ITALIAN CANADIAN WRITING: THE DIFFERENCE A FEW DECADES MAKE*

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The article explores the changes in the last 40 years both in the language of Canadian ethnic literature itself and in its authors' self-identifying as Italian Canadian in light of the developments of those years both in 'identity politics' and in Canada's national sense of selfhood. En route it tests the usefulness of various labels used, over time, to identify these writings against the literary corpus produced for almost thirty years now by Nino Ricci, born and raised in Canada, by Italian immigrant parents.

Scrittura italo-canadese: pochi decenni possono fare la differenza
Il contributo analizza i cambiamenti che negli ultimi quaranta anni si sono verificati nel linguaggio, utilizzato per definire la letteratura etnica canadese, e nel modo in cui gli autori si sono identificati come italo-canadesi a fronte sia delle mutate politiche identitarie sia degli sviluppi nel senso nazionale di identità canadese, susseguitisi in quell'arco temporale. Per testare la validità delle varie etichette utilizzate via via per definire tale letteratura, viene esaminato il *corpus* letterario, ormai trentennale, prodotto da Nino Ricci, scrittore nato e cresciuto in Canada da genitori immigranti di origine italiana.

To Begin With a Story

In the mid-1990s – in another century and in another country – I was invited to participate in a panel dedicated to the topic of "Ethnicity and Writing/ Reading" at the annual conference of the Modern Language Association of

* This article began life as the Pugliese-Zorzi Italian Canadian Studies Lecture presented in February 2018 to the Canadian Studies Program and the University College Alumni, University of Toronto. What probably only members of my own family know is my personal academic debt to Olga Zorzi Pugliese, Professor Emeritus of Italian at the same university. Without her early example, not only would I not have had such a positive female professional model, but I wouldn't even have been allowed to go to university in the first place. It was because I could point to her – another Italian-Canadian female like myself – and her scholarly success that my parents permitted me to continue my studies and be the first in my family to attend university.

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Oltreoceano. Geografie e letterature: luoghi dell'emigrazione, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro, Anna Pia De Luca, Daniela Ciani Forza, 15 (2019).

America. Given that the other speakers' names alone apparently justified their being invited to speak (they were: Sabine Goelz, Daniel Boyarin, and Homi Bhabha), I was at first feeling somewhat self-conscious, and wondered if, with a name like Linda Hutcheon, I would be expected to talk about the secret ethnic life of the Scots in Canada. The organizer of the panel, however, knew that I had gone from being Linda Bortolotti to being Linda Hutcheon in 1970 when I married. On May 30th of that year, my ethnic identity had become encrypted, silenced – unless announced by choice. My husband tells me that for years I would introduce myself as «Linda Hutcheon» and then add at once, «but I'm really Italian». In that conference panel over twenty years later, I jokingly called myself a secret, hidden, or «crypto-ethnic» (Hutcheon. "Crypto-Ethnicity": 28).

But I have to say that I do self-identify (and always have) as a happily hyphenated, if crypto-Italian-Canadian. I only call attention to this because, by that point in my life, it had already been a few decades since I had first experienced that strange shock of recognition upon reading a work of Italian Canadian writing. As Joseph Pivato described the same experience, it was like hearing a familiar voice (*Echo*: 102). For me, this happened when I read the volume edited by Pier Giorgio di Cicco called *Roman Candles*: *Poems by 17 Italo-Canadian Poets*. This appeared in 1978, the same year as Frank Paci's novel simply entitled *The Italians* – my second encounter with this 'familiar voice'. And I kept hearing it over the next years.

It was Joseph Pivato, I believe, who gave the first academic conference paper on Italian Canadian writing, and that was a few years later, in 1981. The '80s, in fact, were the years in which the cultural and literary entity designated as 'Italian Canadian' was made visible and audible to the rest of the nation. This was when new books by writers like Marco Micone, Maria Ardizzi, Caterina Edwards, Mary Melfi, and others to began to appear. The first anthologies were created at this time (e.g., Caccia and D'Alfonso; Minni); then came the first survey and first critical study to be published (Pivato. *Contrasts*); conferences were held across the country; and the well-established scholarly journal called *Canadian Literature* dedicated its volume 106 (Fall 1985) to Italian Canadian writers. Robin Healey organized the first library exhibition at the University of Toronto called *The Italian Connection: 25 Years of Canadian Literature and Italian Translation: 1963-1988*. Simultaneously, television, radio and the mainstream print media began paying attention to these and other writers. Things had begun to happen.

The Association of Italian-Canadian Writers had been founded in 1986; the proceedings were published in 1990 as *Writers in Transition* (Minni and Foschi Ciampolini). The Mariano Elia Chair for Italian Canadian Studies came into

existence at York University, and before we knew it, courses were being given and dissertations were being written on Italian Canadian writing. By the start of the 1990s, Nino Ricci had won the Governor General's Award – and many other prizes – for his novel, *Lives of the Saints*. The 1990s saw the further cultural consolidation of Italian Canadian writing as a cultural entity: more anthologies (e.g., Di Giovanni; De Gasperi, Seccia, Canton and Mirolla; De Franceschi. *Pillars of Lace*; Pivato. *The Anthology of Italian-Canadian Writing*), and more special issues of journals. In 2000, Guernica Editions began its Writers Series of monographs on Canadian writers, many of whom were Italian Canadian, thanks to the pioneering editorial work of Antonio D'Alfonso and Joseph Pivato. ECW Press included Italian Canadian writers in their series called "Canadian Writers and Their Works". Italian Canadian literature had arrived.

In the early years of the 1980s, the academic literary critics among us assigned ourselves multiple tasks to undertake; as Francesco Loriggio has noted: we had to «name the texts, disseminate them, and, at the same time, at this particular stage of the game, define them, situate them within the literary agenda of the century and the debate it has fostered» (21). This meant editing, collecting, translating, anthologizing; it meant both writing for scholarly journals and reviewing in the daily newspaper. My own engagement with these particular tasks involved the positioning of these writings within Canadian literary history. I had been asked to write the chapter on the novel in English from 1972-1984 for the fourth volume of the literary reference work called *The Literary History of Canada* (Hutcheon. "The Novel"). Clearly, since I was going to be writing this chapter immediately after 1984, there wasn't going to be any comfortable temporal distancing here – no helpful filtering-out process over time – that would help me decide which works to discuss: that is, which I thought were going to last and thus become part of the 'canon' of English Canadian literature.

Like most Canadian critics in those years, I had become increasingly self-conscious about the normative process of canon-formation: at the infamous Calgary Conference on the Canadian Novel in 1978, a gathering of publishers, teachers, and critics had drawn up a list of the 100 best Canadian novels (see Steele) – and we were well on our way (whether we knew it or not) to privileging works that worked within already accepted strategies and ideologies. I found myself wondering where novels like those of Frank Paci or, later, Nino Ricci, written outside the dominant cultural traditions of English Canada, would fit in this canon.

The fact was that, always relatively diverse, the Canadian literary scene had changed radically in the '70s and '80s, with the coming of writing age of a generation of immigrants or children of immigrants. This didn't simply mean, as Mar-

garet Atwood had put it in her afterword to *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, that all Canadians are immigrants at heart (62) – though, aside from the Indigenous peoples, that is literally true. Canonical figures like Susanna Moodie or Frederick Philip Grove were immigrants too. But in the 1970s and '80s, even more new names, even more different names, names like Joy Kogawa, M.G. Vassanji, Harold Sonny Ladoo, Henry Kreisel or Maria Ardizzi began to appear on the covers of literary works published in Canada.

Because Canada has changed so much in the last decades, we may need to remind ourselves that at the end of the Second World War, 50% of the Canadian population (of 12 million) had claimed descent from the British Isles and 30% from France; 40 years later, by the late 1980s, our population had more than doubled, and over 5.5 million of the 26 million were immigrants, mostly not from the UK or France. Many of the Italians who had come earlier in the century arrived (and left) as temporary migrant workers, sources of cheap (and often exploited) labour, rather than as permanent settlers. After the war that changed and many came as settlers, with their families. By the late 1980s, Italians were the 4th largest ethnic group (after English, French and German) in Canada; this is despite continuing, if more discreet, efforts by the government to keep the population predominantly British, French, or at least northwest European.

But even in the 1960s, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism had found itself inescapably bound to study a significant third demographic element in Canada, and therefore it had reported on not only the 'official languages' but what was called 'The Contribution of the Other Ethnic Groups' – that is, their contribution to the cultural enrichment of Canada. It therefore wasn't long before Canada was no longer considered only a bi-ethnic and bilingual country – as if it ever should have been, given the presence of our many Indigenous peoples.

The Utility of Labels

What were we going to *call* the literature written by these 'other ethnic groups', though? We always seem to need labels – if only for heuristic purposes. It is not just literary critics who use labels as markers to help us organize cultural phenomena; reviewers, readers and even writers seem to want them too. I'll come back to this drive to designate and differentiate, but for the moment I would like to examine the various choices of labels that have been tried out over the decades. Another historical reminder, though: these were the days of strong Canadian cultural nationalism, and so the primary debates were over what constituted 'Canadian' literature writ large, even if that discussion might

end up being at the expense of those works that didn't quite fit: labels come in handy to *exclude*, as well as *include*. In 1998, Pasquale Verdicchio, looking back at those years of Canadian nationalism, felt that Italian Canadian writers had, in effect, been silenced or at least reduced to marginal status. In his words: «Everyone is conditioned to expect something from so-called 'ethnic' writers. Unless the expectation is fulfilled by the product, it will create yet another region of marginality within an already marginal cultural space» (D'Alfonso and Verdicchio 27; see also Pivato, *Echo*: 79 on this topic).

Clearly, therefore, it mattered to the writers themselves what label was used to describe them and their works. Manifestly, the term 'Italian-Canadian', with or without the hyphen, was sufficiently descriptive on one level. But beyond that, was it also to be called 'immigrant writing'? In a long and influential article written in 1988 called "So Great a Heritage as Ours': Immigration and the Survival of the Canadian Polity", Robert Harney made an interesting distinction between the words 'ethnic' and 'immigrant' as descriptive terms. He wrote: «immigrant conjures up the thresholds of acculturation while ethnic implies a permanent quality of otherness» (68). He went on to say: «to be called ethnic in Canada is to be called less, as in 'ethnic writer', and marginal, as in 'ethnic enclave'» (68). In 1988, 'ethnic' was certainly not considered 'mainstream'.

However, people soon began to ask: did not English Canadians or Québécois also actually represent separate 'ethnicities' within what we would come to call 'multiculturalism' in those same years? The answer for some was: yes. But English and French were deemed ethnic 'majority' writing, and all the others were relegated to ethnic 'minority' status (Padolsky). Language plays some role here, of course, but within three generations, ethnolinguists tell us, the language of the street becomes the language of the cradle (Harney 83). And so, most of what was considered 'ethnic minority' writing was indeed written in English or French. So, was this ethnic majority/minority distinction either useful or meaningful?

In post-colonial Australia, as in Canada, the term 'migrant' writing gained a certain currency in the 1990s (Gunew 10), but 'migrant' carried (for many people) negative connotations of transitoriness, of divided loyalties, of possible nostalgia for a past elsewhere. Another term used at the time in both literary and sociological circles was 'literatures of lesser diffusion' – which sounded much more descriptive and had the advantage of pointing to important *institutional* considerations of both production and consumption: 'lesser diffusion' signaled a publishing issue – fewer of these writers were being published – but it was also a reception issue (fewer books by these writers were being bought and read). But (and here was the worry), did the word 'lesser' (like 'minority') imply a question of numbers or also status; was it quantity or also quality?

After the passing of the Multiculturalism Act in 1988, it was probably inevitable that the critical term 'multicultural literature' would gain currency – and, of course, face critique. For some, it conjured up the fear of homogenization at the very time when individual groups – Italian Canadians among them – had achieved so much: by then, they had their own cultural centres, media, heritage language programs, and so on. In other words, the firm cultural specificity of these groups provoked political resistance against threats of homogenization.

In order to understand how this came about, we need to broaden our perspective on the cultural context of the '70s and '80s, for these were the years that saw – in the Western world more generally – the demand for what was called the 'recognition of difference'. Whether that 'difference' be defined in terms of gender, sexuality, race, or ethnicity, people came together and rallied beneath its banner in order to «assert hitherto denied identities» (107), as Nancy Fraser put it. People now sought both public recognition of their different voices and also control of their cultural representation within local and international arenas. In the academy, feminism, critical race studies, queer theory, even postmodernism – all came out of this period, and the shorthand term for this time's new ethical and political charge was 'identity politics'. By the end of the twentieth century, though, there had been a drastic shift in the meaning of this 'politics of recognition'. As it had earlier in the twentieth century, 'identity politics' once again became associated with ethnic cleansing and even genocide in many parts of the world; the recognition of difference fueled (and still fuels) many global social conflicts. Instead of respect and peaceful interaction within our increasingly pluralizing and hybridizing global cultural context, we have witnessed greater intolerance and chauvinism, as group identities have become simplified and reified and their norms universalized (Fraser 108). Sometimes this has been in the name of religion, sometimes gender, sometimes ethnicity.

Because of this historical shift in the political and ethical weight of 'identity politics' – from self-affirmation to something considerably more sinister in its fixity – it isn't surprising that within the first decade of the twenty-first century, a new critical term was being sought in Canada too to replace the others adopted and discarded over time (that is, immigrant, ethnic, ethnic minority, migrant, and even multicultural literature). The new term appears to have been 'diasporic' and for many, its implied emphasis on diasporic affiliations 'within' a community held the promise of liberation from the notion of being subordinate or second class in another, host country (Ty 99). This was a shift of focus. What Lily Cho has called 'the turn to diaspora' has meant that this word, usually associated in the past with the dispersed Jewish and Armenian peoples, has been broadened to refer to any «scattering of peoples who are nonetheless connected by a sense of a homeland, imaginary or otherwise» (12).

Diasporic peoples, then, are those who do not live in their homeland, yet retain some collective, shared notions about that homeland. As Eleanor Ty and others have explored in considerable detail, some of these peoples *had* to leave their homeland; others 'chose' to do so – though it may not have felt like much of a choice, given social and economic conditions (98). Within these two kinds of dispersions, there are historical or 'old' diasporas brought about by the early oppressions of slavery and indenture, as well as by more or less forced economic migration (and many Italian Canadians fit into this latter category); there are also newer displacements and dispersions caused by continuing natural and human-made catastrophes as well as by the transnational cosmopolitanism of our mobile global order (Cho 22). Fleeing persecution, however, obviously makes for a different sense of 'homeland' than does choosing a better economic or political life for one's family, but exile and isolation can obviously be experienced in either case.

To open a significant parenthesis here, it is important to note one of the political fallouts of this recent 'turn to diaspora'. As Lily Cho points out, indigenous writer and scholar Lee Maracle has reminded us that the very concept of diaspora can be seen as valorizing migration and mobility – and therefore it shares a lot with colonialism in its implicit devaluing of indigenous claims and cultures (qtd. in Cho 28, n.1.)

I return, though, to this idea of the very need to label, and I do so in order to raise the issue of the possible functions of labeling. If the use of the term 'diaspora' is not seen as liberating, earlier the use of 'ethnic minority' was rightly seen as limiting. In each case, however, given the cultural politics of the (different) times, the label chosen aimed at being descriptive of not just the literature, but of its relationship to a perceived dominant culture – seen as 'majority' in the case of 'minority' or as non-diasporic mainstream. It is this implicit comparative dimension that I want to call into question here in order to foreground the (needless) evaluative implications of these labels.

A Test Case: The Literary Corpus of Nino Ricci

First, I want to explore the usefulness of such labels over time by looking at specific works of the actual literature they have been used to designate. My test case is the literary *corpus* produced over almost three decades now by Nino Ricci, born and raised in Canada, of Italian immigrant parents – just as I was. But he can have no '*crypto*-Italian' identity; his name marks his ethnicity openly. In the heady years of 'identity politics', in the late 1980s and into the 1990s, when Italian Canadian writing was being recognized and even celebrated,

Ricci's Vittorio Innocente trilogy mapped in fine detail the terrain, first, of migration, then immigration, and finally the return to the homeland. The familiar *Bildungsroman* format of the three novels allowed readers to trace the protagonist's journey from his childhood in Italy through to his growing up in Canada and then to his return to an Italy that, he learns, is the product of both memory and nostalgia.

In the process, the cultural negotiations into which both Ricci and his protagonist are forced are complex ones. In some ways, they are the least problematic and the least problematized in the first book of the trilogy, *Lives of the Saints*, published in 1990. A story of migration and of the coming of age of a naive young boy, it traces the journey from an Italian village, ironically named Valle del Sole, to Canada in the post-war years, when the boy's father, Mario, leaves his family temporarily in order to go to work in the new world and, in time, to make a new life for them all. The emotional (and to some extent sociological) focus of the novel is on Vittorio's mother, Cristina, left behind in the village. Through the child's eyes, we come to understand that she has become pregnant – not by her absent husband, obviously, but by a stranger, a 'blue-eyed' man. The clash of values of the old-world villagers and the modern rebellious Cristina drives her to leave Valle del Sole and head to Canada – though initially it isn't clear whether she is going to her husband or to the 'blue-eyed' man. She dies on the ship while giving birth to the blue-eyed Rita, Vittorio's stepsister, and the children are eventually placed in the care of their father.

The fraught cultural negotiations between old-world and new-world values take centre stage in the second novel of the trilogy, *In a Glass House*, published in 1993. The story of migration changes into one of immigration, for the depressive and lonely young Vittorio, his moody, anxious, inarticulate father, and the young Rita, the constant and living reminder of Mario's adulterous wife. The novel's portrayal of the dislocated Italian farming community in southwestern Ontario is a harsh and unsentimental one of an ethnic group alienated from the others around them and torn from within by conflicts between generations. As Vittorio becomes anglicized to Victor and tries to leave behind him all that makes him feel 'different' from mainstream Canadian culture, he moves into his university years and teaches in Nigeria for a while, returning only on the news of his father's death.

The final installment of this narrative, *Where She Has Gone*, appeared in 1997; it places Victor in Toronto, an MA student in his 20s who has finally found a way to both feel and articulate his emotions. It would be an understatement, however, to say that his identity issues have been solved. He and his stepsister both return to Italy and the terrain of the first novel, only to discover that there is no Truth (capital T) to be found about their past or their mother's;

there are only multiple versions of (small t) truths. The child born en route to Canada, Rita of the blue eyes, is both a symbol of cultural and family contamination (for the Italian villagers) and the epitome of new-world multicultural hybridity (Mullen. "Neither Here Nor There": 7, 45). Victor, we learn, becomes a writer. After a suicide attempt, he turns to writing:

> I set things down, placing them one after another like links in a chain that might finally pull me back to the world, though there remain always those things, perhaps the most important ones, that are not quite captured or that are held back, where ability fails or where every fibre rebels at the betrayal of putting a thing into words (*Where She Has Gone*: 320)

He continues: «Language seems sometimes such a crude tool to have devised, obscuring as much as it reveals» (320) – but it's all he – and we – have.

What will he write about after telling the story – in three parts – that we've just read? Given the presence of a certain amount of autobiographical reference in the trilogy, we might speculate that as a writer Victor might follow the trajectory of Nino Ricci. So, let's examine that trajectory. I think it would be fair to say that Ricci's fourth novel, entitled *Testament*, published in 2003, wasn't quite what the critics were expecting. Instead of another story of migration, immigration or return to the Italian homeland, Ricci gave them four different narrative perspectives on… Jesus. But critics are not easily put off the scent, as you may know: one claimed to see in this work's protagonist the trilogy's Vittorio – «his hesitancy, his yearning, his aloofness, his unrootedness» (Burns) – and another saw in Mary Magdalene an echo of Cristina, the adulterous mother in *Lives of the Saints*. While these assessments aren't necessarily wrong, it does feel as if the critics are trying very hard to make links where differences might be more to the point – at least for this reader.

The break with the Italian thematic material of the trilogy having been made (rather ostentatiously), I feel as if Ricci could return to a now familiar Italian-Canadian male graduate student protagonist, this time in his 30s and named Alex (he resists Alessandro). Despite this Anglo-sounding shortened first name, his surname – one he says even he can't pronounce – is coded as distinctly Italian: Fratarchangeli. The setting of this 2008 novel, called *The Origin of Species*, is no longer Toronto, but Montreal in the mid-1980s, in the fractious years of Bill 101 on French language rights. While Alex's Italianness isn't front and centre, it sits constantly (and – to me – sits uncomfortably) in the background, something to be resisted, along with what he calls the «last shackles of the Catholic Church» (Part 1, Chapter 2). He may eat every day at a place called Casa Italia, owned by people from Molise, like his parents, but he considers himself «Italian and not Italian. Not really» (Part 2, Chapter 6).

Like his mother, he is what he thinks of as «un-Latin» (Part 2, Chapter 2), phlegmatic, (in his words) the «WASPiest Italian you'll ever meet» (Part 3, Chapter 6); he also comes to feel he is, again in his words, «mongrel through and through» (Part 3, Chapter 5) – not a pure Italian.

Much of the book is about his interactions with Québécois, Spanish-American, and Swedish friends. When Italians other than his family are mentioned, they are often dismissed as «overdressed Italian girls on the lam from their nineteenth-century parents and gold-chained Ginos who drove up in muscle cars» (Part 3, Chapter 8) – in other words, what he calls «everything he had fled from back home» (Part 3, Chapter 8). He has avoided involvement with Italian young women for fear of finding himself, as he puts it, «bound up in a web of soul-strangling obligations he would never have got clear of or paralyzed with ethnic shame» (Part 3 Chapter 8). Adapting Sander Gilman's term, what we might call this Italian «self-hatred» (Gilman) isn't new to Alex: he tells us that «Most of his childhood [...] had been a matter of not liking things much, what he was, where he'd come from» (Part 3, Chapter 9).

The Origin of Species once again won for Ricci the Governor General's Award for Fiction. My brief discussion of Alex's fraught relations with his ethnicity touches on only one part of a long and complex novel that ranges geographically from Sweden to the Galapagos and thematically from Darwin and the impossibility of «trying to separate bloodlines» (Part 3, Chapter 5) through to disability issues, from the Québécois language laws to the perils of paternity. Its fictional world mirrors a real world in crisis – with AIDS and Chernobyl lurking in the background. The protagonist has been aptly described by his creator as someone «who has raised the cultivation of dysfunctional relationships to the level of an art form» (https://ninoricci.com/book/origin-of-species). And a big part of this comes from his inability to come to terms with himself, not to mention his family, and thus with his Italianness.

In 2009, the year after this novel was published, Ricci contributed a volume to Penguin's *Extraordinary Canadians* series – and it was the one on Pierre Elliott Trudeau. (Trudeau was mentioned in the previous novel, since Alex used to walk by his Montreal house on the way to his appointments with his therapist.) But from the start, Ricci's biography is framed in his own and his immigrant parents' response to Trudeau. Leaving it to the reader to figure out (from Ricci's name) that his parents came from Italy, he tells us that he grew up believing that «the true height of being Canadian was to be British» (Chapter 1). Those like him, from what he now generalizes as the 'immigrant boonies' had never actually felt 'Canadian' until they heard Trudeau speak. In Ricci's words, over the years:

> What grew clear in this was that Trudeau remained a figure with whom so many of us continued to feel a peculiar sense of engagement, even if we hadn't quite finished with him. It was also clear that this lingering connection had as much to do with what we needed to see in him as what he was (Chapter 1).

He goes on to add: «If he hadn't existed, we would have had to invent him. In many ways, of course, we did» (Chapter 1).

The biographer's point of reference for his narrative is the immigrant or, as he puts it, «all those in the grey zone of the not-quite included» (Chapter 2); for them, Trudeau's ascent to power meant the end (in his terms) of «an old boys' WASP hegemony» (Chapter 2), for he was a mix of French and English, which made him somewhat like them. As Ricci says, «reflection on a dual heritage is very familiar to the children of immigrants, who grow up fighting dual claims in almost every arena» (Chapter 3). Certainly, this is the terrain, both ethnic and emotional, of the trilogy and even *The Origin of Species*, but it is much less fraught. In its now more generalized articulation, the immigrant experience appears less problematic, or perhaps just more accepted. There is no talk of Italian Canadians here, only immigrants in general.

And even this all but disappears in Ricci's next novel, entitled *Sleep*, which was published in 2015. The male protagonist, as a personality, is a familiar one by now, if a decade older than Alex: both are intellectually blocked as academics and self-absorbed and frankly self-sabotaging as men. This one, named David Pace, is a classicist – a career destined from an early age after a trip to Ostia Antica outside of Rome. We learn of his troubled past relationship with his immigrant father, but the difficulties appear more personality-based than inter-generational and ethnic. One character in the third chapter does point to the Italian pronunciation of his surname «Pah-che» (Part 1, Chapter 3) but not much is made of this. In other words, this is not a novel about Italian Canadian identity; that identity is present, but not emphasized in this dark and brooding tale of the disintegration of personality from a sleep disorder.

The break from the thematic core of the past here is not as abrupt or striking as was *Testimony*, the book about Jesus that followed the Vittorio Innocente trilogy. But, for this reader, at any rate, it is a break nonetheless. But it is also true that 2019 is not 2003. Canadian literature is something different today; so too perhaps is what we used to call Italian Canadian literature. In 2004, Amanda Mullen made the argument that Ricci's trilogy created what she calls an «authenticating mythology» that «reconstructs the historical realities of Italian migration to Canada» (30). These three novels, she felt, gave Italian migrants and their descendants «a genuine sense of belonging» (30), making them part of the Canadian 'grand' national narrative. I suspect she is right –

though I would want to argue that Ricci has not been alone in making space for Italian Canadians in that grand narrative: Frank Paci's trilogy predates Ricci's, and while it never had the same popular success, it did serve to mark a place in the nation with this community's «authenticating myth of pain» (38), to use Mullen's term. But Ricci could move on, she implies, having accomplished this authenticating task for Italian Canadians.

Perhaps it was the same for Marisa De Franceschi, who went from writing overly about the trials of Italian Canadian families to backgrounding the Italianness in her latest novel, *Waiting for Chrysanthemums* – a mystery thriller – with Italian characters. Just as Louise Penny writes about Québécois characters in her detective novels set in that province, so De Franceschi writes about Italians who live in Windsor. Things have changed.

Mary di Michele did the same and moved on from writing in the early 1980s about her Italian family (in collections like *Mimosa* and *Bread and Chocolate*) to being more concerned over time about women's issues in general (Pivato. *Echo*: 116). When Italy and North America have come together again in her writing, it has been in different ways – as in the 2008 novel entitled *Tenor of Love* – the tale of three women (Italian and American) in love with the great operatic tenor, Enrico Caruso – or as in the 2011 novel-in-verse, *The Flower of Youth*, about the life and death of Italian film director, Pier Paolo Pasolini which includes the author's own account of her researching process. With time, with the passing of generations, the distance (both temporal and emotional) from the personal and familial displacements of migration and immigration grows. Yet, it doesn't disappear, I would argue.

The Normalization of Ethnic Difference

But something else has happened culturally and sociologically, for the last decade in Canada has witnessed what we might call a normalization of ethnic difference: to be Canadian today is, by definition, to be multicultural, hybrid. British is not the norm, nor is French, despite Quebec attempts to assert the contrary. Labels like 'immigrant' and 'ethnic minority' would not illuminate much when used to describe a work like Madeleine Thien's award-winning novel *And Do Not Say We Have Nothing*, though 'diasporic' might, perhaps. Like Nino Ricci, Thien refers to herself simply as 'Canadian'. Her personal website (http://madeleinethien.com/) tells us she is born in Vancouver, as Ricci's announces he was born in Leamington, Ontario (http://ninoricci.com/about/biography). But their works have been translated into multiple other languages. Perhaps Canadian literature no longer needs those hyphenated la-

bels I discussed at the start; perhaps it is now by definition hybrid, transcultural, even transnational.

This does not mean that the Italian gets totally lost in the Canadian. Or does it? To try to answer this question for myself, I decided to do a little social-science research – on my own, with my Italian Canadian family members, who generously all agreed to answer a few questions. What I learned was perhaps obvious: as was the case with Nino Ricci over his career, the farther you are from the direct experience of immigration, the weaker the ties, both cultural and emotional, unless your professional work involves either Italy or the Italian Canadian community. If you still have family in Italy, you and your children are more likely to visit them. If your Italian family food traditions – from making sausage to bottling tomato sauce or antipasto – were learned in Italy, they are more likely to be passed on to the next generation – and the next. But that's not all: it depends, it seems, on when the immigration occurred. As one cousin put it, in the 1940s they kept their Italian pride quiet and, if anything, wanted to blend into Canadian life, not assert Italian identity. And, I learned that if you married another Italian-Canadian, there is an even stronger likelihood that you will self-identify as Italian Canadian (or more regionally – as a Friulano, for part of my family) and so too will your children. Your group of friends is more likely to include other Italian Canadians. But even if you didn't marry another Italian Canadian, you may have very tangible, even sensual memories of growing up with Italian grandparents. As one cousin put it, she remembers «energy, food, excitement, connections» but also «A cold storage room that had a smell of the earth, with vats of wine lined up. Everything was so tactile, especially the walls» (Cathy Ingham, personal email).

Given the fact that the two sides of my family have been in Canada since the first quarter of the twentieth century, the temporal distance from immigration for them (if not, sometimes, their spouses) is now quite far. Some of my cousins (and even aunts and uncles) have married non-Italians. Some of these have become crypto-Italians like me, but others still have an Italian surname. As my niece, who is a Bortolotti, puts it: «Growing up with a distinct, often mispronunced last name has served to make me feel tied to my Italian roots» (Lauren Bortolotti, personal email). But she adds, «it is a point of embarrassment that I have to say that I don't speak Italian – which is a common question when people correctly identify the origins of my surname» (Lauren Bortolotti, personal email). I learned that she is not alone: the further from immigration, the less Italian is spoken – or even learned. Personally, I studied Italian for the first time when I arrived at university, though I had a passive knowledge of the language from hearing my grandparents speak it over the years. I remember when, on the occasion of my grandmother's 100th birthday, I made copies of a

tape (remember tapes?) of an interview I had done with her a decade before about her immigration to Canada – only to realize that some of my second cousins couldn't understand the Italian. A print translation followed.

I also learned, however, that not speaking the language doesn't stop my family members (or their partners) from self-identifying as culturally Italian, from following Italian films, soccer, fashion, food, and Ferrari Formula 1. My Anglo-Scottish-Irish Canadian husband even so identifies – claiming to be more Italian than me at times. But we and all my cousins – and especially their children – live in a country where their friends are as likely to be Asian, Greek, Arabic, or Caribbean Canadian. They are all simply Canadian. That doesn't mean losing one's ethnic identity, but simply adding it to the hybrid mix that now defines what it means to be Canadian. Just as Nino Ricci's website does not trumpet his Italian parents' immigration, it does mention it – almost in passing. That strong assertion of Italian Canadian identity in the 1980s and '90s clearly left its mark, in the sense that it doesn't have to be re-asserted constantly: it simply is. And it's real, even if different from the way it was those many decades ago when I first began to think and write about it. As writer Licia Canton put it recently, «We are the writers and the Canadians that we are because we share a common heritage. That's what brings us together; that's what keeps us writing» (De Gasperi et al.)

That common heritage is indeed a widely shared one: according to the 2016 Canadian Census, 1,587,970 of us self-identify as Italian Canadian, though only 242,255 of us were born in Italy. This community has grown immensely from when that first Venetian, Giovanni Caboto, landed in Canada. It has grown not only in size but in cultural confidence. Its identity as both Italian and Canadian has led one Italian critic to say that this makes Italian Canadian writers «not just Canadian writers, but world writers. They write from Canada with an original point of view on multiple (hybrid) identities and have something to tell the whole world» (Lamberti). I hope the world is listening.

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