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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS IN ITALIAN-CANADIAN WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

BY

LISA BONATO

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND FILM STUDIES

Edmonton, Alberta
FALL 1994

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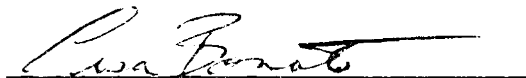

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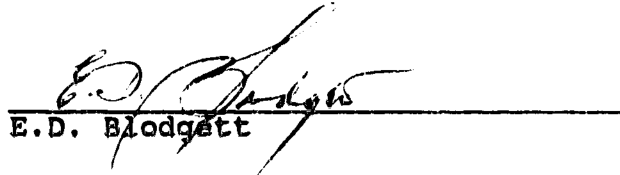

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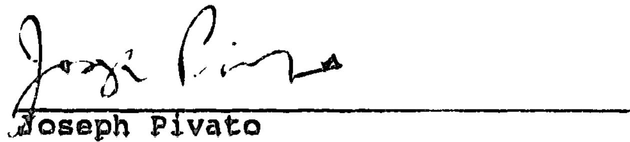

Joseph Pivato

Nasrin Rahimieh

August 19, 1994

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my sister, Paula, whose wisdom, love and support is sadly missed.

ABSTRACT

This work examines the portrayal of mothers and daughters, as well as mother/daughter relationships in the narratives of Maria Ardizzi, Mary di Michele, Caterina Edwards and Mary Melfi. Employing both ethnic and feminist literary theories, I explore the dominant theme of multiple identities in the portrayal of mothers and daughters. In relation to this analysis, I examine the various ways in which the experiences of these four writers as ethnic or immigrant women contribute to mother/daughter discourse. Therefore in my approach, I focus particularly on the common areas of ethnic and literary theories concerning the issues of subjectivity, author identity assertion and agency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Introduction

This work explores mother/daughter discourse in the narratives of four Italian-Canadian women writers: Maria Ardizzi, Mary di Michele, Caterina Edwards, and Mary Melfi. Using a comparative approach in my analysis, I have chosen to concentrate upon these writers for their differences, as well as their similarities. While they identify with the Italian-Canadian immigrant experience within and outside of their writing, these writers also reflect the diversity which exists among people of Italian origin in Canada. An important aspect of these differences is the representation of a wide variety of both Italian and Canadian regional contexts. Regional identifications remain strong in Italy, with each region having a distinct culture and linguistic dialect. Edwards identifies with northern Venetian culture, while the other three writers are southerners, with Melfi from Molise and di Michele and Ardizzi from Abruzzo[1]. In the Canadian context, these writers have settled in different provinces, representing a cross-section of Canadian regional experiences. Both Ardizzi and di Michele have lived mostly in Toronto, which is one of the largest Italian immigrant communities in the world. Edwards has always lived in Edmonton, and expresses a distinct western

[1]Ardizzi also identifies with Roman culture, since she moved to Rome in her youth. She lived and studied there for many years before immigrating to Canada.

sensibility in her work, while Melfi grew up and lives in Montreal, amidst both the Quebec and the Anglo-Canadian majority cultures. Reflecting some of these writer's experiential differences, their narratives cover a wide variety of topics and utilize different languages, genres and styles. As a member of an older generation of Italian immigrants, Ardizzi differs from the other three writers since she writes in standard Italian and concentrates largely upon the experience of emigration from Italy. Melfi and di Michele have mostly written poetry, although both have also explored other literary forms[2], while Edwards has written both drama and fiction.

Yet in spite of these differences, the portrayal mother/daughter relationships is a point of intersection in the works of these writers. In my analysis of this theme, I often use 'mother/daughter discourse' and 'maternal discourse' as terms representing the study of mother/daughter relationships in literature. While this terminology has been coined by the American feminist theorist, Marianne Hirsch, the discourse concerning the mother/daughter relationship has originated from different schools of feminist theory over the past thirty years. I employ a wide range of ethnic and feminist theory in my

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[2]Melfi's fiction titles are: A Dialogue with Masks and Infertility Rites. She has also written a play, Sex Therapy: A Black Comedy and a novel for young readers entitled, Ubu, The Witch Who Would Be Rich. Di Michele has recently released a novel entitled, Under My Skin.

analysis of the specific ways Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi portray mother/daughter relationships from their multiple positions of writing as women and as Italian-Canadian immigrants.

Chapter One, "Double Jeopardy: The Outcast Daughter," examines the portrayal of immigrant daughters as alienated figures of transition between two cultures. For these daughters, their troubled and somewhat ambivalent relationship with their mothers symbolizes their own struggles with language, culture and gender. Chapter Two, "Beyond Silence: The Immigrant Mother" explores portrayal of immigrant mothers as challenging the cultural stereotype of them as powerless. While these immigrant mothers are not given as definitive a role in the narratives as the daughters, their voices and their presence are significant as the "silent" story of immigrant mothers is finally being told. Finally Chapter Three, "Woman and Ethnic: Italian-Canadian Women Writers," examines the issue of the authors' multiple identity positions derived from experiences of gender, ethnicity, language and class. In this chapter I examine the commonalities between ethnic and feminist theories particularly through the assertion of identity and the theory of agency. I also analyze the significance of identity in the writing by Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi, and the ways in which multiple identities are expressed in their narratives about mothers and daughters.

Chapter One

Double Jeopardy: The Outcast Daughter

I. Introduction: Alienation and the Split Self

This chapter will explore literature written from the perspective of the daughters: Il sapore agro della mia terra by Maria Ardizzi, "Mimosa" and selected poems from Bread and Chocolate by Mary di Michele, The Lion's Mouth by Caterina Edwards, and Infertility Rites by Mary Melfi. In examining these works, I will illustrate that the themes of alienation and the split self are central in the daughters' portrayal.

The voices of daughters are prevalent in many of the narratives of Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards, and Melfi. Like the writers who create these women, they are generally educated, intellectual, and creative. In spite of existing in two cultures, the daughters experience difficulty identifying with either their Canadian or their Italian contexts. In terms of their Italian heritage, these daughters find traditional roles for women, especially as represented by their mothers, to be restrictive and incompatible with contemporary ideas of Canadian motherhood or feminist conceptions of womanhood. Moreover, they experience conflict in Canadian society at large, since they are marginalized as women and as 'ethnic.' What therefore results in the works of Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and

Melfi is a representation of daughters as outcasts or exiles. At odds are conflicting gender and cultural paradigms which create a life of dualistic or pluralistic roles for the daughters within their families, their communities and also, within themselves. The Italian-Canadian writer, Genni Donati Gunn observes that mothers, in particular, pass on this heritage of "duality":

> Most first-generation immigrant women, although in Canada, continued to enforce upon their daughters the same rules and roles given to them by their mother, while, at the same time, they desired a better life for their daughters, one filled with the opportunities they never had.
>
> 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 the literature. (143)

The outcast and the split self are literary forms identified as common both in Canadian ethnic writing and in women's writing. Discussing ethnic literature in Canada, Francesco Loriggio identifies "homelessness", "multiple subjectivity" and "identity as something provisional" (1989, 16) as modernist devices that are "turned against modernism (or its post-modernistic aftermath)" (1989, 17) by Italian-Canadian writers such as Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards or

Melfi in order to express their unique ethnic position of marginalization and exile in history and in literary history. Furthermore, it should be noted that many works by Italian-Canadian male writers, such as Black Madonna and The Italians by Frank Paci and Addolorata and Gens du Silence by Marco Micone, portray daughters and sisters as exiles with fragmented identities. From a feminist, psychoanalytic perspective, Marianne Hirsch observes the elements of alienation and multiple selves as characteristic of daughterly perspectives in contemporary mother/daughter relations in women's literature. In what Hirsch defines as the "feminist family romance", the daughter, "as part of a newly emerging feminist generation," (139) defines herself through a complex web of public events and ideologies, as well as personal relationships and histories so that "as public and private merge, the protagonist herself is multiplied, split into several selves - mother and daughter, past and present, adult and child, autobiographical subject and fictional character, 'she', 'you' and 'I'" (138). In my analysis, both theoretical perspectives are relevant since together, gender and ethnicity situate these daughters in marginalized positions that generates their alienation and their many selves. From a writer's perspective, di Michele describes this condition as a "double jeopardy":

> It is a very complex situation. It is like existing on two comparable levels, a kind of

> double jeopardy. Because of my aspirations I have been an outsider in my family and ethnic community, and because of my ethnic identity and female character I am an outsider in the larger public society generally. (1984, 21-22)

As these daughters seek to reconcile their multiple selves and alter their status as outcasts, their relationship with their mothers and their role as intellectuals or artists are of central importance in their quests. For the daughters, their mothers represent both the nurturing and the authoritarian aspects of their traditional culture. In the works of Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards, and Melfi, mother/daughter relationships are depicted as far from ideal; nevertheless, these relationships, however problematic, are highly significant in the daughters' search for identity. In dealing with their own status as outcast, they must confront their ambivalent feelings towards their primary female role models, namely their mother and other women in their extended families. Although the daughters ultimately reject the female roles that tradition dictates, they do not completely disassociate themselves from their mothers and their traditional culture. Daughters and mothers maintain a tenuous bond based on their shared experience and conflicts created by immigration and the patriarchal family. In relation to these mother/daughter bonds, it is noteworthy that in Il sapore agro della mia

terra, Bread and Chocolate, "Mimosa", The Lion's Mouth and Infertility Rites, the perspectives of fathers are often non-existent or peripheral and, moreover, absence is a common theme in father/daughter relationships. In fact, in a number of Italian-Canadian narratives, fathers are often dead, as in Ardizzi's Il sapore agro della mia terra and Frank Paci's Black Madonna. In explaining this particular phenomena in literature, Joseph Pivato observes that historically, Italian men were often absent for long periods from their families due to wartime and post-war conditions, immigration laws and work patterns, thus leaving mothers and daughters alone in difficult, but frequently unifying circumstances:

> In Canada, Italian women have had to confront the paradoxes that emerge from the clash of different cultures and values. While men have been physically present as good providers, they have been absent much of the time as companions and fathers. Is this why the Italian family is so mother-centered? These women, mothers and daughters have often had to struggle alone with the various contradictions of immigrant society. (1986, 86)

Also related to the daughters' quests for identity is the role of writing and creativity. It is significant that all of the outcast daughters in Il sapore agro della mia

terra, Bread and Chocolate, "Mimosa", The Lion's Mouth and Infertility Rites are intellectuals, writers or visual artists. For these daughters, education and creative expression are forms of rebellion that enable them to depart from many traditional aspects of both Canadian and Italian-Canadian womanhood and, furthermore, these activities, when taken up as professions, also deviate from the immigrant work ethic of what constitutes a 'legitimate' career or 'honest hard labour.' Also, within the daughters' internal landscapes, their intellectual and artistic pursuits take the form of personal confession and cultural expression. Writing and art allow them to convey the 'silent' stories of their immigrant heritage, while they are also provided with the space that is appropriate to examine their status as outcasts and to attempt to reconcile their multiple selves. Of further importance in representing the daughters as artists are the autobiographical allusions to the authors themselves. When Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi write about characters writing or painting they are drawing attention to their personal history that is a part of the public fiction. As will be discussed later in Chapter 3, through their experience of marginalization as women and as ethnic, the authors and the fictional daughters experience the creative process in similar ways.

II. Novels of Development about Italian-Canadian Daughters

In exploring the themes of alienation and the split self in the portrayal of daughters, Il sapore agro della mia terra[1] by Ardizzi is an excellent starting point since it is a detailed novel of the development of an immigrant daughter's life in Italy and in Canada. Il sapore agro della mia terra is the second book in a trilogy entitled "*Il Ciclo degli Emigranti*" ["The Cycle of Emigrants"] dealing with the Italian experience of immigration and focusing on common themes such as exile and alienation. It is important to note that Ardizzi as an Italian-Canadian writer differs from di Michele, Melfi and Edwards not only because she writes in Italian,[2] but also in that she can be identified as part of the "earlier" generation of Italian-educated immigrants. As Pivato observes, "there are three groups of Italian-Canadian writers: the older generation writing mostly in Italian, the younger generation writing in English and another group writing mostly in French" (Pivato, 1985 B, 171). Therefore, unlike the other three writers, who write with a certain distance about Italy, Ardizzi's work largely

---

[1]The English translations which appear after all quotations from Ardizzi's works throughout this thesis are my own.

[2]Ardizzi's first novel, Made in Italy, was written in Italian and published simultaneously in Italian and in English translation. Since then, her works have been published exclusively in Italian (Pivato, 1987, 67).

concentrates upon life in Italy, as well as Canada, and also expresses the immigrant experience in a realistic style.

Il sapore agro della mia terra blends elements of the *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman* in chronicling the life and intellectual development of Sara Valtoni from childhood and adolescence in Italy to womanhood in Canada. Reflecting the fragmentation in Sara's life, the structure of the novel is split in several ways. The voice of the work is divided between a third person narrative and the briefer, first person interjections of Sara's personal diaries. Furthermore, the work is divided into three parts: Part One takes place in La Marghera, Italy; Part Two in "America", that is, Toronto, and; Part Three centers upon Sara's return visit to Italy. These various parts signify Sara's multiple identities and her different Italian and Canadian voices: the traditional, peasant daughter from La Marghera is contrasted to the modern, university professor from Toronto. Common in female novels of development is this fragmented narrative form:

> Novels that depict female apprenticeship and awakening not only alter the developmental process, but also frequently change its position in the text. The tensions that shape female development may lead to a disjunction between a surface plot, which affirms social conventions, and a submerged plot, which encodes rebellion;

> between a plot governed by age-old female story patterns, such as myths and fairy tales and a plot that reconceives these limiting possibilities; between a plot that charts development and a plot that unravels it. (Abel et al., 1983, 12)

In both Italy and Canada, Sara, in her perspective as a daughter, can be characterized as alienated and fragmented. Part One traces Sara's life in pre-war and wartime La Marghera, her home region. In La Marghera, a rigid class and gender structure prevails, and it is made known to Sara from childhood that as a peasant woman ('*una contadina*'), she is at the bottom of the hierarchy and must not challenge her place in the world. Santa, the village midwife, states, "*Le donne, se vogliono sposarsi, devono saper stare al loro posto, con la bocca chiusa.*" ["Women, if they wish to marry, must know how to remain in their place, with their mouths shut."] (11). Sara's relationship with her own mother, Teresa, is one of ambivalence: she despises the oppressive role for women that her mother represents, yet she also respects her mother for her fortitude, "*Sei una buona madre! Sei la migliore di tutte!*" ["You're a good mother! You're the best of them all!"] (61). In witnessing the many hardships of her mother, Sara decides from an early age to pursue an education rather than to marry. In spite of her father's protests, Sara breaks with tradition and is allowed to go to school at her mother's insistence. Teresa states:

> *Mi sono sposata a sedici anni...e a trenta ho una vita conclusa. Per me, non c'è nulla davanti.. Ma ho quattro figlie femmine. Le mie figlie non devono vivere senza una speranza.* [I married at sixteen and at thirty my life is over. For me, there is nothing ahead. But I have four daughters. My daughters must not live without hope.] (30)

In spite of the hardships of the Second World War, Sara finishes middle school under the instruction of Don Fabiano, a young priest on leave from his ministry, and eventually she attends high school in the neighbouring city of Teramo. Initially Don Fabiano represents access to the world of knowledge desired by Sara; however, as time passes, Sara falls in love with him, "*È nato in me un sentimento nuovo...confuso...molto dolce...Non riesco a vedere Don Fabiano come un prete...È il mio professore, e lo vedo come un uomo.*" [A feeling was born in me...new...confusing...very sweet...I can't see Don Fabiano as a priest...He is my teacher and I see him as a man] (65). Thus, another source of Sara's alienation in La Marghera are these mutual, unexpressed feelings between her and Don Fabiano. Just as Sara breaks with convention through her education, she also defies local religious belief and moral standards by falling in love with a priest.

From the time that Sara begins her education with Don Fabiano she keeps a secret diary that appears regularly

throughout the narrative. This diary reflects Sara's inner world of beliefs and thoughts that would not be acceptable in the exterior world of La Marghera. As the novel progresses, the diary provides personal insight into the events of the world, such as the war and its effect on the village. Yet the diary is more than a record of events; it is simultaneously Sara's source of liberation, her instrument for developing her inner self and also, her one companion in her alienation:

> *Comincio a divertirmi a questo gioco. Tenere un diario è come avere un complice. Per non dimenticare ciò che accade, ho cominciato a prendere nota. E cosí facendo, scopro che qualcosa di nuovo sta accadendo in me: è come se il mondo mi si spalancasse davanti, e io mi spalancassi in esso.* [I'm beginning to enjoy this game. Keeping a diary is like having an accomplice. In order not to forget what happened, I began taking notes. And from this, I am discovering something new happening in me: it is as if the world opened up itself in front of me and I opened up myself to the world]. (25-26)

In this first part of the novel, it is significant to note that the absence of men from the family is a major theme, especially with the arrival of war in Sara's village. In fact during this time, Sara's father dies, leaving Teresa

to head the family. Thus, while Sara is censured for her deviation from local standards of womanhood, in a time of crisis all of the village women willingly assumed non-traditional roles in the absence of the men. However, unlike Sara, when the men return at the end of the war, "...*le donne hanno ripreso il loro posto nelle case.*" [...the women returned to their place in the home] (112).

In the second part of Il sapore agro della mia terra, Sara and her family escape post-war poverty in their village by immigrating to Canada where they live with their father's brother, Joe. Although Sara escapes the rigid class system of La Marghera, she finds that life in Canada as an immigrant implies a new kind of struggle with culture and language. Moreover, Uncle Joe carries with him the old belief system of La Marghera and tries to impose this upon the family. Uncle Joe is a typically successful, first-generation Italian immigrant, who endures many sacrifices to build a new life in Canada, while nostalgically clinging to the old ways of Italy. In her diary, Sara describes him as:

> "...*un uomo vecchio stampo, che del suo paese conserva intatto lo spessore antico. Porta gli anni cementati nella pelle. Il suo volto pare scoplito su un vecchio legno. La sua ricchezza, ho saputo, è enorme, ma lui indossa sempre lo stesso vestito e viaggia su un camioncino*" [...an old-fashioned man, who preserves the old ways of

> his country. He wears the years ingrained into his skin. His face appears to be carved from old wood. His wealth, I know, is enormous, but he always wears the same clothes and drives around in a little van]. (175)

While her sister Lisa marries Uncle Joe's son, Larry, and takes up the traditional role of wife and mother, Sara continues to study and becomes a high school teacher and later, a university professor. Moreover, she becomes romantically involved with a Canadian, James, and eventually leaves Uncle Joe's house to live on her own. Yet these successes only serve to increase her feelings of fragmentation and alienation. She is neither Canadian nor Italian, but suspended somewhere in between as an immigrant. When she asks herself, 'Who am I?', the response is:

> "*...sono un'emigrante. Non sarò mai separata dal mio vecchio mondo, ho pensato. Potrò sottrarmi al nuovo mondo? Rimarrò qualcosa di mezzo, che non sta né da una parte né dall'altra?*" [I am an emigrant. I will never be separated from my old world, I thought. Will I be able to remove myself from my new world? Will I remain somewhere in between, belonging neither in one place, nor the other?] (175)

Ten years after her arrival in Canada, Sara makes a return visit to La Marghera in order to reconcile her

fragmentation. While many things in La Marghera have not changed, Sara finds that she views her old village not has her home, but as a foreign place. Moreover, Don Fabiano is also distant and unattainable since he has returned to the priesthood during Sara's absence. This return journey, a theme common in Italian-Canadian writing (Pivato, 1985 C, 169), enables Sara to resolve her split self and to return full circle to live on a farm in Canada, not in exile, but by choice.

Narrated from the recollections of an immigrant woman, The Lion's Mouth by Edwards is also a novel that combines elements of the *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman*. However, unlike Sara in Il sapore agro della mia terra, Bianca, the immigrant in this novel, is raised in Canada, and struggles with rather ambivalent feelings towards her Italian heritage. The Lion's Mouth tells two interspersed stories: Bianca's account, related in the first person, of her life as an Italian-Canadian writer living in Edmonton and a third person narrative recounting the events leading to mental breakdown of Bianca's Venetian cousin, Marco. The two stories are interdependent in that when combined they form a complete representation of Bianca. Edmonton is her "outer city" (46), that is, her Canadian exterior, while Venice and Marco comprise her "inner city" (46), representing the Italian heritage that embedded in her psyche. Thus, the themes of alienation and multiple selves in this work are

conveyed not only through personal history of the main character, but in the split form of the narrative, and also through the many attempts at fiction writing by Bianca about herself and her cousin.

Bianca's own story appears in small yet significant interruptions between the more intricate, tragic story of her cousin, Marco. Emigrating from Italy with her parents as a child, Bianca loses all sense of identity and place: "Leaving Venice, though I was with Mamma and Papa, I felt stripped of family, of friends, of familiar walls and buildings, of proper landscape. I was exposed, alone in nothingness" (76). Her difficulties in adjusting to a new language and culture are exacerbated by her mother's determination to preserve her as an "Italian child" (79). As a result, Bianca is sent off each summer to her relatives in Venice. She learns from an early age that in order to survive between conflicting values and behavioral systems she must displace her original self and assume the appropriate identity for each cultural context. Although she is still loyal to her heritage, Bianca nonetheless allows her external self to appear 'assimilated' in order to survive and gain acceptance in Canada. She submerges her Italian self beneath a Canadian facade: "I hadn't rejected Venice, but I wanted protective colouring. I wanted camouflage, to become like rather than to become. My parents' way meant exposure" (81).

Throughout much of her young life, Bianca views her immigrant mother with particular embarrassment and rejects her as a female role model. Although her mother works outside the home and learns to speak English, to Bianca her mother's immigrant ways and beliefs seem archaic and absurd in a Canadian context. One example is Bianca's mother's misuse of English: "If the words sounded right, sounded as she sensed they should, her intended meaning must be there no matter what I claimed. 'Crazy bones,' she would call me affectionately, or she'd inform me, 'I've been working like a moose'" (84). Consequently, as she seeks out an alternative to her mother, Bianca is inspired by two different cultural models of womanhood: her Canadian friend, Jody, and the older, Italian, Elena. While it is impossible for Bianca to become either of these women, she finds their example inspirational in the making of her many selves. Devoid of any markings of ethnicity, Jody is the blonde, blue-eyed, upper-middle class, "perfect Canadian girl" (81). Following Jody's example, Bianca develops a non-ethnic persona that she uses as a mask in order to assimilate into Canadian society. Furthermore through Jody, Bianca learns that in Canada, "...the code of rules, the method of behaviour they [Bianca's parents] were trying to impress on me was inappropriate here" (81). Conversely, Elena is an intellectual and rebellious Venetian woman who possesses the dramatic style and sensuality that Bianca

wishes to develop within herself. Elena's example of womanhood presents Bianca with a new and striking contrast to both Bianca's traditional Italian mother and to the proper, perfect Canadian Jody. To Bianca, Elena is as charismatic and as distant as a movie star: "Who could forget Elena? I hadn't seen her since I'd moved to Canada and had seen her rarely enough before, but her image, luminous, intense, had stuck with me" (114). Elena makes a further impression on Bianca in teaching her to use 'masks' to her advantage. While "transforming" the awkward, adolescent Bianca with a beauty makeover, Elena states: "'We can all use a mask from time to time. You're young yet. You'll see'" (118). This advice along with her physical "transformation" constitute Bianca's passage into womanhood.

As her intellect and political awareness develop in womanhood, Bianca is determined to shed her status as outcast and make Canada "her country" (146). As a part of this process, Bianca re-examines the example set by her mother and, in doing so, she comes to see her mother not so much as an anachronism, but as a woman struggling with the same paradoxes of ethnicity and gender as herself:

> Since I saw that her judgement on things Canadian was off, since I heard her distortions, I believed that all she said, her whole system of customs and beliefs, was fake, a private fantasy, like the fairy tales I make up for myself. But then,

> during my summers in Venice, I would be surprised over and over to find that she could identify subtle shadings, that her methods of evaluation could apply. Even her stories about her younger self (the friendships with the aristocrats, the many suitors) would be confirmed, borne witness to by Aunt Elsa and your [Marco's] mother. (84)

Thus, while Bianca chooses not to live like her mother, she recognizes that they share a common heritage of alienation and duality. Rather than searching for yet another role model, Bianca turns to writing fiction in order to reconcile her multiple selves and it is at this point that Marco's 'story' begins. From childhood, Bianca uses her imagination to survive the loneliness of being different. As she remarks, "I populated the gap between myself and everyone else with dwarves, giants, fairies, and elves... My involved stories filled the silence of the long hours I passed alone" (79). By the time she is fifteen, Bianca exchanges her fairy tale creatures for the fictional personage of Marco. Through her teenage and young adult life, she writes Marco's story three different times, with each version reflecting a stage in her own development as a woman and as an artist: "As I look over those three earlier novels, I see that my changing needs, my shifting perceptions and understanding, cast you in different forms, bestowing different roles, different masks" (46). The version of Marco's story that is

included in The Lion's Mouth recounts the marital problems and the involvement in terrorist activity that lead to his nervous breakdown. While the novel begins with Bianca's hearing of Marco's illness, it is left unclear as to whether the proceeding story about him is reality or yet another attempt made by Bianca to write of her cousin's life.

Bianca writes these stories "not from choice but need" (152), a need to understand Marco so that in turn she can comprehend her sense of alienation and her many selves. Throughout Bianca's life and development, Marco is a constant presence during her summer visits to Venice, in her stories and most significantly, within her psyche. She says of Marco, that he is "the emblem of [her] inner city" (46). Bianca uses her stories to communicate with Marco and in turn, the part of herself that he represents. Marco is Bianca's 'other half,' that is, her Italian self that she suppresses when she is in Canada, and her creativity and sexuality that she has difficulty in comprehending and expressing due to her upbringing as a 'proper Italian girl.' Since Marco is part of Bianca, it is significant that in Canada, as Bianca develops strength as a woman and an artist, in Italy, Marco is slowly becoming undone. Marco's demise signifies the futility, and perhaps, the distancing of Bianca's relationship with her Italian self. For Bianca, writing is a "need" that is somewhat liberating, yet ultimately it does not release her from her feelings of

exile, as is evident in her failure to bridge the gap between herself and Marco through her stories. Regarding her relationship with her cousin and all that he represents in herself, at the end of the novel Bianca concludes: "I will never touch you at all" (180).

III. Portraits of the Italian-Canadian Daughter in Poetry

While Maria Ardizzi and Caterina Edwards portray the immigrant daughter in the form of a novel of development, Mary di Michele creates a variety of images or portraits in her poems that collectively convey the daughter's experience. Although images of the mother and daughter appear throughout much of her poetry, the themes of the immigrant daughter as outcast and split self are most strongly expressed in her collection, Bread and Chocolate and the long poem, "Mimosa" from Mimosa and Other Poems.

Bread and Chocolate, while "not strictly autobiographical" (Billings, 1983-84, 100), is a collection of poetry based on di Michele's personal experience of immigration and her family history and relationships. Robert Billings interprets di Michele's basis for the book as follows, "Driven by what she describes as a 'psychic need' to come to terms with the sheltered, patriarchal upbringing she says is typical of first-generation immigrants, she experiments with voices other than her own" (1983-84, 100). In Bread and Chocolate, the voice of di

Michele as daughter, is woven into a complex fabric of family *personae* including father, mother, grandmothers, aunts and uncles. The poem "Cara" (meaning dear or beloved) introduces the daughter in a state of innocence, before she is 'fragmented' by immigration, family expectations and patriarchy. "Cara" describes a photograph of an ideally beautiful three year old Mary which signifies the proper Italian girl whom she once was and was expected to continue to be. The photo creates a standard that di Michele feels she could never fulfil, and it remains as an emblem of the pain of conflict between the daughter and her parents:

> This is the picture which has always dreamed
> itself larger than my life.
> My parents display it (more than half ashamed)
> like a stuffed and decapitated fawn
> accidently killed in a hunt. (34)

The poem "The Disgrace" marks the daughter's first menstruation and passage into womanhood. In this poem, the image of daughter as outcast is emphasized by contrasting her with the traditional women of her family. Still a child, ten year old Mary reluctantly assumes her role as woman by being relegated to the kitchen with her mother and aunts; however, with her book in hand, she shows early signs of rebellion:

> I am marking the day of my first bleeding
> in red pencil in my work book.

> I am ten years old.
>
> Already they are plotting
>
> a new and disquieting role for me. (39)

While children of both sexes are allowed to play outside together, in adulthood the men and women are divided into separate social circles with the men in the living-room and the women in the kitchen. Longing to be free from such limitations, Mary feels imprisoned in her new role, "On the first day I forget to play, / I am cramped in the corner like a snail / climbing the wall by the stove," (37). Surrounding her are the women in her family who gossip and exchange stories of family history, most of which are about the hardships of women. Mary's status as an outsider is emphasized further in the story of the insane Aunt whom she was named after:

> Maria Luisa, my father's youngest sister,
>
> went mad in her sleep,
>
> she tried to kill her elder sister, Chiarina,
>
> with a knife, she cut her throat
>
> in a hospital a week later
>
> and I'm named for her, the consequences to be
>
> revealed by my stars. (38)

Nonetheless, the status of outsider enables her to possess a unique and insightful perspective in her family and in the world. She observes that there is little difference between sexes in her family with the exception

that the men enjoy the power that patriarchy affords them: "They are similar stories as the women / but with authority, with the weight of the fist / and the cry of the accordion" (40). Yet she emphasizes that these men and woman share a certain powerlessness since they "do not write their own histories" (40), and it is ironic that as an outsider turned poet, she gives voice to their "unwritten stories" (37).

Like the social divisions portrayed in "The Disgrace," the men and women throughout Bread and Chocolate are separated into public and private spheres. The principal themes in the father/daughter relationship are ones of absence and conflict. In Bread and Chocolate, di Michele depicts the father as head of the patriarchal family, who is rooted in the public world and is detached from his family much of the time. "Waiting for Babbo" is about the father's estrangement from his daughter due to his long absence in Canada, while in "How to Kill Your Father" the daughter fantasizes about killing her father through her departure from traditional and patriarchal conventions. Representing a similar patriarchal authority in the public sphere, "The Primary Lesson", "Dormi Marisa", and "Outside the Circle" depict the cruel Catholic nuns whom di Michele encountered in school. Conversely, poems like "Ave" and "Pietà '78" portray a mother/daughter relationship that exists in an internal, more personal realm of nurturing and attachment. The words 'ave' and 'pietà' evoke images of the Madonna and

it is significant that di Michele uses this religious imagery in titles for poems about her mother. This Madonna imagery in her mother's portraits symbolizes sacrifice or martyrdom, but also power and fortitude. The poem, "Ave," recounts the hardships of her mother's life, but with recognition by the daughter that her mother is not powerless like the stereotypical immigrant woman. The intelligent daughter is an extension of her mother whose knowledge is of a different source, "the intelligence of hands [her mother's] / without books," (29).

In "Pieta '78," the image of the daughter, Mary, as outsider is juxtaposed alongside the figure of her traditional mother. Once again in the kitchen, the daughter, Mary, is reading Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter (43) as her mother ritually labours over her Christmas baking; however, unlike her distaste for traditional womanhood in "The Disgrace," in this poem Mary regards her mother's role with a certain reverence. In spite of her rebellion against duty and tradition, she maintains a connection with her heritage through her mother in "spaces that are long and filled" (43). Like the title of the poem, the mother/daughter relationship is expressed in terms of religious imagery:

> ...It[her mother's house] is the only church I
> frequent,

> the choir of household noises in attendance, the
> sermons
> on money and weather, It is the only temple I
> honour
> because there are still some things I hold sacred:
> the warmth of baking, its glow imminent in my
> mother's
> brow as the light fans her hot face by the window,
> (43)

In this relationship with her mother, the daughter is split between her need for independence and her desire for the security of tradition that her mother represents. While the feminist/intellectual part of the daughter finds solace in de Beauvoir's Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter, her traditional self takes comfort in the sight of her mother working in the kitchen, "that part of my mind relaxes, / reassured by the routine learned off by heart, the simple / life" (43).

In the long poem, "Mimosa", from the collection Mimosa and other poems, the representation of the daughter as outcast and split subject is continued from Bread and Chocolate, but here it is divided into two symbolic *personae*, the sisters, Marta and Lucia. Like the Virgin Mary and the prostitute, Mary Magdalene, these two sisters represent opposite poles of values and behaviour, with Marta being the traditional, virtuous daughter, while Lucia is the rebellious daughter, called by her sister, "putane" (4), a

whore. Their father, Vito, is satisfied with neither of these two extremes and feels that both daughters have failed to meet his expectations:

> The good life gave him a house and money
> in the bank and a retirement plan,
> but it didn't give him fruitful daughters,
> his favourite makes herself scarce
> and the other looks like her mother. (3)

Exemplifying the schisms in the family, the poem is divided into three monologues, with the common thread being the rejection of cultural tradition by Lucia. The first section, written in the third person, explores the perspective of Vito, the father, while the latter two sections are the first person narratives of the daughters, Marta and Lucia. As a traditional woman who has little authority and knows little English, the mother is present in the poem through her daughters' words, but her own voice and perspective are strikingly absent.

Although Vito has learned some English, he "keeps that tongue / in his pocket like a poorly cut key to a summer residence" (2) and so, his perspective must be translated through a third person narrator. Vito is portrayed as an aging patriarch who idealizes the old country and its traditions. To him, the family is sacred ground that has been sullied by the defiant actions of his daughter Lucia:

> There is only one heaven, the heaven of the home.

> There was only one paradise, the garden
> that kept them little children even as adults,
> until one angel, Lucia, his luckless offspring
> fell, refusing to share in his light. (1)

Although he is sentimental about Marta's and Lucia's childhood, Vito and his daughters share a relationship based more upon authority than love. Like the father in Bread and Chocolate, since Vito has worked long hours away from his family, there are feelings of alienation, "the estrangement like a border crossing" (2) between father and daughters.

In their respective dialogues, Marta and Lucia contrast with one another and symbolize the two extremes of the split self in representation of the daughter. Marta, the traditional, compliant daughter, is a grade school teacher and lives at home with her parents: "but I know enough to risk nothing, / to live where it's safe, / to have a job that's secure" (4). Conversely, Lucia is a poet and a wanderer, who scoffs at tradition, and is described by her sister as: "...that gypsy / daughter, the bohemian, the cuckoo's / egg in our nest" (4-5). Yet in each sister lies the repressed other half. Although Marta is the 'good' daughter, she secretly envies her sister's freedom of expression and, as a result, she spends much of her life in Lucia's shadow, as is evident in the fact that much of her monologue is about her sister rather than herself. Marta, experiences personal and creative freedom only in brief,

clandestine moments, with the assistance of her accordion or her cosmetics: "Friday night when I'm going nowhere / and I'm alone, I play with my kohl / eye pencils and become Cleopatra" (10). Similarly, Lucia represses parts of herself. Beneath her recalcitrant exterior is a traditional daughter who admits: "So much of my life has been wasted feeling guilty / about disappointing my father and mother / It makes me doubt myself" (13). Although there is no ultimate reconciliation between the sisters or within themselves, they are united on a certain level through their mother, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

IV. The Underworld: In Between Daughterhood and Motherhood

Like Sara in *Il sapore agro della mia terra*, Bianca in *The Lion's Mouth*, Mary in *Bread and Chocolate* and Marta and Lucia in "Mimosa", Nina Difiore in *Infertility Rites* by Mary Melfi, is portrayed primarily through the themes of alienation and the split self; however, Melfi's protagonist differs from these other daughters in that her perspective is situated on the borderline between daughterhood and motherhood. Nina is alienated both in her own Italian immigrant family and community and in Canadian society at large. In marrying outside of her ethnic group and in pursuing a career in art, Nina has rejected the conventions of her traditional Italian-Canadian family. Moreover, as an 'ethnic' woman in Canada, Nina defines herself "as

incongruous as a manual typewriter in a computer store" (55). From a cultural perspective, Nina is marginalized further as a member of the Italian-Anglophone minority in Quebec. Consequently, in spite of her career aspirations and feminist ideals, Nina seeks to alter her status as outsider and find a unified identity through motherhood; however, her attempt backfires, and her sense of alienation is increased as she discovers that she is infertile. In conveying Nina's sense of extreme alienation and split self, Infertility Rites is divided into a surface story that portrays Nina in her everyday activities and family relationships, while a submerged plot or "underworld" (48) describes the surreal and often grotesque, private world of Nina's infertility and her ever-growing obsession with motherhood. Elaine Hirsch describes such an 'underworld' and its fragmented form in narrative as characteristic to the daughter's search for identity in contemporary women's literature,

> ...the effort to connect past and present, to assemble a sense of self, is frustrated and ultimately redefined as the stories they try to tell seem more and more unnarratable - fragments virtually impossible to assemble into significant and meaningful narrative patterns, demanding to be ordered and reordered in a process of continual revision, requiring a language and narrative form

> that might accommodate the unspeakable. (1989, 139)

Nina's alienation is rooted in her underworld where her true identity lies: "I am untrustworthy, an artist - a voyeur, sitting and watching from the back seat - who needs to be entertained by chunks of fantasy life. It is inspiration I want (not love). Always lost in an unfeminine world. Capturing the grotesque" (22). Yet in her surface reality, Nina attempts to participate in two opposing domains: the Italian immigrant world represented by her mother and Canadian society embodied in her husband, Daniel. Through her career as an artist, her marriage to an 'enlightened' English-Canadian, and her feminist beliefs, Nina seeks to construct a Canadian self who is the perfect, 'assimilated' contemporary woman; however, in spite of her efforts, Nina is an outsider in every aspect of the Canadian context. Although she has a university degree, in her part-time job as a research assistant for The Institute of Social Policy (16), Nina is at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy. Moreover, her husband, Daniel, desires an assimilated wife who bears no marks of ethnicity. When Nina wants to have a baby, Daniel erroneously attributes this desire to the suppressed 'ethnic' in her. As he states, "When I married you, you were an exemplary Wasp. Even my mother commented on your successful integration into civilized society. It's recently you started to act like an

Italian fishwife" (32). Consequently, Nina's art becomes a creative means of expressing her alienation and split selves, but her surreal, often violent style does not win mass appeal or commercial success. Although Nina's work is criticized as narcissistic and confessional, from her marginalized position, she finds it impossible to approach art with "objectivity":

> Those in the upper middle class are never plagued by personal insecurities. They are far too busy working for the good of the country, enjoying their status and their inherited trust funds, to be like me: a self-indulgent artist who inherited her neuroses and her sense of morality from peasants who were used to feeling helpless (over weather, landlords, kings, popes and the like.) (69)

As in her Canadian reality, Nina is also an outcast in her Italian-Canadian family and community. She encounters difficulty conforming to prescribed Italian immigrant ideals of womanhood and so she is labelled by her mother as "*stupida*" (29), "*zingara* (gypsy)" (12) and "*putana* (whore)" (12). Even within herself, she shuns her difference: "I do not want to be the lady with the obsessive personality who needs to paint ugly, distorted pictures of urban life" (28). For an Italian-Canadian woman of Nina's generation there exist only two paradigms of acceptable womanhood: the full-

time mother, like her cousin Dora, or the full-time professional, epitomized by her friend, Mary, a lawyer. The embodiment of the traditional daughter, Dora forgoes university to marry young and have children. From childhood, Dora submits to the 'appropriate' female activities of her culture, that is, "catechism, Tuesday nights; Italian school, Saturday mornings; Miss Little Italy, first runner up" (28); and as a result, she represents everything that Nina is not, that is, "my mother's [Nina's] Italian daughter-ideal" (27). Conversely, Nina's friend, Mary, is a successful lawyer and community leader, who opts for a career over motherhood. In describing her profession she states: "I love the challenge of being in business. In many ways, I love the power that comes with it. I have my own secretary" (96). Yet in spite of this empowerment, Mary carefully maintains the facade of a traditional Italian daughter and refuses to admit to any double standards in her culture. For Nina, Dora and Mary represent not only restrictive standards of womanhood, but also of motherhood, since they convey the message that a woman can be either a mother or a professional, but not both simultaneously.

As Nina, the daughter, is attempting to become a mother, her discordant relationship with her own mother is central to understanding the conflicts within herself and with her Italian heritage. As a working-class immigrant,

Nina's mother had children and worked outside the home, yet Nina hesitates to look to her mother as a role model. According to Nina, there is an immense chasm between herself, the first generation Canadian feminist and her pragmatic immigrant mother:

> ...but mostly I resent the fact that we are not close like mothers and daughters are supposed to be - separated first by language (my Italian consists of a few hundred words, and her English of less than fifty); separated too by the fact that what she knows best is reality and I, fantasy. No wonder she is usually right. (42)

In their relationship, Nina views her mother with extreme ambivalence. In contrast, her mother is "Dragon Lady" (71), the emotionally distant woman who is the cause of Nina's alienation. Commenting on this problem, she declares: "I cannot blame my lack of success on my inconspicuous education nor on my ordinary looks. I can blame it on my lower-class mother." (55) Nina's mother imposes upon her daughter the oppressive standards and expectations of the "success story Italian style" (29), and although Nina goes to university, she does not attain her mother's ideal of upward mobility as have many of her Italian-Canadian peers. Nina's mother, however, is also a positive force in her life since she is responsible for providing Nina the opportunity and the freedom of choice to seek alternatives to

traditional womanhood. As a "full-time sewing machine operator, unionized" (29) her mother made personal sacrifices so that her daughter could enjoy advantages not available to women in Italy: "Mother came to North America to ensure her daughter would have equal opportunity with men, be one with the rulers of the land (also male in this part of the world)" (29). From this perspective, Nina comprehends that both her mother and herself are subject to a cultural tradition that devalues women and this fact accounts for much of the difficulty in their relationship: "Mother and I do not talk about intimate feelings. It's part of our cultural heritage not to" (167). In spite of the mother's efforts to ameliorate her daughter's situation, certain inequitable cultural attitudes have been passed down from one generation to the next. Nina's mother was never allowed to complete school since "in that place and time (Italy, the land of soccer players and no-nonsense popes) girls were not worth their weight in gold (like boys in the family)" (89). Similarly, Nina herself learns early in life that "boys were valuable additions to Italian families, guaranteed income-earners, guaranteed to carry on the family name but girls were economic liabilities, uninsurable" (117).

As mother and daughter share a troubled relationship based on a heritage of alienation and duality, Nina, in turn, approaches pregnancy with a similar confusion and

ambivalence. In Nina's mind, motherhood is an abstract, intuitive desire that would provide an immediate remedy to her position as outcast, while in reality, actual pregnancy turns out to be much more problematic: "I do not like being pregnant. A wish comes true and I go and resent it. I want a baby by just wishing it without effort, without trouble, mainly without ambivalence" (29). Nina's numerous miscarriages and "chromosomal abnormality" (126) resulting in infertility confirm her banishment to the "underworld"(48). Like her paintings, Nina's underworld is a surreal and grotesque place symbolizing her feelings of exile: "I am neither Canadian nor Italian, but a citizen of the underworld, trapped in its maze, where it is always badly lit" (48). As will be explored in the next chapter on the Mother, Nina's descent to this underworld marks her transition from daughter to mother.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the story of daughters as written by Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards, and Melfi is ultimately one of duality. As has been illustrated in the exploration of Il sapore agro della mia terra, Bread and Chocolate, "Mimosa", The Lion's Mouth, and Infertility Rites, the daughters as Italian-Canadian women are situated in a unique position where they are marginalized doubly through gender and ethnicity resulting in their portrayal being dominated by

the themes of alienation and the split self. In all of these works the daughters partake in some sort of quest for reconciliation of their many selves. Central to this quest are their intellectual and artistic expression, as well as a re-examination of their traditional culture through their relationship with their mothers. The daughters' perception of their mothers, however ambivalent, holds particular prominence in their lives since these women share a common identity and heritage of marginalization. While the search for identity ironically confirms their status as outsider in the exterior world, these quests ultimately provides these women with unique, inner spaces where their many selves may be brought together.

Chapter Two

Beyond Silence: The Immigrant Mother

I. Introduction: Maternal Duality

In this chapter, the mothers' perspective, as well as various images of motherhood will be examined in Made in Italy by Ardizzi; Homeground and "Prima Vera" by Edwards; "Mimosa" and poems from Bread and Chocolate and Necessary Sugar by Mary di Michele, and; Infertility Rites and "Mirabel Airport, 11:00 A.M." by Melfi. It will be shown that while the portrayals of immigrant mothers are dominated by themes of silence, duality and exile, these four writers dismantle maternal stereotypes in order to forge new connections with their matrilineage and to portray immigrant mothers ultimately as survivors.

In Chapter One, figures of the mother were examined through their daughters' sense of alienation and quest for reconciliation, but what of the mothers' own perspectives? Inasmuch as mothers are ambivalent figures to their daughters, their portrayal is also problematic in literature. In Western culture, mothers generally have been perceived as an enigma: "The advantage that mothers have over everyone in their lives is that they know their family better than the family knows itself. The family has little idea who the mother is" (Maracle, 170). While Italian immigrant mothers and daughters share in the experience of

marginalization in these narratives, mothers are a less common point of focus or subject than daughters. Like the daughters, duality is a theme in the mothers' portrayal; however, these immigrant mothers cannot partake in a quest for self-reconciliation, for they are bound by familial, linguistic and economic limitations. Furthermore, the mothers' duality is informed by society's complex and ambivalent perceptions of the maternal figure as either the victim or the villain. Due to cultural and linguistic barriers, immigrant mothers are largely inaccessible as people, often even to their own children,[1] and thus, they are highly vulnerable to the imposition of these maternal stereotypes. In Italian and Italian-Canadian circles there exist particular views about maternal identities and roles, largely influenced by the Catholic Madonna:

> The complex cluster of meaning associated with the Italian *mamma* has been demonstrated in countless works of literature, painting, music, opera and folk songs. From the thousands of Madonnas in parish churches to the old Alpine song *Oi cara Mamma* to the various popular songs dedicated to

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[1]Lack of a common language between mother and daughters was discussed in Chapter One, particularly pertaining to The Lion's Mouth and Infertility Rites. This theme appears frequently throughout Italian-Canadian literature, not only between mothers and daughter, but generally between immigrant parents and children. Examples of parent/child communication barriers in writing by Italian-Canadian men can be found in Black Madonna by Frank Paci and Gens du Silence by Marco Micone.

> the figure of the mamma, it is clear that this image is deeply ingrained in the Italian psychology. (Schiff-Zamaro, 1985, 79)

Such images have given rise to contradicting forms of the Italian maternal ideal: there is the idea of the extremely passive mother inspired by images of the martyr or the saint, while in opposition, there exists the image of the mother who is the keeper of the family and an unrelenting disciplinarian, such as Mary Melfi's "Dragon Lady" [Nina's mother](71) in _Infertility Rites_. Yet, this victim/villain duality has long been identified not only with the Italian-Canadian mother, but also with images of motherhood in literature, myth, history and psychology. Elements of the good and the terrible mother first appeared in early forms of the first female deities, and both form the basis of the archetype of the Great Mother, who is the mother of creation. Eric Neumann observes the good and the terrible elements coalescing in this third form of the archetypal mother:

> A configured form of the Great Mother has emerged from the primordial archetype. Now an order is discernable in the elements. She has three forms: the good, the terrible, and the good-bad mother. The good feminine (and masculine) elements configure the Good Mother, who, like the Terrible Mother containing the negative elements, can also

> emerge independently from the unity of the Great Mother who is good-bad and makes possible a union of positive and negative attributes. (21)

In the 1970's, feminist theorists in the West began exploring these many images of the mother and in the process, maternal images were deconstructed and reshaped in order to reunite good and terrible aspects in the mythical and the real mother. In France, the exploration of the mother has taken place largely through the *l'écriture féminine* movement. Through deconstruction, psychoanalytic and semiotic discourse, the French feminists have explored female and maternal images in focusing on the body and the language that is derived from it.[2] In experiencing their body as "other" or "object," women express themselves through difference producing a distinct process of women's writing and self-expression which Julie Kristeva conceptualizes as "semiotic" and Luce Irigaray calls "parler femme". Kristeva notes that this difference begins with and, simultaneously, is unified in the body of the mother,

> ...the maternal body is the place of a splitting, which, even though hypostatized by Christianity,

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[2] This is a general statement relating certain points of interception between the theorists in the *l'écriture feminine* movement. There are, of course, a number of differences between these theorists which will not be explored here. The works consulted for the purposes of this chapter were: Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of Medusa"; Luce Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman, and; Julie Kristeva, Desire in Language.

> nonetheless remains a constant factor of social reality. Through a body, destined to insure reproduction of the species, the woman-subject, although under the sway of the paternal function (as symbolizing, speaking subject and like all others), more of a *filter* than anyone else - a thoroughfare, a threshold where "nature" confronts "culture". (238)

Unlike French feminism's focus upon biological difference, in North America the predominance of feminist writing has examined motherhood more as a social function or process. Employing social theory, gender and object relations theories, many North American feminists have examined the effects of patriarchy on mothers, and have identified ways of dismantling male-centered constructs of the maternal. Of Woman Born, by Adrienne Rich, is one of the earliest and most significant works in North American maternal discourse.[3] Similar to Kristeva's concept of maternal into the "social" and the "natural," Rich views maternal duality in terms of society's "institution" of motherhood as distinct from women's actual experience of mothering:

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[3]Aside from Rich, other examples of this approach to maternal discourse would be Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise, and Nancy Chodorow, Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory.

> As soon as a woman knows that a child is growing in her body, she falls under the power of theories, ideals, archetypes, descriptions of her new existence, almost none of which have come from other women (though other women may transmit them) and all of which have floated invisibly about her since she first perceived herself to be female and therefore potentially a mother. (45)

Yet in spite of this attention paid to the maternal and mother/daughter relations in feminist theory, mothers' perspectives still remain marginalized in much of Western mainstream women's literature and theory:

> Feminist writing and scholarship, continuing in large part to adopt daughterly perspectives, can be said to collude with patriarchy in placing mothers into the position of object - thereby keeping mothering outside of representation and maternal discourse a theoretical impossibility. (Hirsch, 163)

It is significant, however, that North American women of colour, such as Alice Walker, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, and Lee Maracle, are creating some significant exceptions to the predominance of daughters' voices in women's literature. In writing from doubly marginalized perspectives, these writers have expressed a particularly strong connection to writing in mothers' voices and also, to the tracing of matrilineage.

Walker admits: "Yet so many of the stories that I write bear my mother's name" (240).

While Italian-Canadian women writers do not experience marginality in the same wav as women of colour, they have expressed sentiments of duality in being situated outside of the North American linguistic and cultural mainstream. Based on the shared heritage of duality between immigrant mothers and daughters, and taking into account the long separations from men in Italian immigrant women's history and experience, it is not surprising that Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards, and Melfi are able to identify with the maternal perspective in their writing, in a way that challenges maternal stereotypes and emphasizes the importance of Italian-Canadian immigrant mothers' role in cultural transmission. Hirsch notes:

> If maternal discourse can emerge in a particular feminist tradition, it may not be surprising that it should be in one that is itself marginal and therefore perhaps more ready to bond with women - mothers and daughters - letting go of male, paternal, fraternal, or filial approval. (177)

While the maternal voice is less common than the daughterly perspective in the narratives, these writers do make a significant contribution to filling the gap of maternal perspectives in women's writing. Three prominent aspects of maternal portrayal by Ardizzi, di Michele,

Edwards and Melfi will be examined: the themes of maternal silence and matrilineage; the depiction of the first-generation immigrant mother as protagonist; and the examination of the second-generation daughter's transition to motherhood.

II. Silence, Memory and Matrilineage: Images of the Immigrant Mother

As I have noted, immigrant mothers are less often a point of focus than immigrant daughters in the narratives of Ardizzi, di Michele, Melfi, and Edwards. At certain points in their work, all of these writers focus upon maternal perspectives; nevertheless, even if mothers are not at the center of the narrative, many images of them are still present in these works. It is important to note that of the four writers, Ardizzi most consistently focuses upon mothers in her writing. In Made in Italy, Il Sapore Agro dell mia terra, and La Buona America, mothers are central to or significant parts of the narratives. Moreover as is evident in Made in Italy, Ardizzi writes in the voice a mother who is part of the older, 'silent,' generation of Italian-Canadian immigrants.[4] As mentioned in Chapter One, Ardizzi

[4]Edwards also writes in the voices of this generation of immigrants in Homeground; however unlike Ardizzi, Edwards writes in English and has admitted to experiencing certain difficulties in translating the experience of this generation. In her essay, "A Playwright's Experience," she discusses her use of English in Homeground and her necessity for mentally translating not only words, but also

differs from di Michele, Edwards and Melfi since she immigrated to Canada in adulthood, and thus she is not as distanced from Italy in respect of language and experience. It is perhaps due to this proximity to the motherland and the mother tongue that Ardizzi is able to focus equally upon both the immigrant mother and daughter in her writing.

Significant in the portrayal of maternal images in the narratives of Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi is the element of silence. Silence is a major theme in depiction of Italian-Canadian immigrants, especially women: "In many senses Italian-Canadian women have been the people of silence, a group that has been robbed of a history, because it is one of men without women" (Pivato, 1986, 87). Yet in the works of Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi silence is not only a symbol of the immigrant mother's marginalization, but also of her survival and overcoming of externally imposed barriers. These writers illustrate that, in spite of her silence, the mother is able to communicate and to assert her influence. For example, in _Infertility Rites_ the reader is informed that Nina's mother speaks little English and, consequently, her voice is not present in the work; however, it is clear that this mother is a rather dominating matriarch and wields a certain amount of control over her daughter's life. Similarly, at the end of Ardizzi's _Made in Italy_, the protagonist, Nora, an aging,

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sensibilities.

immigrant mother, loses her power of speech and mobility; yet, it is made clear that in spite of her disabilities, Nora survives, possessing independent thoughts, opinions and memories.

Another portrayal of the overcoming of maternal silence occurs in the family dialogue in di Michele's "Mimosa", where amongst the voices of father and daughters, the mother, Alma, is not given an opportunity to speak. In the poem it is revealed that unlike her husband, Alma cannot speak English, "the language in which they [her children] dream" (2). However Alma is far from invisible in the dialogue: her presence is pervasive in the poem in that she is the family "mediator" and the parent who is able to communicate with her daughters. Lucia states:

> Most of the time I can't even talk to my
> father.
> I talk to mother and she tells him what she
> thinks
> he can stand to hear.
> She's always been the mediator of our quarrels.
> (13)

Although the two sisters, Marta and Lucia, are diametrically opposed in character, they share the lessons in womanhood taught to them by their mother. For the sisters, Alma is not a victim, but a woman who has survived the often harsh reality of being an immigrant mother. Marta states:

> But I learn most about being a woman
> from watching my mother, Alma,
> I learn from her how a woman is made for love
> and for cleaning house. (11)

While Lucia notes:

> I learned to be a woman in the arms of a man
> I didn't learn it from ads for lipstick
> or watching myself in the mirror.
> I learned more about love from watching my
>   mother
> wait on my father hand and foot. (14)

The reshaping of maternal silence in the works of Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi is also realized through matrilineal images. In reciting their origins, these writers employ both myth and reality in a way that creates a place for immigrant women in history, literature and culture. Francesco Lorrigio cites the tracing of genealogy in Italian-Canadian writing as a means for writers to acquire the identity and language which produce an Italian-Canadian discourse:

> To evoke origin is thus to originate discourse. Italian-Canadian literature can be "about" any subject, with different intensity and different sophistication. Voice, tone and talent vary. But in as much as it accepts itself as Italian-Canadian, as ethnic, it will reiterate, somehow,

> inside itself, one of the degree zero requirements of all literature: the acquisition of language. (1987, 61)

Thus in the historical sense, the expression of matrilineage allows these writers to record and recite the story of past generations of 'forgotten' Italian-Canadian women who until very recently have been ignored in literary and historical studies.[5] Joseph Pivato notes that Italian-Canadian women writers are serving this historical purpose by giving "a voice to these voiceless women and make this invisible population visible" (1986, 87). This telling of matrilineage demarcates the importance of the mother, particularly in the area of the transmission of cultural and family histories, which are largely unwritten in light of the oral tradition of many Italian dialects. Of the four writers, Ardizzi is strongest in conveying this historical

[5]The writing of women has been included and seriously considered since the inception of Italian-Canadian literature and criticism (perhaps with the exception of the predominantly male, interned, wartime generation). For a chronology and overview of the literature see, _Italian-Canadian Voices: An Anthology of Poetry and Prose (1946-1983)_, edited by Caroline Morgan DiGiovanni. However, examinations concerning themes specific to women in Italian-Canadian writing and history have been more recent. In terms of literary analysis, see: Joseph Pivato, "Italian-Canadian Women Writers Recall History" in _Canadian Ethnic Studies_; Chapter 6 on Women's Issues in _Writers in Transition: The Proceedings of the First National Conference of Italian-Canadian Writers_, and; Mary di Michele's essay, "Conversations with the Living and the Dead" in _Language in Her Eye_. For a feminist historical analysis see, Franca Iacovetta, _Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto_.

type of matrilineage: her work gives a realistic impression of women's lives in a wartime Italian village and as new immigrants to Canada. This historical accuracy is perhaps due to the fact that Ardizzi is readily able to recall life in Italy. Rather than remember vague images of her grandmothers, Ardizzi writes clearly in their voices, as in her portrayal of the aging matriarch, Nora, in Made in Italy. In terms of matrilineage, Nora contributes a realistic perspective of the older generation of Italian-Canadian women who existed in the traditional, Italian patriarchal system and also as immigrant mothers in Canada:

> *Nel mio paese non c'era posto per chi non si conformasse alle regole comuni. Le donne non avevano scelte; il giudizio degli anziani le accompagnava dalla nascita, e se nel percorso accadeva loro di sbagliare, il giudizio sfavorevole restava appiccicato loro tutta la vita, come una condanna.* [In my region, there was no place for whoever could not conform to the common rules. Women did not have a choice; the judgement of the elders followed them from birth, and if along the way, they made a mistake, disfavour would be stuck to them for the rest of their lives, like a death sentence.] (23)

In contrast, the matrilineage in the works of di Michele, Edwards and Melfi is more distant in time and space

to the writers, and, consequently, their portrayals often take on mythic proportions. As these maternal images move beyond realism into the realm of myth and symbol, these writers are not denying history, but forming, as Lorrigio suggests, a necessary link with the past for themselves and the reader. Through mythical matrilineage, these writers are creating a literary discourse for 'doubly' marginalized women. Writing about literature and gender, di Michele explains women writers' need for a connection between past and present in literature:

> The need for literature as a conversation with the living and the dead is like the need to map ancestral family trees, to resist amnesia in our own lives, to refuse doublespeak and the rewriting of history even-as-it-happens by the media, to recognize that memory is history in the body, as the voice is poetry, is literature in the body. And we extend this history, this poetry, this our collective body, when we write it down, and we inscribe this history, this poetry, this body, when we read it. Aloud in our hearts. (1990, 106)

This type of mythical matrilineage has a strong presence in di Michele's work, Bread and Chocolate which is filled with depictions of her female ancestors, particularly her grandmothers. Di Michele portrays these women through distant yet almost religiously benevolent images of love,

nurturing, pain and sacrifice. For example, in "A Strange Glance" di Michele writes of her paternal grandmother, interchanging the words 'grandmother' and 'love':

> She was an octogenarian, love, a matriarch,
> and her heart tracked for many miles
> barefoot in its slow orbit in the space
> of her chest.
> Love knew the ivory limit
> of her universe (10)

In another poem, "Bees and Chickens," di Michele writes of her maternal grandmother whose home was destroyed in the war and whose family left for Canada soon thereafter. This grandmother is a symbol of tragedy and sacrifice made by such women during and after the war:

> my mother's mother makes a grave picture
> crouching before her hearth
> sacrificing the wood in her arms
> to the communal fire (20)

Mary Melfi's poem about her grandmother, "Mirabel Airport, 11:00 A.M.," expresses both maternal duality and, also, an appreciation for her matrilineage. In this short piece Melfi finds that her memories of a treacherous matriarch of her childhood in Italy change as she herself grows older. Initially she remembers a sort of terrible, mythical, grandmother: "That witch, that amputator, my grandmother" (56). Yet when her grandmother arrives in

Canada, Melfi finds her to be an indispensable bridge between past and present, and between Italy and Canada:

> My memories are certainly out of date.
> This lady is priceless,
> as frail as an amputee's goodbye kiss,
> a piece d'art suddenly certainly necessary.
> Welcome, my ancestor, my mother's well-being.
> (56)

Another example of women turning to their matrilineage is in Caterina Edwards' play, Homeground. The main character, Maria, has been transplanted in Edmonton, away from the safety of her village in Italy and its network of female kinship. In attempting to protect her daughter from the "*maloccio*" [the evil eye], Maria cannot remember the folk remedies used by her female relatives back in her village in Italy. Maria's women ancestors take on mythic qualities, representing age-old wisdom and knowledge:

> There is safety in the old ways, safety. The old rites. Oil and salt, flame and water. If I could remember the words. I only heard them a few times as a child, mumbled over my head or that of my brothers and sisters. I left the valley before I had the age or the wisdom to learn from the older women. (78)

The historical research of Franca Iacovetta on Southern Italian immigration to Canada, confirms the experience of

Edwards' character in Homeground. Post-war immigration to Canada for Italian women often meant isolation from the security of strong networks of women in their home villages in Italy. In spite of a traditional, patriarchal system, these women were far from powerless and were able to carve out a place for themselves in the village order: "The numerous bonds that women formed with female kin and neighbours led inevitably to a women's culture. Women were constantly in the company of other women, as they baked bread, put out their laundry, threshed wheat, and shelled beans" (Iacovetta, 86).

III. The Immigrant Mother as Protagonist

Although not as common as those about the daughters, there are narratives which do focus on the immigrant mother as protagonist, most notably "Prima Vera" and Homeground by Caterina Edwards and Made in Italy by Maria Ardizzi. In these works, two different perspectives of the immigrant mother are available: one is the immigrant mother, who is new to Canada, and the other is the aging immigrant, who has lived in the country for many years. When these mothers are protagonists, they express an inner duality that differs from the good and the terrible maternal stereotypes. From their perspective, their duality is derived from their role as mothers conflicting with their need to exist outside the maternal role as a person. This maternal duality is

affected further by the fact that these mothers exist in two cultures. As a result, the Italian-Canadian mothers' story is filled with common immigrant themes of exile, isolation and the inability to communicate. Yet from the mothers' perspective, these themes take on particular characteristics. Due to family obligations and cultural standards, mothers, unlike their daughters, cannot undertake a quest; therefore, their story is structured more as one of survival rather than reconciliation. There is a realism to the style of the narratives, with certain tragic, almost melodramatic aspects that denote these mothers' harsh reality. Most prevalent in the mothers' story is a connection to the physical body, especially concerning childbearing and aging. Hirsch explains: "Maternal discourse (and plot), when it can be spoken, is always repetitive, literal, hopelessly representational. It is rooted in the body which shivers, hurts, bleeds, suffers, burns, rather than in the eyes or in the voice which can utter its cries" (185).

The immigrant mother named Maria is the protagonist of both Homeground and "Prima Vera" by Caterina Edwards. "Prima Vera" concerns Maria's arrival in Edmonton and her first pregnancy, while Homeground continues the story in the same setting five years later. In discussing the writing of Homeground, Edwards states: "I also wanted to give voice to that first generation of immigrants and from their, not the

second generation's, point of view" (1990 C, 107). In both works, Maria, expresses the duality, isolation, and disillusion characteristic of the first-generation immigrant mother. Language is a significant element in conveying these themes in Edwards' works, which are written predominantly in English, with the inclusion of some Italian and dialect dialogue, proverbs and songs. Since Maria spends most of her time in the home, language and communication are particularly problematic and also strong factors in her isolation. Although writing in English, Edwards effectively depicts Maria's difficulties by instilling an Italian sense of abstraction into the language of the works. Edwards explains that during the writing process of Homeground, she was mentally translating between Italian and English,

> When I was writing I heard my characters speaking Italian. Speaking abstractly and philosophically comes easier in Italian, as it does in French, than in English where the language itself pushes us to the concrete and the understated. What seems a bit extravagant in English is commonplace in Italian.(1990 C, 109)

In "Prima Vera", there is an overall sense of confinement expressed in both the language and the repetitive form of the narrative. Told in the third person, "Prima Vera" alternates between Maria's remembrances of her

life in Italy, and the reality of her present situation in Canada. There are several elements that contribute to Maria's "imprisonment" in Edmonton: her authoritarian husband, her pregnancy, her ill health, a foreign language, and the harsh Canadian climate,

> Nor had she imagined how confined she'd be to the house, locked in partly by her lack of English and her not being able to drive, but mostly by the never-ending winter. A prisoner of this cold country. Month after month. Her very thoughts were freezing into the shape of the rooms and the furniture. (128)

In her story, Maria is submitted to some rather harsh realities in her life as an immigrant. It is revealed that Maria did not marry Cesare of her own volition but was prompted to do so by her father, who expected women to fulfil the traditional roles of wife and mother. To Cesare, marriage was not for love, but for the convenience of having someone to cook, clean and run the household. He states: "I had to have a wife. I couldn't return without one. I would have taken anyone. Even a whore if she was willing" (131). Once in Canada, Maria is not only a wife to Cesare, but must also run a house with five male boarders. The house is filled with men separated from their families, to whom Maria must be surrogate mother, sister and friend. Away from her home and surrounded only by these men, Maria has no maternal

role models and is isolated from the important circles of female kinship and culture in her village.

Maria's difficult situation is aggravated further by her ambivalent feelings toward her pregnancy and her body. Her troublesome pregnancy creates a problematic relationship to her physical self. By constantly being weak, faint, and nauseous, Maria feels powerless, as if she is gradually consumed by impending motherhood. She states to Cesare: "Its feeding off me. Sucking out my bones...By the time it's born, there'll be nothing left of me" (129). Yet ultimately it is the pregnancy that empowers Maria and creates a vital connection to her new home in Canada. When Maria is in labour, she begins a journey from daughterhood to motherhood. At this point, Maria loses her identity and all sense of reality: "Where was she? But her mind was as white as the featureless world. She was lost" (141). It is significant that when in labour, Maria feels most connected to her own mother, who died giving birth to her. Assuming the daughterly perspective, Maria cries out for her mother: "Mamma. It was her mother's eyes, those first eyes, that she needed. Though she couldn't remember them, not as they were" (138). Yet once her son is born, Maria resurfaces in reality with a new maternal identity and the duality that accompanies it. For Maria, the child creates a sense of belonging in Canada, which simultaneously imprisons and liberates her: "Indeed, though she was not to know it for

many years, his pudgy body was her first connection to the hard, foreign land. She was saved and she was bound" (141). The process of childbirth creates a concrete, yet ambivalent link between this immigrant mother and her new land. In one sense, having a Canadian-born child makes Maria less of an outsider in her new country. Furthermore through her child, Maria has a new, independent identity and role apart from the patriarchal world of being a wife and servant. However, Maria's new sense of belonging in Canada also represents her further alienation from the old country. As will be shown in the analysis of Homeground, Maria is transformed by her experiences in Canada to the point that she feels like a foreigner when she returns to Italy.

The play, Homeground, takes place five years in Maria's life in Edmonton, where she has a daughter, as well as her son, Beppino. The main themes of isolation, exile and the duality of the immigrant mother are continued in this work. The play opens with Maria and Cesare returning to Italy, and then moves backwards in time to their life in Canada. In Homeground Maria has been transformed completely into a traditional mother as she continues in her repetitious routine of cooking, cleaning, taking care of children and running the boarding house. Aside from the three male boarders, she also has the company of Candida, another immigrant wife from Italy. Yet Candida provides little comfort to Maria since she refuses to accept the harsh

reality of being an immigrant and eventually arranges to return to Italy. Expressing her isolation, Maria says to her daughter: "I will only have you. And Beppino and Cesare, of course, of course. Until we go home. Just us" (77).

Representing the tragedy of the immigrant experience is the character, Lucio. Unlike many of the immigrants, Lucio is educated, and he finds it particularly difficult to adjust to life in Canada. As a boarder in Maria's house, he befriends Maria and eventually falls in love with her. Lucio slowly begins to lose his sanity when Maria refuses his advances, and he then loses his job and his fiance in Italy. When he becomes suicidal, Cesare and Maria make the decision to commit him to a mental hospital. In the final scene, it is revealed that Lucio does not recover from his depression in Italy, and it is there that he takes his own life. For all of the characters, but especially for Maria, Lucio represents the mental and emotional costs of immigration. It is Maria with her strong instinct for survival that preserves the well-being of her family and her boarders. Attesting to her own strength, Maria at one point advises Lucio: "No matter what you believe. No matter how hard it is, you have to go on" (84). Three years later, Maria and her family finally return to live in Italy only to find that they no longer belong in their old country. Expressing the sentiments of an exile, Maria states: "We no longer fit our place" (92).

Similar sentiments of exile are voiced by the immigrant mother, Nora, in Ardizzi's Made in Italy. This first person narrative alternates between Nora's recollections of her earlier life and the present occurrences in her family. Told largely from memory, Made in Italy is a type of immigrant mother's *Bildungsroman* that traces one woman's story of marriage, child rearing, work, and immigration. In spite of its almost melodramatic style of tragedy, this story is a realistic account of the Italian immigrant mother's fortitude and survival. As an immigrant woman, Nora is secure and proud of her identity, *"C'è stata sempre, da parte mia, una taciuta fierezza di ciò che sono e di dove provengo: un'emigrante con l'istruzione della quinta elementare, priva di smancerie, difficile da raggirare, consapevole della mia identità."* ["On my part, there has always been a quiet pride in who I am and where I come from: an emigrant with a fifth grade education, without sentimentality, difficult to deceive, aware of my identity"] (15).

As in Edwards' narratives, central to this work are the familiar themes of isolation, exile, and the inability to communicate. Nora's recollections present a realistic picture of the Italian immigrant mother's life which goes beyond the victim/villain maternal stereotypes. Nora's path in life is typical of the real experience of Italian immigrant women: marriage, children, immigration, cultural

and linguistic barriers, blue collar work, widowhood and most importantly, the ability to survive. Throughout her life, Nora's dreams and aspirations are overshadowed by the needs and expectations of her family and culture. As a girl, she desires an education, which she is forced to pursue surreptitiously(3) due to traditional expectations that she should be trained only for marriage and motherhood. Within her marriage, her desires are overruled by her husband, John, and his decision to uproot the family and emigrate to Canada. Restricted by these traditional roles of daughter, wife and mother, Nora is unable to express her true self and, thus, she is bound to remain silent. Her frustration over this silence is most evident in her relationship with her husband,

> *...io giacevo inerte ad assaporare un piacere che sentivo incompleto, con tante parole che avri voluto dire, con tanti pensieri che avrei voluto esprimere, con un bisogno struggente di qualcosa di piú di quanto ci eravamo appena scambiati.* [...I lay silent savouring a pleasure that I felt incomplete, with so many words that I had wanted to say, with so many thoughts that I wanted to express, with a yearning for something more than what we had already exchanged.] (9)

Even her own children, Andrea, Amelia and Matteo are merely the 'possessions' of her husband, "*sono figli di*

John" [they are John's children] (14). In adulthood, her children realize the immigrant dream in becoming culturally assimilated and financially successful, leaving Nora increasingly isolated, in spite of the fact that her youngest son, Matteo, lives with her. Contributing to Nora's feelings of abandonment is the death of her husband, John, while he is visiting Italy. After the years of work and sacrifice, Nora has outlived her usefulness to her family and she is forced to sit by passively and observe the increasing problems in her children's lives. Abandoned in the present, Nora turns to the past for solace and also to attempt to make sense of her life:

> *Negli ultimi tempi, il passato è la mia sola compagnia, ed indugio in esso impietosamente, temendo che presto, molto presto, mi mancherà il tempo do comprenderlo tutt'intero. La morte potrebbe guingere da un momento all'altro a rompere il filo della mia vita divenuta gabbia. Non mi difenderei; non invocherei: opporrei la dignità del silenzio ad un epilogo che non offre scelta.* [In this past while, the past is my only company and I enjoy it ruthlessly, fearing that soon, very soon, I will lose the time to understand it entirely. Death could come at any moment to break the thread of my life which has become a cage. I will not defend myself, I will

> not call out: I will offer the dignity of silence
> to an epilogue that allows no other choice.] (2)

As Nora is "...without reference points and isolated from both old and new societies" (Pivato, 1987, 66), there exists a wall between her and all of her children, particularly with her 'Canadianized' daughter: "*Vedo Amelia di rado. Tra me e lei, sono ormai palesi le differenze: tanti pensieri che non esprime li indovino nella poca considerazione in cui tiene le mie opinioni.*" [I rarely see Amelia. By now, differences have arisen between her and me: it is from what she does not say that I have guessed the low regard she holds for my opinions] (11). This relationship of ambivalence between mother and daughter continues on with Amelia and her daughter, Anna, in the next generation, and it is significant that, as the immigrant mother and grandmother, Nora is able intervene as mediator.

Symbolizing these walls that surround Nora are the tragic occurrences in the novel of violence, illness and death. In a short period of time, Nora violently loses two children: Matteo is murdered by his girlfriend's husband, while Andrea and his wife Peggy are burned to death in an accident. Furthermore, Nora suffers a stroke, leaving her paralysed and unable to speak. These tragedies underline the fact that the experience of immigration for Nora and her family is far from the idyllic stereotypes of the Italian-Canadian 'dream.' Similar to the insanity of Lucio in

Edwards' Homeground, the physical suffering in Made in Italy represents the emotional toll of immigration, particularly for the mother. Yet like Maria in Homeground, Nora possesses a deeply rooted survival instinct. In spite of her losses and her marginalization, Nora retains a strong sense of pride, independence and determination to live. The closing of the novel signifies not her defeat but her survival and her desire to persevere:

> *Ricomincerò tutto daccapo, come quando ci si affaccia alla vita. Ma è un lavoro segreto, che voglio compiere da sola. Essi non lo devono sapere! Il mio coraggio é ancora tutto con me...È il mio marchio "Made in Italy."* [I will start again from the beginning, as when one first comes into the world. But it is a secret task, that I want to carry out alone. They must not know! I still have all my courage...it is my label "Made in Italy."] (215)

IV. The Second Generation: The Daughter Becoming The Mother

Particularly in the works of Melfi and di Michele, there exists the beginnings of an exploration of the next generation of Italian-Canadian immigrant women who become mothers. Significant elements in these narratives are the development of a maternal language and discourse that is grounded in the mother's body, as well as the expression of

the interconnectedness between creativity and motherhood. Unlike the first-generation mothers who are concerned with survival, for the immigrant daughters, motherhood becomes part of their quest for reconciliation, as they attempt to create new paradigms which combine Italian and Canadian models of the maternal. In spite of their ambivalence towards their own mothers, the daughters ironically find that in becoming a mother, themselves, they are able to come to terms with their split identity.

Infertility Rites portrays motherhood as a part of a daughter's quest for reconciliation of her own duality and of her maternal ambivalence. In her youth, Nina is the typical, upwardly mobile second-generation daughter, who wishes to forgo motherhood for her career. As a young adult, motherhood meant denying herself an education: "Way back at university (as a working class princess) I used to be so relieved when I saw that first drop of blood, though I knew if my birth control methods had failed, I would have an abortion. The embryo had to be sacrificed for the sake of my education" (65).

Later in life, however, Nina looks to motherhood to rid herself of her feelings of exile and duality. When she experiences numerous miscarriages and discovers that she may be infertile, her body becomes her "body cage" (180) trapping her in her surreal, almost insane "underworld" where she is without identity. For Nina, motherhood becomes

her escape from the complexities of being an immigrant woman. Furthermore, she feels that by having a child she will not only find her connection to Canada, but also she will be able to assert definitively her identity as an artist:

> Perhaps, if and when I do have this baby I too will know exactly who I am - certain of my position on earth, my status, my roots. Certain I am an artist - peeling layers of colours from my own internal reality and re-applying them on my canvases. Certain I can find the right colours to describe my state of emotional exile; confident the thousand islands I am living on are in my name; my inheritance. (180)

It is significant that Melfi ends the novel before Nina gives birth, and it is left unclear as to whether motherhood will be the panacea which remedies Nina's split identity and her ambivalent maternal feelings. In exploring the second-generation daughter's life after motherhood, di Michele's narratives continue where Melfi concludes. The 1983 collection _Necessary Sugar_, marks a shift in much of di Michele's writing from the daughterly to the maternal perspective. Also evident in later works such as, _Immune to Gravity_ and _Luminous Emergencies_, many of the poems in _Necessary Sugar_ express a maternal sensibility through numerous physical images of birth, breast-feeding, the

maternal body and the mother/daughter bond. Prominent in this collection is this theme of the unspoken physical and emotional connections between mother and daughter. Symbolizing this bond in "Dragons of Sullivan Street" is the symbol of an invisible umbilical cord between mother and daughter:

> My baby slumbers above, bathed in her milk
> dreams.
> There's a long knotted cord running from my
> heart
> to her navel, making me turn with her
> restlessly,
> sense distress before it can reach her. (57)

Also significant to this portrayal of the maternal in _Necessary Sugar_ is the intermingling of the concepts of creativity with giving birth and motherhood. In the poem, "Necessary Sugar" di Michele equates the birth of her daughter to the building of cathedrals and, in doing so, creates an image of the maternal that is deeply connected to creativity rather than set apart from it:

> Giving birth I realized that men
> build cathedrals in an attempt
> to sculpt light,
> you are the firefly
> I collected between my legs. (38)

In her article, "Creativity and Motherhood: Having the Baby or the Book", Libby Scheir comments that mothering is beginning to surface as a prominent subject in Canadian women's writing. She mentions di Michele, among others, as one of the women who are attempting to create a place for the maternal perspective in the mainstream of Canadian writing: "As women, we are trying to reinvent language that emerges from the reality of our lives, rather than reflect the perceived impressions of men" (1984, 11-12). Yet it is important to note that di Michele's maternal language and discourse do not idealize motherhood, as some of her poems from this perspective address the painful side of being a woman. In "Poem for My Daughter" di Michele attempts to prepare her infant daughter for certain harsh realities in advising her to channel her pain into creativity:

> I advise you to steel yourself
> although there's no escape from pain
> you can burnish with it
> like an iron in the fire. (51)

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the maternal narratives of Ardizzi, Edwards, di Michele and Melfi give voice to immigrant mothers' stories. In closely identifying with mothers and matrilineage through their own experience of double marginalization, these writers are moving beyond the

good/terrible maternal stereotypes in order to create multi-dimensional maternal perspectives. Moreover, these writers reshape certain immigrant themes of silence, isolation and exile so as to convey Italian immigrant mothers' particular perspectives as cultural transmitters and family mediators. Thus, for first-generation mothers, in spite of the many barriers and hardships they face, their stories are ones of fortitude and survival. The next generation of daughters who become mothers looks to motherhood in their quest for reconciliation, and in the process, they explore new possibilities for maternal roles, discourse and language.

Chapter Three

Woman and Ethnic: Italian-Canadian Women Writers

I. Introduction

This Chapter will explore the significance of subjectivity, multiple identities and marginalization for Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi as Italian-Canadian women writers. While these writers differ in many respects, this analysis has examined the mother/daughter relationship as a thematic point of intersection in their narratives. I have asserted in the previous chapter that it is precisely due to the doubly marginalized position of these four writers, that they are able to situate themselves in close proximity to their matrilineage and express what feminist theory has identified as the problematic relationships between mothers and daughters. In this chapter, I will examine further the significance of these writers' "minority" identity in relation to their narratives and, also, in terms of broader theories of Canadian literature. Central to this study will be the significance of identity, or more specifically, of agency, in both the writing of these four women, and also in ethnic women's writing in general. Therefore, I will first examine the location of ethnic women in both feminist and ethnic theories, and I will pay attention to the importance of identity, particularly through the theory of agency, as a possible

point of intersection between these two discourses. I will then examine the issue of multiple identities of Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi as Italian-Canadian women, and how this position impacts upon their narratives, particularly concerning mother/daughter relationships. Finally, I will briefly discuss the issue of identity differences between these writers.

II. Ethnic Women Writers and The Intersections of Feminist and Ethnic Discourse

Women writers have contributed in large numbers to the Canadian and Italian-Canadian literatures since their beginnings; moreover, ethnic women make up a substantial number of Canadian women writers. In spite of this overlap, ethnic and feminist discourses have often resisted identification with one another. While the distinct natures of both ethnic and feminist criticism are valid and necessary, the inability of these discourses to recognize some common ground calls into question their ability to distinguish themselves from the universalizing tendencies of majority discourses. For example, in ethnic discourse, Frank Paci in his essay, "Tasks of the Canadian Novelist Writing on Immigrant Themes," describes the ethnic writer as labouring within "three concentric circles" where: "The largest circle would involve the task of the novelist in general. Then there'd be the condition of the Canadian

Writer. And finally the writer on immigrant themes in the smallest circle" (1985, 37). However, certain equally important perspectives are omitted from this diagram, such as gender, sexuality and race. Canadian novelists such as Mary Melfi, Joy Kogowa, or M. Nourbese Philip, all of whom write about immigrant themes, do not completely fit Paci's conceptualization. Similarly, much of feminist or gender theory has often been neglectful of ethnic, linguistic, racial and sexual orientation perspectives. In terms of Canadian examples, Shelagh Wilkinson's essay traces a thematic history of Canadian English literature by women, "By and About Women", includes a very good section on ethnic women's and women of colour's writing (225-230); however, Wilkinson chooses to keep these women segregated into one part of the essay and fails to integrate them into all of the different aspects of her analysis, which looks at such issues as sexuality and aging.

However, these fields have recently begun to recognize the specific perspectives of ethnic and immigrant women. For example, the 1986 First National Conference of Italian-Canadian Writers, had a section devoted exclusively to women's issues. Similarly a recent non-fiction anthology about Canadian women writing in English, Language in Her Eye, reflects the diversity of the women's writing community with essays by writers such as Mary di Michele, Himani Bannerji and Dionne Brand. At present, a dominant topic

seems to be the determination of how to go about linking the two issues within each discourse. In the context of Italian-Canadian women's writing and feminism, Roberta Schiff-Zamaro states:

> If we are really interested in discussing the woman's issue in a serious and professional way, now that we are so lucky as to have quite a large body of feminist writings, we could raise the question of how and where the works by Italian-Canadian female writers would fit into such a corpus, and if they do fit, how do they differ from other works precisely because of the two-fold disadvantage of being both women and immigrants. (135)

In addressing some of Schiff-Zamaro's queries, the multiple perspectives of Italian-Canadian women writers may not readily 'fit' into feminist or ethnic discourses. For example, to consider Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi as 'ethnic women' writers is a complex matter that involves a number of issues beyond the basic facts that they happen to be women who immigrated to Canada from Italy. The positions of both gender and ethnicity can be found in certain elements within the narratives of these writers, as well as in statements of self-identification external to their writing. In defining women's immigrant writing in Australia, Sneja Gunew observes:

> It is possible that it is not so much a question of being a migrant but of writing from a migrant position, and this in turn could be a matter of choosing to interrogate - a will to alienation. Admittedly this is also, in the long run, going to mean being subject to metaphorization, since anyone can mimic forms of rebellion. It is not just a matter of which "I" but of what sustains the various "I's": What are the conditions of speaking? (1985, 168)

Gunew's concentration upon subjectivity in the context of the theory of agency would appear to be one viable point of intersection between ethnicity and feminism. In his theory on agency, Paul Smith re-examines the issue of subjectivity so as to differentiate between the subject and the agent. Rather than being a unified whole, the subject is "... the series of the conglomeration of positions, subject-positions, provisional and not necessarily indefeasible, into which a person is called momentarily by the discourses and the world that he/she inhabits" (Smith, xxxv), while the agent is one form of that subjectivity that offers, "...the possibility (indeed, the actuality) of resistance to ideological pressure is allowed for (even though that resistance too must be produced in an ideological context" (Smith, xxxv). In his analysis, Smith cites feminism as utilizing subjectivity in this manifold

way. He claims that feminist theory is able to express its marginalization, while still being an active agent in opposing the institutions that perpetuate its marginalization:

> Feminism, so it seems to me, has been able to recognize the operations of subjectivity and ideology in a way at once more sophisticated and more appropriate to contemporary conditions than most of the other discourses or oppositional movements which have arisen in those years. The "subject," in the widest catchment of feminist discourse, has been formulated both in terms of its experience as dominated "subject" and also as an active and contestatory social agent. (152)

In relation to Smith's theories of agency and subjectivity, it is important to note that both writers and literary theorists working in Italian-Canadian and feminist fields have cited the assertion of identity (or multiple identities) as a vehicle of voicing one's marginalized position, while also actively critiquing dominant modes of literary discourse. Francesco Loriggio has observed that the significance of identity in ethnic literature is in opposition to the academic mainstream's postmodern view of the 'death' of the author:

> In opposition to modernist and post-modernist objectivism, which stresses the cognitive value of

> outsidedness, ethnic duality reinstates insidership. An Eliot, a Joyce, being inherently inside, being endowed with, as it were, too much history - the history of the dominant class or the dominant group - responds by moving towards the margin. A Di Cicco or a Di Michele or a Micone, who is marginalized by history, will seize upon every bit of identity s/he can get. (1989, 22)

In her essay "On Female Identity and Writing by Women" Judith Kegan Gardiner notes the expression of identity is important for the assertion of difference in women's writing and experience. As a result, asserting identity becomes important tool in questioning patriarchy and the male-dominated literary canon. She notes:

> Twentieth-century women writers express the experience of their own identity in what and how they write, often with a sense of urgency and excitement in the communication of truths just understood. Often they communicate a consciousness of their identity through paradoxes of sameness and difference - from other women, especially their mothers; from men; and from social injunctions for what women should be, including those inscribed in the literary canon. (184)

Yet ethnic women writers have the potential to achieve agency by challenging the universalizing of identity not only by majority discourses, but also by the ethnic and feminist discourses which claim to speak for or about them. Using the specific example of Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi, their "conditions of speaking" (Gunew, 1985, 168) involve various combinations of identities based upon gender, culture, language, and class; thus, these multiple positions undermine ethnicity's and feminism's frequent tendency towards the use of binary divisions of identity such as man/woman, or dominant/other. As Trinh Minh-ha observes, many discourses, including feminism, assimilate ethnic women's identity into a generic notion of 'difference':

> The difference (within) between difference itself and identity has so often been ignored and the use of the two terms so readily confused, that claiming a female/ethnic identity/difference is commonly tantamount to reviving a kind of "male-tinted" romanticism. (96)

In terms of mother/daughter relationships, as stated in Chapter One, these writers have a tendency to insert a personal history into the public fiction, particularly when writing in the daughterly perspective. This is done not merely for a confessional purpose, nor solely for the assertion of difference; this form of subjectivity asserts

that multiple positions and ideologies exist not only for the authors, or their narrative voices, but for the readers and theorists as well:

> ...where the gap between imaginary relations and real conditions becomes an abyss, then one reaches as a matter of survival for the first person in order to establish some kind of foothold. And it is precisely here, under those conditions, that 'truth' (in the sense of a reality beyond our experience) is signalled as contingent, as historically and culturally specific, and that the subject is fragmented into contradictory positions which are also historically and culturally specific. (Gunew, 1988, 119)

This marking of the 'truth as contingent' through the use of the first person is not unlike Julie Kristeva's notion of the *sujet-en-procès*, where both the writer and the speaker are never fixed subjects. In this process, the subject travels constantly between the paternal symbolic order of language and the pre-verbal semiotic domain (Kristeva, 1986, 92-93). Agency, in turn, asserts an awareness of this process of subject multiplicity, so as to actively challenge certain ideologically fixed notions of identity. For Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi, agency is achieved through specific modes of identity assertion.

III. The Conditions of Speaking: Expressions of Identity by Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi

For the specific texts of Ardizzi, di Michele, Melfi, and Edwards, how is identity asserted? As has been mentioned, defining these women as "Italian-Canadian Women" writers stems from a number of elements within and outside their narratives. Chapters One and Two have examined certain common expressions of mother/daughter relationships where these writers intersect as Italian-Canadian women. There is more, however, than thematic commonality in the narratives of these writers. From the analysis of mother/daughter relations, other assertions of identity become evident, in particular, the use of language, the experimentation with traditional literary forms and also, certain statements made outside the narratives.

The multiple identities of these writers impacts strongly upon the language they employ. For Ardizzi, aside from the English translation of Made in Italy, she writes only in Italian, and thus, although she is a Canadian writer, her works remain largely unknown to the majority Canadian audience. Yet Ardizzi's use of the Italian language is unlike that of contemporary writers living in Italy, since she writes in a careful, standard Italian and avoids the dialect words and anglicisms that one may expect from an immigrant living in Toronto. Through this use of language Ardizzi is consciously asserting an independent

identity within, and in opposition to, the dominant culture which surrounds her in Toronto.

For di Michele, Edwards and Melfi, writing in English may entail the difficult task of 'translating' Italian or Italian-Canadian sentiment and experience. In an essay dealing with her experience as a playwright, Edwards expresses an awareness of her different audiences (i.e. Canadian, Southern Italian, Northern Italian). In attempting to inject an Italian sensibility into the English language, she comments: "I don't know how to solve this problem without sounding a false note for one of my audiences" (1990 B, 109). Often this 'translation' is achieved by inserting Italian words in the English narrative. In respect of using Italian words in her writing, di Michele states: "...I also use Italian words to signal difference or to signal that some form of 'translation' is necessary" (1990, 105). While there is the risk that these Italian words may detract from the writing in either confusing the English speaking reader or in appearing to be pretentious or artificial, as di Michele asserts, these words also have the potential to serve a positive function by reminding readers that both the identity and mode of expression may be manifold.

In respect of language, it is also important to note that certain Italian words may take on a different meaning in the English context. For example, the use of the word

puttana by di Michele in "Mimosa" and by Melfi in Infertility Rites illustrates some of the complexities in using Italian words in English writing. Both writers spell the word differently from its standard Italian spelling: di Michele writes "*putane*" (1981 B, 4), while Melfi uses "*putana*" (1991, 12). These variations create some confusion as to the writers' actual intentions. Some explanations may be that the writers either misspelled the word, employed a transcription of the phonetic sound, used a dialect spelling or perhaps that the editor made an error proofreading. Furthermore the word, *puttana*, has developed a specific meaning in the Italian-Canadian immigrant context. In Italian, *puttana* is a derogatory expression meaning a whore or a prostitute, and is only applicable to women. In the Italian-Canadian context, *puttana* takes on a new meaning in a situation where it used by a family member to label a daughter, sister or female cousin, in order to imply that she is somehow rebellious against traditional ways. Thus, when di Michele and Melfi employ this word in their mother/daughter narratives, they are expressing a specific experience of Italian-Canadian women when their Italian and Canadian identities conflict. In relation to this notion of the *puttana* as the rebellious woman, it should also be mentioned that these four writers express their multiple identities in the language of gender experience and sexuality in an Italian-Canadian cultural context. Some

examples are the Madonna/Prostitute imagery used in describing the two sisters in di Michele's "Mimosa" and the violent, surreal language used by Nina in _Infertility Rites_ to describe her experience of sex, pregnancy, miscarriages and maternal ambivalence.

As evident in Chapters One and Two, these four writers also make distinct use of the narrative forms, particularly in terms of the use of multiple stories and voices. Integral to these experiments with form are the elements of history, biography, autobiography and matrilineage, which add to the multiplicity of the writing by expanding time and space. These devices are of particular significance to these writers since the act of writing implies for them a distinct tension between their culture, their families and themselves. Helen Barolini describes this tension for Italian-American women as:

> ...the paradox: Italian American women are the core of their families and they are the ones who have most subordinated themselves to the well-being of the total entity. Family above self. But, being at the heart of things, it is they who, breaking the silence imposed on them by family loyalty, are best suited to make literary use of the material implicit in family struggles. What provides the thematic material is, ironically, the greatest obstacle to the writing. For that old

> sanction of *omertà* both defies creativity and instigates it. (1987 B, 27)

Like the experimentation with language, the creation of multi-layered narratives and multiple voices, allow Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi an opportunity to express the contradictions of their position as ethnic women writers. In particular, the multiplicity of form and voice reflects the specific tensions for Italian Canadian woman writers between North American individuality and the Italian immigrant cultural collectivity.

While language, voice and narrative form play important roles in the assertion of identity within their writing, it is important to note that Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi also openly identify as ethnic women, as mothers and as daughters in their non-fiction writing and personal interviews. For example, di Michele is particularly vocal about the multiple positions involved in writing as an Italian-Canadian and as a woman. In one interview, she stresses her need to understand both immigrant and female identities for her writing:

> I began to look back into my own immigrant experience, and as result I found my voice. Dealing with that background was fundamental in my development as a writer in terms of my identity and my voice. Understanding my experience as an

> immigrant and as a woman was absolutely essential
> for me and my work. (1984, 22)

Furthermore, all of these four writers are mothers and, the fact that they continue to write and publish calls into question the belief that motherhood and creativity are incompatible. For example, Ardizzi has written, Conversation with My Son, a collection of poems which is also a type of personal diary relating her experience as a mother witnessing her son's battle with leukaemia. Moreover, Melfi claims to derive poetic inspiration from being a mother: "A number of poems in this book [A Season in Beware] also show my delight in being a mother. My two sons have been a great inspiration to me. I am grateful for their exuberance in my household" (129).

IV. Divergences in Identity

The expression of Italian-Canadian women's identity by Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi is comprised of both common and divergent perspectives. While I have discussed some of the commonalities between these writers, there are two points that I wish to discuss concerning identity differences. First, while identity is significant in the works of these writers, their narratives are not solely about ethnic and women's themes. For example, Melfi's A Bride in Three Acts deals with the themes of relationships and marriage, while Edwards' latest two novellas, Becoming

Emma and _A Whiter Shade of Pale_ are not about the Italian-Canadian experience and do not have predominantly Italian characters.

Secondly, despite many commonalities, there are a number of cultural, generational, regional and ideological differences between these writers, which in turn effect their literary style and form. As has been mentioned, all of these writers originate from different regions in Italy, and thus, although I have identified them as Italian-Canadian, there may be certain regional, linguistic and cultural differences which I have not fully examined in their writing. Generational differences also exist since Ardizzi was schooled in Italy and immigrated to Canada as an adult, while di Michele, Edwards and Melfi immigrated as young children and were all educated in Canada. This difference translates into various identifications with Italian-Canadian immigrant culture in their writing. Writing in Italian, Ardizzi more readily identifies with an older generation of Italian immigrants, most notably with mothers. The writing of di Michele, Edwards and Melfi instead focuses on the younger generation's tensions between Canadian and traditional Italian cultures.

Aside from the various Italian perspectives, there are certain Canadian regional differences to consider: Ardizzi and di Michele have lived mostly in Toronto, Melfi has always lived in Montreal and Edwards was raised and lives in

Alberta. In some cases, these regional differences are evident in the narratives, and at times, they are not. For example, the fact that Edwards has lived most of her life in Alberta is evident in the strong sense of Western Canada in her works, while there is not the same sense of place in Melfi's writing, although she grew up and still resides in Montreal. Perhaps the absence of place in Melfi's writing is due to her surrealistic style, as well as the fact that as an immigrant and an anglophone, she does not strongly identify with the dominant culture in Quebec.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has examined the issues of multiple identities of Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi as Italian-Canadian women writers. I have illustrated that the multiple identities of these writers impacts upon their writing not only thematically, but also in terms of language, narrative form and voice. In terms of mother/daughter discourse, it is due to their specific perspectives as immigrant women that these four writers are able to identify closely with their matrilineage and write clearly in the voice of both daughter and mother. I have also noted that the assertion of identity, particularly through the theory of agency, presents a viable and necessary point of intersection between ethnic and feminist discourses. In spite of the risk of marginalization in the

mainstream, literary community, claiming one's ethnic and female identity in literature ultimately questions universalizing discourses and create new avenues in terms of the way literature is read and studied. Canadian ethnic women's discourse is still in its early stages and it will most likely be writers such as Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi who will be creating its future directions.

Conclusion

In spite of their complex and ambivalent relationships, mothers and daughters in the narratives of Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi find common ground in a heritage of duality derived the female immigrant experience. In the explorations of their multiple selves, mothers and daughters partake in various quests involving a re-examination of their relationships one another.

Daughters figure prominently in these narratives and their portrayals are dominated by the themes of alienation and the split self. Common in the daughters' story is the quest for identity reconciliation involving a re-examination of traditional culture through the mother/daughter relationship. Also important in the daughters' quests is the role of intellectual and artistic expression as a vehicle which asserts individuality, yet also provides the space to explore their traditional culture. In contrast to their early desires for assimilation, these quests for reconciliation confirm the daughters' status as 'outsiders,' yet finally provides them with the opportunity to recognize and express all of their multiple identities.

In the portrayal of immigrant mothers, themes of silence, isolation, and exile are reshaped to illustrate the mother as cultural transmitter and family mediator. While mothers as protagonists are not as common as their

daughterly counterparts, these writers also utilize various images of immigrant mothers, including figures from their matrilineage in order to rewrite the 'silent' maternal perspective. Like daughters, these mothers also experience multiple identities as immigrant women; however, the mothers' quests are more internal in nature, involving a re-examination of their ambivalence towards their own maternal roles.

Finally, it is evident that Ardizzi, di Michele, Edwards and Melfi are creating new directions for the narrative, mother/daughter discourse and the approaches to ethnic women's writing in Canada. Through this examination of mother's and daughters, I have observed that the authors' experience of identity shapes the telling of the mother/daughter relationship. For these writers the position of writing as an immigrant women, situates them in close proximity to their matrilineage, and thus they are able to give voice to both the maternal and daughterly perspectives, as well as explore the complexities of the mother/daughter relationship. In general, their assertions of multiple identities achieve agency by questioning certain universalizing classifications in various literary discourses. Thus agency, with its emphasis on multiple levels of subjectivity, including active resistance to ideological or social 'norms', is one approach where ethnic

and feminist theories may find the necessary common ground for further examination of ethnic women's literature.

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