

Hungarian

1. Critical surveys

Miska, János. "A kanadai magyar irodalom két dimenziója." *Kronika* 2.11 (1976): 7-9.
 ---. "A kanadai magyar prózairásról." *Nyelvünk és Kultúránk* 49 (1982): 21-6.

2. Representative anthologies

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Nyugatalan tengerszem: amerikai magyar írók évkönyve (Restless lake: a yearbook of North American Hungarian writers). Rome: Amerikai Magyar Írók 1984. Includes poems by four Hungarian-Canadian poets.
Vándorének: nyugat-európai és tengerentúli magyar költők (The wanderer's song: Hungarian poets in Western Europe and overseas). M. Béliádi, ed. Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó 1981. Includes poems by four Hungarian-Canadian poets.

JOSEPH PIVATO

Italian-Canadian Writing: A Polysystem

Italian-Canadian writing is part of several systems which can be described in historical, social, literary and linguistic terms. Italian-Canadian writing has close ties with immigrant culture; this includes the specific experiences of Italian immigrants and the general history of world migrations. Thus this literature can be approached by way of the social sciences of literary anthropology, or the sociology of literature, or ethnic studies. In terms of the literary systems, Italian-Canadian writing can be examined as a new literature that is being evaluated by both readers and critics. In the context of Canadian literatures, Italian-Canadian writing can be explored in the light of contacts and interference with English, French and Italian literatures. In the systems of world literatures we could consider if there is an Italian literature outside of Italy.

In order to get some sense of Italian-Canadian writing in terms of polysystems theory we will briefly consider two aspects: the social-literary dimension of critical recognition, and the cultural context of the immigrant experience and oral folklore. We must also keep in mind that Italian-Canadian literature has been written and published in English, in French, in Italian and in some dialects, and thus has a linguistic complexity that would seem to lend itself to a polysystems approach.

RECEPTION

As a recognizable body of writing, Italian-Canadian literature did not exist before 1978. That year two books appeared: Pier Giorgio Di Cicco's *Roman Candles: An Anthology of Poems by Seventeen Italo-Canadian Poets*, and Frank Paci's novel, *The Italians*. The initial shock of disbelief over the publication of these books soon gave way to serendipity with the realization that a distinguishable body of work was being produced, writing that was speaking for a group of people who, up to that time, had remained silent and invisible in mainstream Canadian society. It is no small irony that in Québec Marco Micone produced the play entitled, *Gens du silence* (1979) to describe these people. We soon discovered that there were writers of Italian

background scattered across the country: Dino Minni was publishing in Vancouver, Alexandre Amprimoz in Winnipeg, Caterina Edwards in Edmonton, Frank Paci in Sault Ste. Marie, Di Cicco and Mary di Michele in Toronto, Antonino Mazza in Ottawa, Filippo Salvatore and Antonio D'Alfonso in Montréal, and many others. Some of the writers were self-consciously exploring questions of ethnic duality, retelling stories of immigrant experiences and contributing to English and French literatures in Canada and to Italian literature as well.

Several of the writers included in Di Cicco's *Roman Candles* soon published books of their own. The most notable are Mary di Michele with *Mimosa and Other Poems* (1981) and Mary Melfi with *A Bride in Three Acts* (1983). Before critical recognition came self-recognition among these writers. In an interview Frank Paci explained his motivation for writing about his Italian immigrant origins:

Yes, there was a need to preserve the accomplishments of my parents, with the accent on "serve." I had the voice which they didn't have. It's this very sense of preserving that acts as a catharsis, because as you're writing the story of your parents you're also coming to terms with your background and defining yourself in a historical context.¹

This novelist followed *The Italians* with two other novels, *Black Madonna* and *The Father*. In Québec Marco Micone followed *Gens du silence* with *Addolorata* and *Déjà l'agonie*. In Toronto Maria Ardizzi brought out three Italian novels: *Made in Italy* (1982), *Il sapore agro della mia terra* (1984), and *La Buona America* (1987). Many books of poetry appeared. Di Cicco's last book, *Virgin Science*, is his fourteenth volume. Many young writers also began to publish in new literary magazines: *Vice Versa*, *Il Caffè*, *Gamut International*, *Anthos*, as well as established reviews, *The Canadian Forum* and *Canadian Literature*.

A large number of books published in a short time seemed to create an instant Italian-Canadian literature. In typical Canadian fashion we began defensively to document this growing phenomenon in a minority literature. We produced bibliographies and collections. Various anthologies appeared: Tonino Caticchio's *La poesia italiana nel Québec* (1983), a bilingual Italian-French collection; Cacciaia and D'Alfonso's *Quêtes: Textes d'auteurs italo-québécois* (1983), and Caroline Di Giovanni's *Italian Canadian Voices: An Anthology of Poetry and Prose* (1946-1983). We gradually began to convince ourselves that an Italian-Canadian literature did truly exist. The critical reviews of many of these volumes were quite positive.

1 C.D. Minni, "An Interview with Frank G. Paci," *Canadian Literature* 106 (1985): 6.

Slowly a body of criticism was building around this literature. In May, 1981, I presented my first paper on Italian-Canadian writing at a conference in Halifax. A year later I published the first article on this topic in *Canadian Ethnic Studies*.² Other articles and reviews followed by a variety of critics. In 1984 there was a conference in Rome, Italy, on "Writing About the Italian Immigrant Experience." In Vancouver, W.H. New, editor of *Canadian Literature*, devoted issue number 106 (1985) to Italian-Canadian writing. In the Fall of 1985 a book appeared, *Contrasts: Comparative Essays on Italian-Canadian Writing*. In September, 1986, a conference on Italian-Canadian writing was held in Vancouver which lead to the founding of the Association of Italian-Canadian Writers. In March, 1988, a second conference of Italian-Canadian writers was held in Toronto. There were many smaller meetings, symposia, readings and book launchings across the country. Articles on a variety of aspects of this writing were published by academics: Sante Viselli, Francesco Loriggio, Sherry Simon, Linda Hutcheon, Enoch Padolsky, Richard Cavell, Alexandre Amprimoz and Giovanni Bonanno, and by critics: Robert Billings, Louise Longo, Jean Ethier-Blais, Jean Royer, Gilles Toupin, David Homel and Jean Blouin. Critical reviews appeared in English, French or Italian and matched the linguistic diversity of the writing itself.

This writing began to have an impact in the broader systems of the social sciences. In the late 1970s Italian-Canadian historical studies had developed at the University of Toronto as an outgrowth of the Ethnic and Immigration Studies Program. With the development in creative writing Italian-Canadian Studies could no longer be limited to immigration history and sociological studies of minority communities, but had to consider the arts as well. In many instances Italian-Canadian writers were reconstructing a forgotten past; they were trying to write an unwritten history. As members of the Italian community the writers began to tell the story of this community and to move beyond the disciplinary boundaries of academic histories. We began to see that the interference between the literature and the history is so profound that one cannot be fully understood without the other.

Italian-Canadian writing has been given some modest institutional recognition. Texts by these authors are used in some university literature courses, and students are writing masters theses on this new literature. All of these developments can only enhance the critical recognition of all the other literatures of lesser diffusion. These new literatures will take Canadian writing beyond the walls of the garrison mentality, beyond the thematics of survival and beyond the maze of English and French cultural politics.

2 Joseph Pivato, "The Arrival of Italian-Canadian Writing," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XVI.1 (1982): 127-137.

CULTURE OF IMMIGRATION

The critical reception of Italian-Canadian writing since 1978 is only part of the story. During this ten-year period the earlier history was gradually uncovered, an unrecorded story partially lost in the great migrations to the New World. This culture of immigration is a system that includes both oral and written texts, both lost and extant materials. During this early period we have Italian texts, such as Francesco Giuseppe Bressani's *Breve Relazione* (1653), A.A. Nobile's *An Anonymous Letter! Una Lettera Anonima* (1885), and Antonio Gallenga's *Episodes of My Second Life* (1884). In Toronto Francesco Gualtieri published a brief history of Italians in 1928 entitled, *We Italians: A Study in Italian Immigration in Canada*, which lists four collections of his poems on the back: *Songs of Solitude* (1920), *The Swing of the Soul* (1923), *Harbors* (1924) and *The Sonnets of Triumph* (1925). All of these books have disappeared. In Montréal Liborio Lattoni was writing and publishing poems in Italian, but the only examples of his work that we now have are three poems in English translation in Watson Kirkconnell's 1935 anthology, *Canadian Overtones*.

We are more fortunate with books from the 1940s and 1950s. Mario Duliani's *La ville sans femmes* is an account of his experiences in internment camps during World War II, and came out in Italian translation in 1946. Duliani also published a number of plays in French and introduced the plays of Pirandello to Québec theatre. His contribution to the history of Québec theatre and writing has yet to be examined in any detail.

In 1958 Elena Albani was the first Italian-Canadian woman to publish a novel, *Canada, Mia seconda patria*. Elena Albani was the nom de plume of Elena Randaccio who later brought out two more novels: *The Sound of the Harp*, in English (1976) and *Diario di una emigrante*, in Italian (1979). Other Italian language books include: Ottorino Bressani's *Non dateci lenticchie* (1962), Gianni Bartocci's *In margine a Gauguin* (1970), Giovanni Di Lillo's *Il fuoco della pira* (1976), Gianni Grohovaz's *Per ricordare le cose che ricordo* (1974). The better known book from this time is Guglielmo Vangelisti's history, *Gli Italiani in Canada* (1956).

Despite these and several other volumes by Dino Fruchi, Camillo Carli, Camillo Mencini and other writers, Italian-Canadian authors were not very well known. These writers, scattered around the country, worked in isolation and were often unaware of one another. Though using Italian they were writing outside any Italian literary context. They were not part of what was then regarded as Italian literature and they were not part of Canadian literature either. If they were part of a tradition it was the fragmented culture of immigration. The absence of a conscious cultural context is exemplified by the obscurity of their works, volumes such as Baldassare Savona's collection of poems, *Tristezza* (1961). The title means bitterness and

the poems lament the absence of any culture or literary life for Italian immigrants in Canada. After its publication in Toronto the author disappeared back to Italy.

In contrast to Savona's disappointment with Canada there is Mario Duliani who, despite his internment camp experiences during the war, defends Canada in his book, *La ville sans femmes*. Duliani's French works also received much more attention than those of the Italian language writers. *La ville sans femmes* was published by Société des éditions Pascal of Montréal in 1945, the same publisher and the same year as Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion*. The back cover of Duliani's book has a publisher's notice advertizing the publication of Gabrielle Roy's first novel. Since Duliani was a journalist in Montréal he was probably better known in Québec at the time than Roy. Duliani's case simply contrasts the almost total obscurity of the other Italian-Canadian writers that I mentioned.

These individual writers do not see themselves as part of any literature. They are simply trying to chronicle the experience of immigration. While they are not conscious of contributing to any literature they are aware of being part of the long history of Italian migration. The small audience for these books were other immigrants, the same readers who subscribed to the Italian language papers in Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver.

Italian language papers, *La Verità*, *Il Cittadino Canadese*, *L'eco d'Italia*, *Il Corriere Canadese*, and others, indirectly supported Italian-Canadian writing, although most did little to directly encourage creative writing. Italian newspapers in Canada have always been concerned with political and economic issues, with social problems and with sports, but not with culture. Culture has always been seen as high culture, that found in the museums and art galleries in Italy, and not that found among immigrants of peasant origins. Until recently, therefore, the oral traditions of these immigrants have been ignored.

Italian language writing in Canada was only discovered with the development of English and French writing by Italian-Canadian authors. These younger writers, all born in the 1940s and 1950s, were educated at least in part in Canada and published in one of the official languages. They were not dependent on a small ethnic audience but were addressing the general reader in Canada. In the process of discovering themselves they also discovered the literature of the earlier Italian language writers. The forgotten books of Elena Albani were resurrected and parts of Duliani's novel were translated into English. The growth of French and English writing among Italian-Canadians also encouraged new Italian language writers: Romano Peticarini in Vancouver, Maria Ardizzi in Toronto and Elettra Bedon in Montréal. The different languages and literary systems supported one another because many writers were bilingual or trilingual.

The different strains of Italian-Canadian writing came together: the older generation, the English writers, the French writers, and the new Italian language writers. The question is often asked, what unites this writing in three languages into a literature? There are several elements which make this a recognizable body of writing, a system. All the authors share an Italian background which is reflected in the texts. Much of the writing deals with the situation of Italians in Canada. This may involve the experience of immigration and adjustment, the ethnic duality, the conflict between parents and children, or between men and women due to different cultures. Themes and motifs in many works reflect the folklore from Italian rural, peasant culture. The patterns in the works often deal with migration or reverse migration, that is, the return journey to Italy. The problems of finding an Italian culture in Canada is sometimes explored in questions over the use of languages: English, French, Italian, Italian dialects, education, self-determination and the position of women. The authors consciously reject the negative stereotypes of the Italian often projected in the American media. These are not seen as part of the common experience of Italians in Canada. Since the works try to honestly depict the lives of immigrants they tend to be in the realist tradition of narrative and drama. There is little experimentation with style, but the use of language often shows a consciousness of different linguistic codes. The radical aspect of these authors is that they are speaking for an immigrant population who never had a voice; they are in fact giving these people their own voice in three languages.

Let us look briefly at some of these elements and see how they can be examined through a polysystems approach. We can begin with the return journey. The return journey to Italy has been both a thematic preoccupation in the texts and an actual historical event in the lives of many Italian-Canadian writers. As an actual event the return trip to Italy stimulated many writers to focus on aspects of the Italian immigrant experience. Novelist Frank Paci explained this important episode in his own self-discovery as a writer:

In 1972, twenty years after my family had emigrated, I went back to Italy — my first and only trip back so far. I didn't realize it at the time, but this trip was the catalyst that finally made me see that I had to come to terms with my Italian background before I could write about anything else... The trip dramatically impressed upon me the wide gulf between the Canadian and the Italian cultures and the depth of my heritage, which I had been too naive and stupid to appreciate. The trip also made me appreciate my parents... When I started to write *The Italians* I had in the back of my mind to celebrate my parents and others like them, to thank them for what they had done. This opened up a wealth of deep feeling that I had never handled in the other books. (Minni 6)

We find similar testimonies from other writers: Mary di Michele, Marco Micone, Filippo Salvatore, Antonio D'Alfonso and Dore Michelut. These people had been raised in Canada and had been educated in the English or French culture, yet as writers they found it necessary to seek out the culture of their Italian origins. The first return trip to Italy and all that it represented spiritually, psychologically, culturally and linguistically becomes almost a rite of passage for these writers. Mary di Michele tells us about the changes her first trip brought about. "Because of my very intense and detailed childhood memories my body remembered things that I did not consciously remember... My Italian identity started to come out more and more. By the end of the summer I started to dream in Italian."³

This intense experience of the reverse migration is reflected in di Michele's collection of poems, *Mimosa and Other Poems* (1981) and in many other poems on the Italian connection.

The return trip caused Pier Giorgio Di Cicco not only to write about the Italian-Canadian duality but to seek out other Italian-Canadian writers. The result was *Roman Candles*, the first anthology of Italian-Canadian writing, that encouraged further writing and publishing. In the Preface of that 1978 volume Di Cicco tells us,

In 1974 I returned to Italy for the first time in twenty-odd years. 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. It became clear to me that they had something immediately and emotionally at stake with their environment. And that phenomenon was something I had had to construct at every effort to feel relevant in an English country.⁴

Is Pier Giorgio Di Cicco expressing a form of nostalgia here? It is a sentiment that appears in many of his poems — a longing for Italy.

This desire to re-establish the link with Italy is expressed in many, many texts by Italian-Canadian writers. It occurs so often that it can be described not just as a major theme but as an obsession. Elsewhere I have examined the structure of the return journey in Maria Ardizzi's Italian novel, *Made in Italy*, in Frank Paci's *Black Madonna*, in Caterina Edwards' *The Lion's*

3 Mary di Michele, "An immigrant daughter and a female writer," *Vice Versa, Magazine Transculture* 1.5-6 (1984): 21.

4 *Roman Candles* (Toronto: Hounslow Press 1978) 9.

Mouth, Dino Minni's short stories and in several other texts.⁵ Are these authors expressing a form of Italian nostalgia in these Canadian works? *Nostalgia* is a word with many meanings in Italian. It is a word that occurs very often.

FOLK CULTURE

When we examine the basis of this preoccupation with Italy as the first and ultimate home, we find that the sources are in Italian folk culture, especially as expressed in folk music. The themes and songs of nostalgia are from the music of the rural, peasant culture because it is from these people that the immigrants have come for the last hundred years. Italian-Canadian writing has links with this oral tradition and little or no link with the elite literary tradition of Italian cities.

The Southern Italian peasants have a long history of migration to other parts of Italy, to Northern Europe and to North and South America in order to find work and a better life. Among these people there developed a culture of the migrant worker and of the family he left behind. A whole repertoire of traditional songs and stories evolved about the feelings and the experiences of temporary migration and of permanent emigration. Often there was the element of death in the background.

In a typical song, which is often a poem put to music, the speaker promises his sweetheart, or his wife, that he will return, or he promises his mother that he will come home, or he promises Italia (more often his *paese* or hometown) that he will be back. In many songs the three overlap and merge; a love song to a sweetheart could be a love song to a mother, and a love song to a mother becomes a song to *il paese*, the hometown. In Italian the word, *nostalgia* has all of these associations and many more.

The popular song, "Terra Straniera," begins as a love song to a girl back home. It addresses her beauty, her hair, her eyes and her kisses. The song then addresses the old mother of the emigrant, and ends with a declaration of love for "Italia mia." The final lines of the refrain combines these three loves:

Mamma, moriro di nostalgia
L'amore del paese e della Mamma
E un gran fiamma che brucia mio cuore.

These traditional themes and structures are part of the culture and history of the Italian immigrant. Italian-Canadian writers have had to deal with this culture, now almost lost, and with the history of a people, now almost forgotten. Italy has changed; the economic miracle of the European Economic Community has made emigration from Italy no longer a dire necessity but just another alternative. Italy too has become Americanized so that North American rock and roll music has diminished the tradition of popular *bell canto* of Italian folk music. This culture is kept alive by many of the fifty million Italians outside Italy.

In Canada this culture of the immigrant has come out in the work of Italian-Canadian writers and has become part of Canadian literature. We can see this in an early poem by Pier Giorgio Di Cicco,

Donna Italiana

Lady, I cannot help myself in you. There is the
song of three thousand years, of little old men with the
eyes of saints, they walk on the hillside in the mid-day heat,
ghosts, wishing me well. They are my grandfathers and my
great-grandfathers,

and the ancient men that kept my ribs burning at Monte Cassino, in the
air above my brother's corpse, in the shelled house in Arezzo, in

Rimini, where I sat spread-eagled on the sand; they kept the ribs
burning through the cold Montreal nights...

... Only you persuade me that the hills were white. Only you
persuade me that the ribs burn less and only when a woman is
the country that I love.⁶

Like the love song, "Terra Straniera," this love poem appears to be addressed to a woman, but instead the love object is Italia. Without the rhetorical hyperbole of the Italian song, it is a Canadian love poem to Italy. I cannot imagine someone writing a love poem to Canada with such intimacy.

The Di Cicco poem demonstrates another aspect of this nostalgia tradition; with the longing to return home there is always the suggestion of death. Immigrant songs like "Terra Straniera," show that among Italian immigrants the nostalgia for home has been expressed in a tradition of bitter-sweet literature and music.

5 "The Return Journey in Italian-Canadian Literature," *Canadian Literature* 106 (1985): 169-176.

6 *The Tough Romance* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1979) 68.

Terra straniera quanta malinconia
 Io penso la notte ed alla mia casetta
 Alla mia vecchietta che sempre aspetta
 Mamma, moriro di nostalgia

This classic song by Narciso Parigi opens another *Terra Straniera*, a Canadian play by Caterina Edwards in which all the immigrant characters plan to move back to Italy. This drama is a recent contribution in the long tradition of music and literature that expresses not just a nostalgia for Italy but an obsession with returning home. This preoccupation with *il paese* is clearly articulated in many immigrant songs: "Tornerei," "La porti un bacione a Firenze," and "Canto del Emigrante" which also associates death with nostalgia:

Emigrante per un sogno d'amore
 credevo di morir di nostalgia
 tornare finalmente da te.

This association is a powerful undercurrent that determines the focus of the love song. This is the bitter edge in the many songs devoted to mamma: "Oì cara mamma," "Mamma mia vieni mi incontro," and others.

In the most famous "Mamma" song by Luciano Tajoli the words of the refrain are, "Sei tu la vita e per la vita non ti lascio mai più." Love of the mamma and of home are equated to life itself. Exile can be death, the absence of these from life. Death is in the mind of the immigrant; there is the fear of dying away from home, of being lost and forgotten. The happy return home can mean coming to the end of the journey, like Odysseus. It can mean the end of the immigrant's journey, but also the end of the journey of life. Coming home can mean to embrace death on familiar ground.

The happy songs of nostalgia of the 1950s always had this bitter edge. Now this dark side has come out in the writing of Italian-Canadian authors. In Caterina Edwards' *Terra Straniera*, Lucio goes home to die; in Maria Ardizzi's *Made in Italy*, Vanni dies back in Italy. In Marco Micone's play, *Déjà l'agonie*, the immigrant father takes his Canadian-born son back to the home village only to find it a ghost town. The death of the father and mother precede the act of reverse migration of Marie Barone in Frank Paci's *Black Madonna*.

A brief review of the social history of Italian immigrants will give the context for this association between death and nostalgia. Most Italian-Canadian writers of this generation grew up in the 1950s and 1960s and heard the many Italian songs of nostalgia on radio, records, film and television. The words and themes of these songs added to the strong Italian

sentimentality about the home town, grandparents and other family. As these writers grew older and became partially assimilated into the mainstream of Canadian society they may have lost the consciousness of this experience but it remained on the subconscious level. The statements by Mary di Michele, Frank Paci, Pier Giorgio Di Cicco and others suggest that the images of Italy, the oral folk culture, are powerful interferences in their work.

The tradition of the return journey and the image of mamma have been incorporated into Canadian writing by Di Cicco, Dino Minni, Antonino Mazza, Frank Paci and others. Italian women writers have been ambivalent on this subject. Mary Melfi rejects the traditional view of women found among immigrants. Mary di Michele can choose to follow the structure of the return journey in a poem about her great-grandfather, but uses irony to undercut it. "A Streetcar Named Nostalgia" recounts how the grandfather emigrated to Canada to work, but hurried back to Italy. But forty years later, when Mary is eventually born, the family must again emigrate to Canada.⁷ In another poem di Michele subverts the values of life and death, and sees returning as a kind of death for a woman. "How to kill your father" deals with the return trip to Italy.

You are alone on the highway to the sun.
 Your north american education
 has taught you how to kill a father,
 but you are walking down an Italian
 way, so you will surrender
 and visit him in the hospital
 where you will be accused
 of wishing his death
 in wanting a life
 for yourself. (di Michele 36)

Di Michele's return trip to Italy makes her realize that she must free herself from the old order both as a woman and as a writer. The metaphor of killing the father is appropriate; for a man it would be the death of the mamma. It suggests that a new order must be found, a new accommodation between the old world and the new. In trying to deal with inherited themes and structures Italian-Canadian writers have had to translate them into English-Canadian or French-Canadian codes. This may involve finding a new language or languages in order to give a voice to the once voiceless immigrant.⁸

7 *Bread and Chocolate* (Ottawa: Oberon Press 1980) 24.

8 Joseph Pivato, "Constantly Translating: The Challenge for Italian-Canadian Writers," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* XIV.1 (1987): 60-76.

This brief examination of Italian-Canadian writing has tried to demonstrate how a polysystems approach can help to structure the analysis of various systems that are in operation in this minority literature. The reception of this writing in Canada, the peculiar culture of immigration, and the inherited folklore of the old country all play a role in determining the nature of this literature, but are only some of the systems in a complex of systems. The interactions of these systems have parallels in the development of other ethnic minority writing in Canada.

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