written in Italian. And it is not easy to have a book translated into English and then published here. Unfortunately, French and English Canadian writers are not routinely translated. Those who write in French often don't know the work of those who write in English and vice versa. Still, Italian-Canadian writers in English and French often speak and read in Italian. I am influenced by the classic and the more modern Italian writers. I feel a connection to contemporary Italian culture. I would define myself as a transcultural writer. I will write a bit more about this at the end.

FF: *One last question: did you read Susanna Moodie's* Roughing It in the Bush *at some point? Is it a sort of watershed book for all women writers in Canada, ethnic or so-called mainstream?*

CE: I think that *Roughing it* is a watershed book for some of the mainstream women writers of my generation, but not for those of us on the margins and not (I think) for the younger ones. After all, one of Margaret Atwood's first published books (1971) was the collection of poems based on Susanna Moodie's book. In 1972, Atwood published *Survival,* which was a thematic study of Canadian Literature. She chose *Journals of Susanna Moodie* as a seminal book in the Canadian literary canon. The short passages I have read in *Roughing it in the Bush* struck me as very British and very central Canada. I did not connect with it. The writers she highlighted in *Survival* tended to be those from the centre—Ontario and Quebec. (They were also published by her publisher, and coincidentally many were her friends, including her future husband.) She does not analyze the work of any indigenous writers. The chosen are all members of "the founding cultures."

A last comment: I sometimes feel that my writing has not received the attention that it deserves. But I suspect that writing from the margins and feeling shut out of the centre has been good for my work. I write of the borderlands, the spaces where different peoples meet. I return again and again to the themes of migrancy, displacement, exile, mixed identity, nationalism, identity, and the juxtaposition of personal and public history. I have been called a transnational writer; I hope that I am.

3.3 Interview with Antonio D'Alfonso

Born in Montreal, Antonio D'Alfonso's parents come from Molise, Italy. In 1978 he founded Guernica Editions, the first Canadian press dedicated to ethnic and Italian-Canadian writers. A prolific author of poetry and novels, D'Alfonso is also a filmmaker. His works include *The Other Shore* (1986), *L'Amour Panique* (1988), *Fabrizio's Passion* (1995), *En Italiques: Réflexions sur l'ethnicité* (2005), *The Irrelevant Man* (2014).

FF: *What is the place of Italian Canadian writing today in Canada? Have writers like you benefited from recent attempts to theorize a global diaspora of 'Italics'? What do you think of Joseph Pivato's juxtaposition of Italian Canadian literature with the notion of "global village"? Your own writing seems a good example of a wider diasporic paradigm at work.*

AD: You are probably the first person to actually use 'Italics' when speaking of Italian-Canadian writers. No one I know ever mentioned my book and what I meant by that term.

I understand why Joseph Pivato uses Global Village, a meritable reference to McLuhan, though I am sure even McLuhan would no longer use Global Village and revert back to his initial idea of the Baroque, what I call the New Baroque. (Guy Scarpetta wrote a book on *Le nouveau baroque* in France).

The concept of Italics presupposes many parameters. The idea of a post-nation, post-nationalist perspective. 'Italics' includes writers in Italy, and is not limited to *fuori d'italia* writers. 'Italics' means that writers strive to attain a higher plane of identity that is neither genealogical nor territorial nor nationalist. 'Italics' means the author is

consciously participating in the attempt to create a federation of diverse deterritorialized identities, based on the ambiguous idea of being Italian (sic). This means that I am against multiculturalism, interculturalism, transculturalism, transnationalism, and Italianness.

All of these terms are basically concepts to camouflage the idea of a genetically based nationhood. In other words, all promote assimilation, disappearance.

Culture is weak. Only a weakened culture can attain higher grounds. Transnationalism and transculturalism presuppose strong centers (nation or culture). Nothing is certain anymore. All is weak. The only parameter left is a sort of broken consciousness. But it is from this broken consciousness that a certain cosmopolitanism and globalized identities will emerge.

Categories are a sickness. But culture isn't. It is ambiguous, but it is a product of thousands of years of people working together. It is as powerful as religion or atheism (which is another institutionalized religion).

So how can the writer deal with these broken concepts without bringing us back to the territory and the State? Italian-Canadian writers exist only if they aim for the 'Italics'. Otherwise, they might as well embrace English or French Canadian nationalism, which are well ensconced in the Canadian constitution.

FF: *What were your initial reasons for establishing Guernica Editions? Did you have support from a group of writers? Your publishing house is an incredible success story that has helped to launch writers of Italian descent in Canada. Are there any moments in particular that you consider crucial to the Press's development?*

AD: I thank you for the compliments on Guernica Editions. The truth is darker than what you can ever imagine. Both on a personal level and professional level. Guernica Editions was founded with the idea of bridging cultures. Being Italian came later. At the end of 1984, after the first meeting in Rome of Italian-Canadian writers.

Before that I might have published Italians, but I did not do it consciously. It is strange to admit, but it is the truth: I did not know that Marco Fraticelli, Filippo Salvatore, Fulvio Caccia, Mary Melfi, Ken Norris, and others were Italian. I was bridging different voices which were not being presented as different in a very divided Canadian setting: The separatists on one side and the English on the other side (back then to be USA was a sin).

Consciousness comes slowly, because consciousness needs concepts and actions to express itself. In fact, being unconscious worked in my favor, and as soon as I became conscious of being an Italian of sorts, hell broke loose. There are three moments in the process of consciousness that might be pointed out:

1. Mexico, in 1979-80: I lived in Mexico for almost a year, where I was not a gringo but an Italian. During this time I organized the books I would publish for the next 5 years.

2. Meeting Fulvio Caccia (1982-90) who opened my mind to French-language writing. Guernica dedicated a lot of time and money to translations and publishing original works in French.

3. Moving to Toronto. In 1991, I decided that Canada was not a bilingual country but very much a country divided in two camps: the separatists and the Brits.

FF: *The year you founded Guernica Editions, Pier Giorgio Di Cicco published a*

groundbreaking anthology of Italian-Canadian poetry. Did you know Di Cicco or any of the other poets included in it? Did Di Cicco's work affect your own efforts to forge an outlet for Italian Canadian literature? Was there a 'circle of friends' back then and were the women writers part of it?

AD: It took Guernica two years before coming out publicly. I had heard about Di Cicco's anthonology and wrote him telling that there were writers he should consider: Marco Fraticelli, Filippo Salvatore, Mary Melfi, Fulvio Caccia, and myself. We had a few letter exchanges which ended unfortunately very badly. His point of view was that Italian had to speak about being Italian. I asked him what that meant. And our contrasting views led to some awful words on his part. The letter is at McMaster University in my archives.

For Di Cicco, one was Italian if the content was Italian, whereas I was totally in disagreement with him: it is not content, but consciousness that is the parameters of identity. Di Cicco and I made peace eventually, and he spent some time in Montreal just before becoming a priest in 1986, I believe.

This confrontation about what makes one who he or she is, remained and remains a main point of contention between Italian-Canadian writers, but also Italian writers outside of Italy. I dedicated my life to fight against the consciousness parameter, plus the act of choosing to work with an Italic center, such as Guernica, where identity was pushed to the fore. This, of course, was not gladly received. Means of production belong to the consciousness parameter, in my opinion. Working as a group demands recognition, whereas being one in many unlike you, makes you pretty invisible, even if success might seem brighter.

I am not sure there ever was a circle of friends. Egos are too large for that to occur. But I can admit that the café in Toronto was a point of reference for Italian-Canadian writers. It was not the case in Montreal, where a number of issues divided the community: left and right wing writers could never agree. And then the language division led writers in totally different directions: the French inevitably become Quebec separatists or nationalists and the Anglophones were pushed into quasi silence, for they never belonged to the Toronto group nor to the francophone group.

FF: *Di Cicco's anthology of seventeen Italo-Canadian poets,Roman Candles, includes the poems of only two Italian Canadian women: Mary Melfi and Mary di Michele. What are your personal reflections on the careers of these two first-generation women writers? Is the work of the next generation more open in terms of themes and issues?*

AD: Guernica Editions made sure to remedy that... what shall we call it? Most of the Italian-Canadian writers I discovered and published were women. This came from the fact that in French Quebec, women and their feminist point of view put into question what it meant to be a writer, and what it meant to use words coined by men. That sort of position surely influenced me in my choice to publish writers like Pasquale Verdicchio and Dorina Michelutti (Dore Michelut), whose language was different and not simple. For me, this putting into question language was a major event in Italian-Canadian writing**.** But unfortunately many writers disliked my position, and so refused to publish with Guernica. Guernica gradually became a black sheep for investing in a literature that did not offer Italian stereotypical subjects. I would like to repeat that if content is what makes us writers, then others will do a better job than us in describing Italian scenes. Appropriation of voice becomes a mean bone to contend with. Even today, it

remains a problem. I have read most of what is being written by Italian-Canadians, and I can conclude that content has become the parameter chosen. There are exceptions, but these are exceptions.

Unless the issue of identity is fully understood, Italian Canadians will accept as Italian Canadian only what is superficially viewed as Italian Canadian. It is a matter of years, before non-Italians will gather the fruits of such a position. This point of view (content), can only change if professors and critics start to take seriously style and what goes beyond content. But if eating spaghetti and being part of the mafia and talking about how great Italy was before emigration remains the main topic, Italian-Canadian writing will soon disappear and will be eaten up by either the French nationalists or the English nationalists.

Italian Canadians are not about survival, they are about breaking through the racism of multicultural fallacies which promote assimiliation as the only way to the future. Italian Canadians should be fighting for rights, social rights. Did you know that today it is impossible to identify legally who is an Italian Canadian?

FF: *Some Italian Canadian women writers have been publishing since the 1950s. Did you consider the possibility of attracting new voices among Italian Canadian women writers, or were they largely still invisible?*

AD: Italian-Canadian women, I have published many. I had to pull most of the books out of them, for they did not wish to continue doing what they could do. Imagine, I had offered a writer to do a Collected Poems (since all of her books were out of print) and

she refused, and got offended. A Collected Poems an insult? This was the crowning of a career.

Italian-Canadian women have much work ahead of them, and work requires dedication. Not many women can dedicate all their time to writing. There are no Italian-Canadian writers, except for one or two, who make a living from their writing.

Italian-Canadian writers have still so many topics to explore, but they seem to follow the path all take. We have yet to have gay, lesbian, or transgender writers. Yes, there is Steve Gallucci, but still... We have yet to have writers who have written about other Italian-Canadian writers. Joseph Pivato says in one of my films, Conversation with Joseph Pivato, that only one thesis on Italian-Canadian writers has ever been written. (And I believe I published it.) With critical analysis, there can't be much writing left for the future.

Without a serious readership there cannot be future writers. Writers need readers, not other writers. In 50 years, I have never received a penny from Italian-Canadian business people. I have never been invited to speak about Guernica or about writing or film (since film is my main field of study) in Canada or by an Italian-Canadian institution or university. There can be no future, if there is no reception of what is being done. We cannot have a literature if we sell only 50 copies of a book. And that book never receives a serious review.

Most of the work on Italian-Canadian writing has been done in Italian universities. I am extremely glad this is the case. But there is so much work left to do on that front.

Unfortunalely, most Italian-Canadian writers dream of being assimilated into Canadian (French or English) mainstream. I am not even sure Italian-Canadians know much about other Italians *fuori d'Italia* or in Italy. Writing is about beingness, not about

being successful. It is about providing new perspectives for future generations, not about being glorified for selling out to another culture, only because one lives in one nation and not in another.

Italian-Canadian writers cannot move forward if they do not put into question Fascism and Nationalism in all its forms.

3.4 Interview with Pasquale Verdicchio

Pasquale Verdicchio, currently Professor of Italian and Comparative Literature at the University of California, San Diego, was born in Naples and immigrated to Canada in the late 1960s. His translations from Italian into English, include works by Pier Paolo Pasolini, Alda Merini, Antonio Porta, Vivian Lamarque and Antonio Gramsci. Verdicchio's poetry collections include *Moving Ladscape* (1985), *Nomadic Trajectory* (1990), *This Nothing's Place* (2008). His critical works are *Devils in Paradise: Writings on Post-emigrant Cultures* (1997), *Bound by Distance: Rethinking Nationalism Through the Italian Diaspora* (1997) *Looters, Photographers, and Thieves* (2011), and *Ecocritical Approaches to Italian Culture and Literature: The Denatured Wild* (2016).

FF: *From 1998, the year you pubished* Duologue *with Antonio D'Alfonso, to the present, did you see any breakthroughs in the recognition of Italian Canadian writing? Currently, the postnationalist turn of 'Italian diaspora' aims at a global dimension that redefines the Canadian mainstream. Have you benefited from your position as a diasporic writer and theorist of 'Italics' global diaspora?*

PV: First of all, thank you for these questions and the opportunity to voice some of my concerns regarding the state of Italian Canadian writing. Regarding this first question: I am not certain that we can speak of "breakthroughs" with regard to the "recognition" of Italian Canadian writing. My off-the-cuff reply would be NO. Italian Canadian writing was anointed with some small amount of recognition with the success of Nino Ricci's Lives of the Saints, that of his eventual trilogy, and his being awarded a Governor

General's Award. Although those moments were celebrated by some as a long-awaited recognition of Italian Canadian writing, it was merely a mirage.

Politically and culturally, the potential that those moments encapsulated never bore fruit; it was a wonderful moment of recognition of Ricci, but not one of recognition for the greater community of writers that might identify as Italian Canadian. Part of this may be the result of Ricci's reluctance to identify too closely with that label and his refusal to be part and participate in the events of the Association of Italian Canadian Writers. Lest one might think that I hold Ricci responsible for this outcome, let me clarify … I do not. I had the pleasure of spending some time with Nino Ricci a couple of years ago, during a conference in Napoli. It is not Ricci as a writer or his works that are responsible for what happened. It is the machine of Canadian culture that manufactures these discrepancies of representation. The responsibility for this failure is of Italian Canadian writers themselves.

Back in the early 1980s, after a memorable meeting in Vancouver, a group of us (Anna Foschi, Dino Minni, Antonio D'Alfonso, Joseph Pivato, and myself) decided that it was time to found an association that could act as a gathering place and platform from which to properly present, publicize and disseminate Italian Canadian writing. Thus, the AICW was born. The idea was that through such an association, through the dialogue that would take place among Italian Canadian writers and theorists, we might provide a critical language through which the Canadian literary establishment might engage us. That lasted a few years, but eventually it became very clear that a lot of the writers resented the space that academics and theorists occupied within the association, and slowly but surely the bi-annual conferences became meetings where writers basically

read their poems and stories to each other, happy to receive the applause of the others and that's that.

This transition became painfully evident to me at a meeting at the University of British Columbia a little over twenty years ago. We met at the margins of the campus, with only a limited number of Italian Canadian writers present, all gathered in one room reading to each other. No audience, no non-Italian Canadians, no interlocutors, no critical readings of works, nothing. That was when I began drifting away from the association. Today it remains pretty much the same. While we were the first so-called "minority" to found an association and hold conferences, we have been left in the dust. Other groups have been much more engaged on the cultural and political fronts (they are often one and the same); they have received recognition and are much more visible in the landscape of Canadian literature.

Have I benefited from my position as a diasporic writer and theorist of 'Italics' global diaspora? Hardly! If anything, it has obfuscated much of what I have done, both as a writer and as a critic. I have always tried, from my earliest writings, to relate the migratory experiences of Italian Canadians to those of other groups. During my three times as president of the association, in Toronto and then Vancouver, we organized conference with South East Asian writers, and then with writers from China and other parts of Asia. That has always been my interest and my focus. But aside from those brief moments, successful as they were, nothing more came of them. In many ways, the Italian Canadian label has been hard to shake. Despite writing, teaching and presenting at conferences on comparative migration issues, the only requests I receive for contributions to journals and book anthologies on migration are related to Italian Canadian matters. Certainly, some of my work in *Bound by Distance* and *Devils in*

Paradise has found some success in the U.S., and it is always encouraging to find readers in Italy and in other diasporic realities, but in Canada it has largely gone unnoticed.

I have a new book of poetry that is about to be released by Ekstasis Editions, in Victoria, British Columbia. Although I cannot escape my name, I hope that the back-cover blurbs that accompany this collection will at least push it in a slightly different direction. Of course, one of the blurbs is by Antonio D'Alfonso, with whom I have had a working relationship and who I regard as a long-time friend; another is by Jerome Rothenberg, internationally recognized poet, anthologist, theorist in poetics and global diasporic studies, also a friend a colleague at the University of California, San Diego; and the last back-cover comment is by Fred Wah, whose work I've admired for decades, and who has been an influential voice in Canadian literatures for decades. These are individuals with whose work and interests I find affinities.

FF: *What are the major moments in your collaboration with Antonio D'Alfonso? Did your publishing experience with Guernica Editions change your visibility as a writer? In the Preface of your engrossing book* Bound By Distance *you mention that D'Alfonso's program was not only to publish Italian Canadian works, but also to create an archival space and point of reference. Why was this goal overlooked?*

PV: I met Antonio in Rome, in 1984. I was living in Florence for a year. I had sent Guernica some poems for publication, thinking that it was a journal. He replied saying that no, we are a press. "By the way, there will be a conference at the Canadian Cultural Center in Rome, why don't you come down to meet me?" So I went down and met him

and a whole group of other writers. It was the first time that so many Italian Canadian writers had been in the same place. Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, Caterina Edwards, Fulvio Caccia, Marco Micone, Joseph Pivato, etc. (My memory fails me as to who else was there… I think Mary Di Michele, George Amabile, Frank Paci and Mary Melfi were also there, but I'm not quite certain). In any case, that marked the beginning of my collaboration with Antonio. We found common ground on postnational poetics, on diasporic issues, on the importance of re-defining the designations that e/im-migration have imposed upon us, and the expectations of both Italy and Canada regarding who we might be and what our work should be about and, as you know, on what we discuss in *Duologue*.

When we met I had a couple of manuscripts ready that had been turned down by other presses: a book of translations of the poet Antonio Porta, of *I novissimi* fame, and a book of my own poetry, *Moving Landscape.* Antonio told me to send him both and he published them one after the other. From that point onward, aside from the occasional book published with other presses in the U.S., where I went for my PhD (UCLA) and where I then began to teach (UC San Diego), most of my books were published by Guernica. Over the time of those collaborations and discussions, through my visits to Montreal and his visits to San Diego, the importance of Guernica as a fundamentally important cultural site became more and more evident. Of course, such a venture can only work if there is a movement that help realize it. It wasn't that "the general concept was lost to many," it was more a case that, just as with the intention behind the association, it did not seem important to a large majority of writers. Rather than seeing the potential behind what could have been a cultural movement by a "minority" that had acquired its own means of production and distribution, that defined the space of their

multi-faceted identities, rather than be defined externally, many saw it as compromising their rise to Canadian literary stardom.

FF: *As a representative of Italic culture living in Canada and in the United States, were you faced with any dissimilarities between the two cultures in the reception of 'Italics'? What is the main reason behind a different acknowledgment of a new and ethnic literary tradition?*

PV: As I mentioned before, regarding the reception of my work and the notions that both Antonio and I sought to present, that of 'italics,' of a global diasporic reality, of North American rather than Canadian or U.S. realities, have had some but not enough of an impact. Canadian and U.S. Italian diasporic realities are as distant as they ever were. There is some collaboration, but territoriality reigns. There is some cross-dialogue, but proprietorship dominates. Certainly, the realities are different, but that should not preclude a more extensive dialogue on the historical, social, cultural and political relationship between the migratory groups, patterns and developments.

Although you will of course find many writers of Italian background in the U.S. that have had great success, their interests are often very distant from notions of migration or ethnicity. There is a generational distance that makes that preoccupation moot. Is it assimilation, acculturation, or simply the natural progress of cultural bonding that makes us what we are and not what our names suggest? The U.S. group like the AICW would be the Italian American Studies Association. They are more organized, include writers and academics in their conferences and meetings, publish both creative and academic works, and define themselves (as their name indicates) through their

ethnicity. Although I would say that they are more successful in their venture, having been successful in introducing Italian American studies in a number of university curricula, I would say that they too are sometimes blind to the dead-end identity traps of concepts such as *italianità* and the like. As with the AICW, I have collaborated with their press, (Bordighera Editions issued a new edition of *Bound by Distance* 20 years after its initial publication by FDU Press), participated in their conferences, and have many friends among both writers and academics.

FF: *Italian Canadian women have often been robbed of their voice. What are your personal reflections on the careers of women writers such as Mary Melfi or Mary di Michele. Are Italian Canadian women partakers in recent attempts to theorize a global diaspora of 'Italics'?*

PV: There are many Italian Canadian women writers worthy of much more attention than they have received. Mary Melfi and Mary di Michele are two that have receive the most attention. There are of course, Caterina Edwards, Marisa De Franceschi, Dorê Michelut, Licia Canton, Gianna Patriarca and too many others to name here. *Here and Now: An Anthology of Queer Italian-Canadian Writing* is a notable new anthology, edited by Licia Canton, which expands the identities inherent in the term "Italics", but which up-till-now have been unheard or subsumed under other categories. However, if we're looking for other incisive academic or theoretical works on the "global diaspora of italics," we have to look elsewhere. Most of that work is being done by researchers in England, Italy, and other parts of Europe. For example Michela Baldo's *Italian Canadian Narratives of Return: Analysing Cultural Translation in Diasporic Writing*

(2019), or Elena Anna Spagnuolo's "Italian Mothers and Italian Canadian Daughters: Using Language to Negotiate the Politics of Gender" (2019), or Carla Comellini's "Italian-Canadian Female Voices: Nostalgia and Split Identity" (2013), to name but three. It may be, however, that our expectations differ on where theorizing practice might take place. It could well be that Italian Canadian women, mostly working outside of academic environments or outside of conventional modes of "theorizing," carry out such an enterprise within the body of their creative work. Personally, I think that this is in fact the case for writers such as Dorê Michelut and Mary Melfi, others would need to be studied more in depth for their linguistic and structural approaches to determine if in fact this is the case. Always plenty of work to be done. Never a dull moment.

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