Thirdly, the academic political climate is not conducive to research in Italian Canadian studies for various reasons. The number of graduate theses dealing with sociolinguistic considerations of Italian Canadians have always been disproportionally low in comparison to the number of Italian Canadians living in Canada.

Fourthly, if class and ethnicity do not exhibit the same strong connection as they did in the past, the question of social and economic status for the maintenance of ethnicity has not been answered. An attempt to come to terms with both the pre-modern, Mediterranean culture found in Canada and its impact on Canadian life has been shown at the Presenza exhibition at the Museum of Civilization in Ottawa<sup>44</sup>. Italian Canadians constitute a most interesting group to study from this perspective as well.

Despite these challenges, Italians in Canada have all the requirements for making a significant impact on the social life of Canadians and in the development of theoretical and empirical research.

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### Abstract

Gli studi sulle lingue degli immigrati italiani e dei loro discendenti che abitano in Canada si concentrano su pochi argomenti specifici e lasciano in questo modo alcuni problemi irrisolti. Viene suggerita una maggiore attenzione alle problematiche linguistiche del multiculturalismo canadese dalla prospettiva delle varietà linguistiche italiane. L'identità etnica e la lingua vengono slegate nella seconda e terza generazione, e la conoscenza della lingua ancestrale cede all'uso di simboli astutamente maneggiati dal marketing. Comunque, grazie alla loro tenacia, alla loro particolare storia dell'emigrazione, alla loro vasta gamma di esperienze, gli italo-canadesi hanno un ruolo cruciale non solo nel promuovere e nel marketing della "cultura italiana", ma anche nel plasmare lo sviluppo della cultura canadese.

<sup>44</sup> Presenza exhibit: http://www.civilization.ca/cultur/presenza/pszase.html.

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to the "first settlers" the founding of a national image, of a socially coherent reality (language/s, culture, economy). The tension that derives from the clashing principles of Biculturalism and Multiculturalism is superseded by the actual implementation of the policies attributed to those governing principles. State Multiculturalism relegates a particular social space to non English and French communities, marginalizing what has become by definition the ethnic proper. Such a space stands out as integrated areas of performances, whereby ethnicity is formed, recognized, and attributed in terms of spectacularized indexes such as exotic diet regimes and particularized body rhythms. In time, these areas of integrated performances have solidified into reproductive patterns of behavior, or working stereotypes, that inform socio-cultural and economic analyses. As the process becomes naturalized, what acquires everyday legitimacy is a set of relations of power that is historically exclusive of, and embraces as "momentary stories", the aggregation within the Canadian landscape of the various cultures and economies that constitute Canada at large<sup>2</sup>.

Italian Canadian, then, is the open term capable of generating a particular reading that favors the multiplicity of identity-formation paradigms resonating within it, and which posits a fluid cultural and political reading. In reconstituting the theoretical basis that supports and emanates from the various artistic texts that are part of this analysis, particular attention must be given to the Italian shore. The origins are not necessarily to be based only on migration processes and patterns, the flow of specific social groups from a given space – Italy to the host or country of arrival – Canada. Rather, origins – in order to undo the latent negative nostalgia - should take into account the historical formation of Italian literature, something that has not been constitutive of Italian Canadian literature proper. What this particular reading has to offer is fundamental to the idea of a displaced poetics, since the production of Italian literature precedes by several centuries the constitution of an Italian state: a body of Italian literary texts is created, refers to, and forms a unitary culture and literature, though the nation of reference does not materially exist. Therefore, what the artistic texts speak to is a nation-in-becoming, something that the texts themselves will attempt to shape and define. Yet, it is central to the position expressed in this article that the body of texts under consideration are written in displacement, in other words as works without of a referential geo-political place. The analogy with the Italian

<sup>2</sup> Not only have present Multicultural practices become objectified as potential, global commodities that can be exported and implemented within other destabilized nation states, but their duplicitous political nature has become explicit in terms of a coherent form of local social management in the culture/religious wars of early 21st century.

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dominant discourse(s), Scott Reid is the one who most succinctly has addressed the pertinent question of belonging. His reading of Survival challenges Atwood's ideological and exclusionary stand and questions its success. Not only are the choices of representation that Atwood has made shown to be partial and arbitrary, and therefore quite limiting: «To get a genuine sense of Canadian habits of mind, Atwood would have had to select the books she would study based upon what Canadians were reading, rather than on what selected poets and novelists were writing ... »6. The choices themselves are politically charged in that they are based on the sustenance of "familial" ties which become existentially justifying for Atwood: «...poet Frank Davey noted that Atwood had managed to include, among her source material, 42% of the poetry and fiction then in print at Anansi, the publishing house at which she was then working as an editor»<sup>7</sup>. In other words, in this account of a canon-shaping work, the halo of innocence that Atwood claimed for herself and her cultural intentions acquires a new perspective, much more problematic than that of a free spirit challenging the intellectual world. Yet, more perplexing and more interesting is Atwood's reputed disdain for "immigrant" literature. In Reid's view:

In response to criticism regarding her choice of authors, Atwood later claimed she had excluded some domestic authors because the themes they explored were simply not relevant to her thesis, and all Canadian immigrant authors because "it seems to me dangerous to talk about 'Canadian' patterns of sensibility in the work of people who entered and/or reentered-and-left the country at a developmentally late stage of their lives"8

As the article continues in its deconstruction of the anti-immigrant stance in Survival Reid points out that «The Canada of Survival has no room for individualists, dissenters, or the purveyors of impurities from overseas (....) its intolerance toward diversity and its methodological flaws are probably the keys to the long-term popularity of Survival»9. The final note - that Atwood had not changed a word in the 1996 reprint or felt it necessary to add a new preface to frame her work - points to the consistent implementation of practices of domination particular to power relations in Canada's political and socio-cultural sphere<sup>10</sup>.

«Studi Emigrazione/Migration Studies», XLIV, n. 166, 2007.

## **Italian Canadian as displacement** poetics: context, history, and literary production

In framing a theoretical approach, departures

Let us situate Italian Canadian literature within the parameters of displacement poetics. The base of such a theoretical construction would invariably be the tension posited between, at the very least, two existentially formative realms, two identifiable geo-cultural realities -Canada and Italy. The theoretical resistance to such a framework that includes the Italian side - can be justified and understood as a discourse that is aware of the potential, negative recuperation of the Italian Canadian experience as a form of extended italianity (encompassing a neocolonial frame), rather then a process in its own terms, bearing its own identity, in the Canadian literary panorama<sup>1</sup>.

In its formulations, the literature production under scrutiny has seen an array of framing devices from Italo-Canadian, Italian-Canadian, Canadian of Italian descent, to more encompassing rubrics such as ethnocultural texts. Each has acted to establish, ideologically and culturally, a particular reality. Perhaps the most problematic has been the hyphenated term, which has meant at once to bring a sense of unity within the greater Canadian literary realm while retaining its own particular genealogy. What stands out as a background has been the Multicultural discourse, a normalizing state mechanism of social control and management of ethnic differentiation. Within the construction of a common, modern Canadian identity, state apparatuses have worked to balance the economic need for immigration with a particular brand of mythopoiesis as historical narrative that foregrounds and attributes

<sup>1</sup> Drawing from Ulysses and his navigation between Scylla and Charybdis, an open reading of Italian Canadian literature should attempt to avoid such pitfalls, while reconstituting a theoretical approach based on the artistic and cultural resonances that occur within the triad: departure / arrival / development, or what we call a poetics of displacement.

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Canadian artistic practices becomes emblematic of the process of constituting a socio-cultural community within a conquered, foreign, occupied or other space. In the case of Italian Canadian literature, the matter is complicated by the fact that the referential space acquires a three-leveled dimension. Briefly: 1) Italy plays the point of origin as an ever-unstable mythologized, nostalgic (in its negative and positive acceptations) historical space of reference; 2) Canada is the living, referential space, and 3) the imagined community, the one yet to come is an identity of multiplicities, rather than a simple sum of the parts. Of course, the process delineated above is not particular to a specific, ethnicized identity3, but is part of the overall, hidden, process of everyday multiculturalism rather than state-imposed Multiculturalism<sup>4</sup>.

### Surviving a Canadian background

If at this point the term Canadian is problematic, in that it summarizes a particular, ideological construct that bestows (but who speaks?) belonging and power within an implicit hierarchical structure, its use nevertheless has a seduction lure, the anchoring identity-effect that cannot be dismissed tout court in the various spaces of cultural production. Perhaps a well-known and groundbreaking work by Margaret Atwood can still elicit a reading that will contextualize the zeitgeist that surrounded the appearance of Italian Canadian writing. Layers of criticism have been laid upon this fundamental book that tend to revolve about one historical principle: immigrants do not contribute or belong to the cultural world of a nation<sup>5</sup>. Of the various critics operating within and without Canadian

<sup>3</sup> As far as the theoretical framework is concerned, displacement poetics assumes two more motivating factors as latent characteristics in the display of representational configurations within the body of otherness in mainstream Canada. One is a general trope that has usually been associated with the science fiction genre, constituted by utopian and dystopian narratives; the other refers to the practices of avant-garde literary movements in the early stages of the 20th century as embodied by authors whose background is, finally, a transcultural one. The very fabric of a literature that emerges from displacement - that is not isomorphic in terms of its creation (author/Language) with the recognized space (country/Language) of circulation - is constituted by a series of communicative strands or strategies that involve the representation of possible social communities by a reworking of the language that forms those communities.

The distinction between small and capital m is necessary when talking about the practices of multiculturalism, because as the term develops and is applied politically, it undergoes a power shift - from grass-roots lived experiences to idealized state function mechanisms - that inevitably alters its reality. As such, in this reductive formulation, immigrants and other displaced peoples – the ethnics in Canada – must then be seen simply in their dire economic functionality as laborers and consumers, but not as producers of any kind.

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The matter at hand - as Atwood states in the book - was not to produce an academic work, but something that would transcend a Canadian parochial divide: the world of academia and popular literature. This was done by positing a catchy, dual-identity paradigm for Canadians - survival and victimhood - which exists somewhere between America's frontier and England's island identity-forming constructs. Atwood's concession, that the first settlers (WASPS, French) have now become the new natives (neonatives), was challenging then on several fronts and still is now: «...but for the later immigrants, hostile cities replace hostile forests, and the place of the feared, unfriendly and treacherous natives has been taken by - of course - those earlier immigrants, the WASPS and the French»11. The act of substitution - settlers to natives - is from the perspective of the recent immigrant who is assigned the same interpretative values as those of the settlers: the habitat is hostile as the natives are. The process of coming to Canada is the same for any group, as identified in Survival. Further to this, the non-WASP non-French immigrant, being the same as the original settlers, would not require any differentiated treatment (Multiculturalism) since it is not a different but a sameness that is produced in terms of (assigned) interpretative values. One would further have to assume that power (political and cultural) is now - 1972 - in the hands of the new species of immigrants. If this sounds familiar to today's cultural critic, it is because the apparently simple book, and Margaret Atwood must be credited for this, contains a proto-postmodern formulation. Ideologically, Survival functions much the same way as the cultural apparatuses that have informed the postmodern mentality. By claiming the end of History and of the grand narratives that sustained it, postmodern thought has attempted to neutralize and domesticate heterogeneous cultural productions for the last decades in order to achieve a global cultural sameness that in the end corresponds to a particular, ideological position<sup>12</sup>. What remains, then, of Atwood's evaluation is this: "immigrant" literature is meaningless because it is transient. The survivalist expression is not only formulated as an applied-in-time canon, but it continues today to shape a "tolerant" ideology of exclusionary practices.

Failure, for survival's sake

6 REID. Scott. Survival according to Atwood, «The National Post», Saturday,

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April 10, 1999, p. B7.

her critics, best formulates.

the pages of Survival. What could have been a revolutionary work is, simply, a domesticating set of expressed power relations filtered through the vestiges of literary texts/tests. Though Atwood does talk about displacement, she fails to articulate it as a possible, emancipatory source for Canadian literary criticism and identity-formation paradigms. Politically, the differentiation between frontier and survival functions cannot produce what is envisioned: cultural authenticity, because both culminate in the process of blockading - preserving the conquest. One function (frontier), at the end, is really the offshoot of the other (survival). The final conquest of a determined space invariably leads to

its defense and maintenance – the only available reading that sustains such a function is a continuous state of emergency, the siege mentality. However, Atwood's position might be recuperated by adopting an inclusive interpretation as expressed by Franco Ferrucci in his work on Homer. Briefly, for the Italian critic, the siege is what is expressed by the Iliad, a closing of the early city (contemplative civilization) upon itself that can only be undermined in the mirroring of art. In fact, Achilles' shield (figurative art) contains and is an interpretation of the world, while Ulysses' subterfuge (the wooden horse) is, ultimately, a religious trick. As the city is conquered and peoples, Trojans and Greeks, are dispersed across the Mediterranean, the return home is a voyage of discovery: the Odyssey. In order to make his way back, Ulysses must undergo the transformation from religious trickster back to artist (encompassing Achilles, language having become the shield), to Everyman. In so doing, the voyage leads to a cultural paradigm shift, the Everyman who divests himself of his religious anchorage is the artist, the actor that begins anew civilization, creating what Nietzsche will identify as "necessary illusions". Positing a different strategy for Canadian literature in general does not at this point preclude its proto-history. As shown, it is necessary to extrapolate from the particularized origins, so as to move beyond its ideological limits, a verifiable theoretical approach, an approach that does not exclude non-English and non-French writers, but which constantly reformulates itself within the parameters of lived multiculturalism, and eschews any tokenism as the means by which dominant discourses are reaffirmed<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> For a full analysis of dominant discourses please see GOULIAMOS, Kosta; ANSELMI, William, Elusive Margins. Consuming Media, Ethnicity and Culture. Guernica, Toronto, 1998. Basically, the Canadian cultural construction is differentiated along ethnocultural lines, by which those of an English or French background posit themselves as founding, settling cultures and define the Other as ethnic. The authors posit as a way out of this power-relations impasse a transcultural federation that re-ethnicizes the settlers' paradigm while including the historical reality of the tensions, political and economical, that have marked the differentiation between an English and a French Canada.

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who, finally, appear in the anthology edited by Fulvio Caccia and Antonio D'Alfonso, Quêtes – Textes d'auteurs italo-québécois<sup>17</sup>.

Between the publication of Roman Candles (1978) and Quêtes -Textes d'auteurs italo-québécois (1983), a poignant and witty analysis that ties itself to Atwood's position and grounds it, without redemption, into a self-legitimizing exclusionary practice, appears in the journal «Canadian Literature». Written, in the fall of 1980, by Professor Laurie Ricou, who, amongst other things, was to become the editor of said journal, the position expressed in the article shows power-relations innate to the fabrications of a national literary canon and their direct consequences:

But (to return to the editor's metaphor) most of these Roman Candles flicker faintly, don't explode or illuminate, don't light up a world. As a group I found the poems more valuable as cultural statement, than as poetry: there is a group of I-can (as they are more punningly called) poets spread across the country; national background is an enormous concern among second-generation immigrants; there are essential connections between the dual homelessness so often encountered in these poems, and the immigrant/tourist perspective in the mainstream of Canadian Literature; and, especially, that recent Canadian nationalism has been an oppressive force squashing the development of our minority cultures<sup>18</sup>.

It is not by chance that such a position is framed by the title Words & Wine. The monocultural critical palate responds to the seemingly new flavours of literature in Canada by resorting to the banal and contrived Multiculturalist epistemological cage: diverse culinary experiences that, in this case, evoke for the Canadian critic the exoticism of wine rather than the more familiar beer. And, the term "new" above is altogether a misleading framing device (invariably tied to the occurrence of the article) since the seventeen poets in the Roman Candles or the eighteen in Quêtes are part of a wave of authors in Quebec and English Canada who have already been working for years (in Canada and the United States) by the time this statement is publicly pronounced. Ricou's assessment deprives the authors of any artistic stature: «I found the poems more valuable as cultural statement», which is indicative, ironically enough, of its subversive political potential. Subversive in so far as the theme of state Multiculturalism is concerned, for by acknowledging the existence of this body of texts as an artistic output, Ricou would have had to reformulate at the same time what it entails to be Canadian at the time, and what is Canadian

17 CACCIA, Fulvio; D'ALFONSO, Antonio (eds.), Quêtes. Textes d'auteurs italoquébécois. Montreal, Éditions Guernica, 1983. <sup>18</sup> RICOU, Laurie, Words & Wine, «Canadian Literature», 86, 1980, pp. 128-129.

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of the first movie (1972) of the Godfather trilogy by Italian American director Francis Ford Coppola<sup>21</sup>:

It pays to have relatives in Cicero

who mean business in Chicago, and connections in Detroit

who make book for the big publishers in New York and Toronto.

From the outset the text speaks of the governing stereotype for people of Italian descent in North America: the Mafioso figure. Yet the title gives to this figure an incongruous attribute, that of being a poet. Such a technique, which was used cinematically and with great effect in the 1995 movie by Jim Jarmusch, Dead Man, aims to deconstruct the stereotype using the associations and contrasts of two seemingly unrelated worlds. The first stanza then continues in presenting the disparate association - mafia world, literary world - by conflating the two as the second last line reverberates within the mafia familial model presented as: «who make book for the big publishers».

> My typewriter was steely black and deadly portable. A trained finger inspired its trigger. I forget the actual number of editors slumped over desks, pumped full of poems.

The most visible aspect of the failure in Atwood's attempt to define a working identity-paradigm for Canadians stands out bluntly from

<sup>11</sup> ATWOOD, Margaret, Survival. A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature. Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1972, p. 149. <sup>12</sup> For a particular critical reading of the postmodern and poetry see LUNETTA, Mario, Un'allegria straziata dal dolore. In: ID.; CAVALLO, Franco (a cura di), Poesia italiana della contraddizione. Roma, Newton Compton, 1989, pp. 13-24.

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Ulysses is to Western civilization, according to Piero Boitani in L'ombra di Ulisse, «un archetipo mitico che si sviluppa nella storia e nella letteratura come un constante logos culturale»14; that is «a mythical archetype which develops as a constant cultural logos in history and literature». This logos represents the desire for knowledge, something that accompanies the long trajectory of humanity from its first civilizations to the present day. In this formulation, a poetics of displacement is invariably entwined with the failures and successes of this particular quest. Yet, the repositioning of the Canadian literary canon – by utilizing the Ulyssean frame/narrative as a revolving light - is especially pertinent for the critical reader since it addresses what is beyond the literature in transit (displaced poetics).

### Arrivals – snuffing the quest, the burning candles

Though Pier Giorgio Di Cicco's poetry anthology Roman Candles is credited as the first concrete appearance of a literature that cannot be summarized by Atwood's founding canonical survey<sup>15</sup>, such credit would not be historically correct in so far as Italian Canadian production is concerned<sup>16</sup>. At the same time that writers of Italian origins were assuming a visible position in English Canada in the late Sixties and early Seventies, so were writers of Italian origins in Quebec working primarily in French. Approaching the history and development of Italian Canadian literature by simply citing Roman Candles as a starting point would, undeniably, alter the context of such a ground-breaking and referential (to other ethnocultural productions that followed) literature. So, as works by such poets in English Canada as Mary Di Michele, Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, Antonino Mazza start to engage Canadian literature tout court, so do poets in Quebec like Fulvio Caccia – who won Governor General's Award in 1994 –, Mary Melfi, or Antonio D'Alfonso, who wrote in both French and English and

<sup>14</sup> BOITANI, Piero, L'ombra di Ulisse. Bologna, Il Mulino, 1992, p. 12. <sup>15</sup> DI CICCO, Pier Giorgio (ed.), Roman Candles. Toronto, Hounslow Press, 1978. Before the full contextualization of Italian Canadian literature can take place, a brief reminder is necessary. In terms of what constitutes literature proper, the choice here is to follow an established critical paradigm. Because of the Canadian publication, distribution and circulation process, texts that previously appeared in Italian are not considered, because a text other than English or French had no means of circulation other than within the community proper and had no Canadian financial support. As well, those texts in Italian by such authors then as Mario Duliani, Maria Ardizzi and so on, are biographical in nature and tend to fall into the category of a negative nostalgia, which, had Atwood been a multilingual/ multicultural essayist, would have helped, ironically, in honing her survivalist skills.

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literature in 1980 during a period of profound changes taking place within the Canadian social and political landscape<sup>19</sup>. By flatly marginalizing an artistic product while placing it in the "sociological" sphere, Words & Wine reiterates the, by now, familiar trope of the "immigrant/tourist perspective". In short: immigrants cannot and do not contribute to the cultural development of a country. At best, their role outside of the immediate needs of economic productivity and exploitation is that of being a social variance of entertainment, coded by color, taste and mildly foreign body movements. Multiculturalism ends up being a specific cultural area of social containment within well-defined geo-cultural spaces, while offering the spectacle of guided representations. Guided, since the script has already been provided by the state at large, and is reiterated by media mechanisms as well as by the cultural ghettos, or mosaic go-betweens. It is up to the frame of Biculturalism to provide the identity-forming paradigms of what it means to be Canadian, finally a tautological device of the second degree – the binaries of Multi- and Bi- culturalism – that still informs and forms the everyday experiences of being Canadian.

Hey, whose mafia is it anyways?

One particular poem best represents the tensions within the Canadian literary space and addresses the role of the ethnicized poet in his/her marginalized role. Rather than using the discursive format of the victimization persona so dear to the atwoodian frame, the poem self-reflexively questions its own "shelf life" (conception, appearance, distribution, recognition) through an extended metaphor. In so doing, the text shows the inherent fallacy and the political aspects inherent in the survivalist approach and its modus operandi while subverting it at the origins. As well, the text immediately faces up to the governing exclusionary practices of the Canadian literary canon as envisioned and established within the Northrop Frye - Margaret Atwood - Laurie Ricou (to mention a few) cultural line. In as sense, the poem becomes (in its parodying of a stereotype format), a partial manifesto for a poetics of displacement. The poem, by Len Gasparini, is entitled I Was a Poet for the Mafia<sup>20</sup>, and was written months before the appearance

<sup>19</sup> Witness, for example, the general political climate surrounding the repatriation of the Canadian constitution in 1982, a process that still today affects the cultural and political discourses of and about the governance of Canada and its provinces. GASPARINI, Len, I Was a Poet for the Mafia. In: DI CICCO, P.G. (ed.), Roman Candles, op. cit., 1978, pp. 24-25.

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and never had a deadline. My books made the WANTED list. I was quoted on police line-ups by suspects who knew my poems by heart.

The humorous, ironic approach reaches a climax in the third stanza with the reference to «suspects who knew my poems by heart», set against an international, multicultural background: «attended literary parleys / in sunny hiding places / like Palermo, Las Vegas, and Rio». As well, the «sunny hiding places» blatantly overturns the referential point of entrance (Canada, implied but never referenced) as a cold, dead place, for living and for publishing.

The critics tried to convict me, but my agent happened to be a syndicate lawyer with pull. I became as infamous as Capone with the power of the poem.

Finally, the analogy typewriter/Tommy gun is fully exploited with the direct reference to Capone's era, while the repetition of the letter "p" (happened, pull, Capone, power, poem) ends up on the very last word of this stanza "poem" as an onomatopoeic device to reinforce the power of the poem as a hit song, as a series of shots (literal and figuratively speaking) against the Canadian literary canon.

Rejections slips were their death warrants. They didn't understand poetry was a front for the back of my hand.

As the poem progresses so does the continuous and very successful twisting together of the two different strands and linguistic discourses that characterize those life experiences. The poet is portrayed as a hit man who uses his typewriter like a gun (characteristically, the typewriter sounds like a Tommy gun) in order to do his business, and as a cultural operator in a familial network of inclusion/exclusion processes.

I collaborated with torpedoes
who were the avant-garde
in their profession;
attended literary parleys
in sunny hiding places
like Palermo, Las Vegas, and Rio.
I lived high and fine

<sup>21</sup> Private phone conversation with the author by William Anselmi, July 2006.

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Sicily" has the last word: it spells out and destroys, precognizantly, the frontier-survival-island triad that gave birth to Survival. At the same time, the fantasized and fetishised origins are recuperated: Sicily as the final destination of the Mafioso. This trajectory completes, ironically, the stereotype by inclosing it in the circular discourse it actually is, by merging stereotype and prescribed origins. In doing so - as an artistic text written beside the canon - Gasparini frees the typecast persona, implodes the stereotype, reclaims the artistic life beyond the ethnicized reality, shows the reductive limits of a monocultural and monolinguistic interpretation (metaphorically killing the monocritic), while pointing to Ulysses' trials and tribulations, thanks to the topos of the voyage that runs throughout the poem. I Was a Poet for the Mafia alludes then to something beside the stereotype, to a useful, subtext of a mythical narrative that parallels that of the immigrant. However, here, the final subversion is the inverting of the economic well-being quest into the original quest for knowledge, in this case for a poetry beyond sterile, canonized parameters: the inclusive poetry of the emigrant that transcends time and place, a possible way out of colonial and neocolonial practices.

Some other texts in the Roman Candles and Quêtes collections, namely those of such writers as Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, Antonino Mazza, Mary Di Michele, Fulvio Caccia, Antonio D'Alfonso, Mary Melfi, Marco Micone, achieve the same poetical texture and reverberations, they are artistic texts beyond any doubt no matter the interpretative canon used to categorize them. Others, and it is a given in any anthology with such an extent of contributors, seem less concerned with voicing or staking out a position, and at times repeat established norms, or fall in an entrenched negative nostalgia. In other words, they end up contributing to a canon of Italian Canadian literature per se, and to the general Canadian canon, by negation. Displacement, in such cases, amounts to entrenchment in one's past, to victimized lives that are suffered as verbal diaspora for impossible returns and problematic sojourns in a rigid context.

To assign to such texts a mere sociological stature, however, or to suggest they do not properly belong because of ascribed transient qualities, bespeaks ultimately of a set of power relations that neutralizes any aesthetical and critical reading at its inception. Such a position would erupt in most simplistic formulation: if you don't like it, leave it (Canada). A formula congenial to entrepreneurs of the monocultural such as a Barbara Amiel or a Diane Francis, who, through the years, from the pages of Canadian newspapers and magazines have made sure that lived, multicultural experiences, would be continuously interrogated. And, whose legitimacy - that of the ethnoculturalist - has always been surrounded by the fog of doubt bestowed upon the would-be enemy within. A circensian practice, situated somewhere between the

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Mazza, in Our House Is in a Cosmic Ear, answers with the portrayal of the worker, who, like Ulysses, travels in order to give something to the world and something to the family left behind: «He was aboard a little purple ship, returning / to our beautiful Calabria. / (....) He had gone to bring gifts to the world»26.

Of course, the guiding gaze that accompanies the father in this poem is dictated by a different point of view: the migrant worker is not an exploitable object, rather s/he a subject that interacts, has always interacted with the world since time immemorial producing cultural wealth. Yet if no economic value is assigned to cultural wealth, what becomes of its genealogy? Melfi shows the conflict that arises between generations raised in different spaces. In one of her texts, Mirabel Airport, 11:00 A.M., the living grandmother is imagined as a monstrous figure; when she finally arrives from Italy to Montreal, the granddaughter's refusal - embodying the acquired marginalization - is suddenly transformed:

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<sup>27</sup>.

The repositioning of memories, from the vintage point of the voyage undertaken and brought back in modernity by the plane that substitutes the metaphorical and real ship, finds that its recipient memories - as embodied by the living subject are, finally, "a piece d'art", the "necessary illusions" of Nietzschean fame. Of course, the genealogical, connecting thread contains an unsolvable problematic, if differentiated according to gender. As for the betrayed Ulysses, who must die in order for the new frontier to survive, does he become responsible for the objectification of culture in the new world, or is the migrant betrayed twice by the dream/trap of economic well-being? Mary Di Michele leaves the question hanging, the ambiguity refracting through the migrant experience where men are betrayed by another culture and women are exotic, cultural trophies:

> and she cries out caught with one bare foot in a village in the Abruzzi, the other busy with cramped English speaking toes in Toronto, she strides the Atlantic legs spread like a Colossus<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> MAZZA, Antonino, Our House is in a Cosmic Ear, ibidem, pp. 41-42. <sup>27</sup> MELFI, Mary, Mirabel Airport, 11:00 A.M., ibidem, pp. 63-64. <sup>28</sup> DI MICHELE, Mary, Enigmatico, ibidem, p. 62.

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«ViceVersa»<sup>33</sup> (1983-1997), a *transcultural* magazine, renegotiates the tensions between the Multi- and Bi-cultural and political model by investing into a discourse that cuts across ethno-based discourses, to overcome nationalistic fences and entrenched ideologies. It does so in content and form, by becoming a cultural space where contributors navigate a series of languages: English, French, Italian, and Spanish, and where discussions about Italian Canadian literature will be featured alongside articles that looked upon the local as well as the

international cultural scenes.

Alas! I learned too late that vice paid worse than verse when a bullet obliterated my poetry. I was a poet for the Mafia. Bury me in Sicily.

The final stanza seemingly resolves the metaphoric tension by actually having a bullet obliterating the poet's life (poetry). It does so by subverting the imaginary metaphorical construct through the intrusion of the "real" life. At this point, the poem - though the bullet be the vestiges of a negative review, of marginalization (the silencing of death) - would end as a critical, ironic narrative that posits the ethnicized poet (Italian Canadian Italian-Canadian) as, actually, un-wanted (confirming the atwoodian position of the immigrant artist as a tourist, reinforced by the naming of the sunny, hiding places). Yet, Gasparini's coup de grace takes place in the last two lines, by recuperating the dialectical process and the strident metaphor: «I was a poet for the Mafia. / Bury me in Sicily». The reiteration of the title now has the atwoodian premise and result: death, which is even more spectacular than just being a victim. But the request to "bury me in

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spectacle of Multiculturalism and the cold reality of post-WWII pragmatic approaches to the identified Other, ultimately subservient to economic reality, if one were to see in the creation of the term ethnic another way to create an exploitable class as Immanuel Wallerstein

has suggested in Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization  $^{22}$ . The critical reader who has been able to navigate through the various scogli<sup>23</sup> that render any landing almost impossible should read the various artistic texts as depositaries of a poetics of displacement in formation. In so far as any theoretical and critical framework is formulated, the relationship with the actual text is more than important, it is fundamental<sup>24</sup>.

Voyages, returns, transformations

The two aforementioned anthologies constitute a map of displaced poetics. They are points of arrival - metaphorically and figuratively rather than points of departure. By tracing different poetic trajectories and summarizing them, however varied the form of the arrival, a particular poiesis is presented: Italian Canadian literature, in the last quarter of the 20th century.

Within the map, Gasparini's position calls into question the topological disposition assigned to works other than those of the dominant discourses: the periphery, (the assigned placement), speaks back. And, in speaking back, it simply reconstructs a different reality. In this reconstruction, in Roman Candles Di Cicco addresses the betrayal of the promised land(s), as in The Man Called Beppino: «and the man is easily duped, / he believes in the honest dollar, and is offered peanuts in return»25. Class structures and ethnic typologies are imploded in the figure of the "worker-monkey" who «is offered peanuts in return», and will eventually die. To this,

<sup>22</sup> WALLERSTEIN, Immanuel, Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization. London, Verso, 1983.

<sup>23</sup> "Rocks by the sea". There is not actual translation in English for the Italian word. The point being made here is a factual one: what happens when the monocritic (monocultural, monolinguistic) attempts a reading of a polyvalent text (the necessarily ethnocultural)? Is it not the general case that he/she will only be able to read that text in a reductive form, and in so doing condemn the text to partial life, una vita monca (a truncated life)?

<sup>24</sup> The premise is that it is the actual artistic text that contains within itself the interpretative theoretical parameters that speak of the texts in questions. Any other approach, any theoretical apparatus that is imposed without on the text betrays the artistic work by making it conform or not, atwoodian style, to a normative, imitative, standard.

<sup>25</sup> DI CICCO, Pier Giorgio, The Man Called Beppino. In: ID. (ed.), Roman Candles, op. cit., p. 31.

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The exotic quality that permeates the migrant's position is reflected in the ambiguous richness of a polycultural development at the periphery of the modern world's economic centres as D'Alfonso tells us from the Quêtes anthology: «Dio where shall I be demain / (trop vif) qué puedo saber yo / spero che la terra be mine<sup>29</sup>».

The language of a Bicultural system is shown to be a futile imposition when confronted with the multicultural reality that has developed beside the official signposts that guide it. The migrant's quest is revealed by the fragmentary, livable spaces that s/he occupies, and by the languages s/he is a point of reference to and of. Language(s) appropriated by the migrant then open up the space of survival, altering its content and form, rendering it a decolonized reality. A babel of languages over the dominant discourses and exercises of power-relations, systems that will try to recuperate such lived experiences in Canada and reduce them to conflicted configurations. In the words of Marco Micone in his preface to Addolorata present in Quêtes «Cette pièce est une dénonciation du pouvoir mâle mais aussi une remise en question d'un certain féminisme étriqué et sectaire qui voit en l'homme, même ouvrier, le seul responsable de l'oppression de la femme»<sup>30</sup>. What is left but to recuperate the continuous metamorphosis inherent to the migrant artist conscious of his/her condition? In Caccia's words: «La metamorphose a déjà commencé»<sup>31</sup>.

#### After the flood

Looking back, perhaps we can say that the period in which the anthologies mentioned above were published had too much to offer in terms of Italian Canadian literature and culture. If, for example Frank Paci is already creating waves with his first novel, The Italians in 1978<sup>32</sup>, that same year Antonio D'Alfonso's Guernica Editions makes its entrance onto the Canadian publishing scene. It will publish a large body of those authors of Italian descent, contributing to the dissemination of Italian Canadian literature and criticism in Canada and abroad. The entrance into the arena of cultural magazines such as

<sup>29</sup> D'ALFONSO, A., Babel. In: CACCIA, F.; D'ALFONSO, A. (eds.), Quêtes - Textes d'auteurs italo-québécois, op. cit., p. 201. <sup>30</sup> MICONE, Marco, Addolorata, ibidem, p. 29. <sup>31</sup> CACCIA, Fulvio, La saut de l'ange, ibidem, p.167.

<sup>32</sup> Of particular interest in Paci's narrative, especially in the Black Blood series, is the role that the native assumes in Italian Canadian literature. Unlike the predestined atwoodian conflictual role, what emerges from the encounter between the displaced and the aboriginal world is one of mutual support, rather than of postcolonial antagonism.

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This type of anthologizing, which had its eye trained on the educational curriculum throughout Canada, actually (consciously or unconsciously) recuperates the various works - by its own use of an inclusion/exclusion model - and neutralizes their critical, and ethno-conscious component. There is no mention of the struggle, of the ideological apparatus gripping this cultural and literal production, politically unwanted. The official position of multiculturalism is taken at face value, and so the anthology becomes a celebration of current, domination processes. The coda to the neutralization process lies in the «responsibility» the writers owe to «their parents [who] sacrificed so much»35. By shifting the responsibility, anchoring it in the predominantly patriarchal genealogy, the relations of power (political and economical) are re-instated, making a diversified, literary production an appendage to the exoticization of the Other in Canada. Is it any wonder, then, that the greatest failure of the Italian Canadian literary production has been in reaching the Italian Canadian communities at large?<sup>36</sup> Little if any discussion has taken place about the way Italian Canadian media systems in Canada have contributed to this silencing from within. The way television, radio, and newspapers in Italian have imported and replicated within the varied Italian Canadian communities the ethnic model imposed from above, which in the end translates into the infamous words of: «mangia cicoria» and «fa' una buona jobba»<sup>37</sup> – scripted the good, obeying, worker as an entertaining buffoon. The question remains: was the silencing willed and imposed because the cultural production called into question the very relationship of the emigrant within the polarized system of Multiculturalism and Biculturalism? If such texts had circulated earlier in these communities, would this have challenged (from within) the role of the go-between?<sup>38</sup> An agent, the go-between, who benefited, most importantly, at the prestige/spectacular level from the Multicultural grants that shaped a specific profile of the emigrant for a whole community. A rhetorical set of questions, perhaps, that still flap in the wind unanswered.

This same period sees the affirmation of a cultural scene that escapes the tenets and domestication processes of a dominant, colonial practice in favour of the formation of a trans-, or multi-, or pluricultural identity in Canada. In 1984, the publication of the anthology, in English, of Italian Canadian Voices - An Anthology of Poetry and Prose (1946-1983) tries to summarize not the shift, but the affirmation of the dominant paradigm in the Canadian literary landscape by positing what amounts to, unfortunately, an a-critical collection. Not only is state multiculturalism invoked as a guiding principle, removing the ghettoizing effects such a policy had, but the historical development of such a rich, cultural scene is seen only through the eyes of a unitary trajectory and a chronological reading. There is no attempt to see the breaks in and dead-ends of such a production, as well as the exclusionary principles inherent in the process of recognition and diffusion, and the surging of an ethnocultural consciousness that re-negotiates for itself a different belonging. In the Di Giovanni anthology the reader moves, for example, from Mario Duliani to George Amabile as if they were all part of the same process:

Contemporary Canadian cultural policy is distinctly different. Today, multicultural manifestations are not only accepted but actively promoted as the kind of national identity Canada want to present the world. The paucity of literary works following World War II, and the relative flourishing of Italian-Canadian writing at present seems to parallel the development of a national attitude which supports and encourages multiculturalism. The chronology of the works selected for this anthology demonstrates this growth<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> The magazine had as its original base Montreal. Born out of the Quaderni Culturali experience (1979-1983), the original founding members being Fulvio Caccia, Antonio D'Alfonso, Bruno Ramirez, Lamberto Tassinari, and Gianni Caccia. It will expand its base in the Nineties by constituting a trans-national urban triangle: Montreal, Toronto, New York. In the mid-Eighties it will features articles on Italian Canadian literature by writers such as Pasquale Verdicchio, William Anselmi and others that will thread it into the Italian Canadian culture at large. <sup>34</sup> DI GIOVANNI, Caroline M. (ed.), Italian-Canadian Voices. An Anthology of Poetry and Prose (1946-1983). Oakville, Ont., Mosaic Press, 1984, pp. 17-18.

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Caterina Edwards's The Lion's Mouth, challenges from the outset any attempt to codify the narrative within the binary system that ascribed to it a marginal – subaltern, minority, ethnic, etc. – position<sup>39</sup>. It does so through the narrator, Bianca, who keeps traveling through the years back and forth between Venice and Edmonton, never quite finalizing the displacement. The reader, then, has the task of unraveling the multiple identities that the continuous displacement creates, which resist any reductive mechanism, any governing principle if not the one lived by the actual narrator. Such a position, the continuous displaced subjectivity, cannot be encapsulated by the exoticized Other: the willing actor of a Multicultural stage. Fundamentally, Bianca is part of a Ulysses-like continuity (the unresolved Ulysses), who must always shift, displace herself in order to acquire and provide more information about the living, existential self.

Is it surprising that the authors mentioned so far problematize, from the very start, the actual role played by any member of the larger Italian Canadian community by spelling out, in English or French, the actual language of that community? The go-between must then govern the problematization of the ethnocultural role, silencing the speakers, diverting the diffusion of the textual body back to the margins so as to appease the gods. These collaborative practices continue into the present and take various forms, from the celebrated artist, to the supportive critic, to the community representative; having assimilated a valuable lesson in social control, they have learnt to survive.

More factors come into play in structuring the first diffused stage of Italian Canadian literature as fundamental and unrepeatable. One is that in 1983-84, academic and critic Francesco Loriggio, from Carleton University, offers the first university course - within the Italian Department - about Italian Canadian literature. By placing within the academic world what had been considered to that point a literature of a lesser god, Loriggio achieves two important results: showing the relationship between Italian and Italian Canadian culture and literature, and legitimizing from within, giving value to authorship, the Italian Canadian experience<sup>40</sup>. The other factor is the first ever conference<sup>41</sup> on

<sup>39</sup> EDWARDS, Caterina, The Lion's Mouth. Edmonton, NeWest Press, 1982. <sup>40</sup> Of the numerous articles and presentations on Italian Canadian literature, perhaps for this text, Going South (in LORIGGIO, Francesco, (ed.), Social Pluralism and Literary History. The Literature of the Italian Emigration. Toronto, Guernica, 1996) is most important, given the articulation of an intellectual/existential reading of the phenomena at hand.

<sup>41</sup> For a reading that contains *in nuce* the various directions present in the Italian Canadian literary world, please refer to MINNI, C. Dino; CIAMPOLINI, Anna Foschi (eds.), Writers in Transition. The Proceedings of the First National Conference of Italian-Canadian Writers. Toronto, Guernica, 1990.

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Early on into the 21st century, while mentioning en passant Salvatore Ala's Straight Razor and Other Poems45, one must note the solid continuity of those writers<sup>46</sup> and critics<sup>47</sup> who emerged in the "boom period" of the late Seventies and early Eighties. They are writers who continue to engage the reading public at large with different proposals matured by years of work, a work that has yet to be fully recognized as constituting part of the body of Canadian literature<sup>48</sup>.

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#### Abstract

L'articolo considera le origini e lo sviluppo della letteratura Canadese di origine italiana. Nella prima parte, mettendo in gioco una lettura teorica – poetica della dislocazione – si affrontano i vari aspetti di una letteratura che ha origine nell'esperienza e pratica del migrante, ovvero il ruolo di una letteratura di origine italiana in Canada: Italian Canadian literature. Allo stesso tempo, l'analisi del contesto canadese e del canone letterario derivato dal lavoro di Margaret Atwood, Survival, ha il compito di mettere in gioco la tensione esistente sia a livello culturale che letterario all'interno del panorama canadese. La seconda parte dell'articolo sviluppa un percorso letterario e culturale che partendo dalle origini arriva fino ai giorni nostri, e che può essere considerato fondamentale per quanto riguarda l'affermazione di un canone letterario della letteratura canadese di origine italiana.

<sup>45</sup> ALA, Salvatore, Straight Razor and Other Poems. Windsor, Biblioasis, 2004. <sup>46</sup> Examples abound: for a Pier Giorgio Di Cicco who has emerged from about sixteen years of silence to publish once again poetic works, Mary Melfi has delved beyond poetry to produce plays, novels, and editing a book on Italian Canadian painter Nick Palazzo; Mary Di Michele has also varied her output producing novels, the latest of which is Tenor of Love (Toronto, Viking Canada, 2005). <sup>47</sup> Beyond the work of a Francesco Loriggio, Marino Tuzi, Pasquale Verdicchio,

Antonio D'Alfonso, Lise Hogan, and others have contributed to a substantial body of criticism that pertains to what I have called in this work displacement poetics. <sup>48</sup> NEW, William H. (ed.), The Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2002, recognizes about 12 writers of Italian origin in over 2000 entries.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>36</sup> For an analysis which indicates the economic damage done to the Italian Canadian communities because Italian Canadian literature has not circulated in those communities and it has not become part of those communities' identityparadigm formations, please see the article by ANSELMI, William; HOGAN, Lise, Italian emigrants in Canada between cultural and economic aspects, «Memoria e Ricerca», 18, 2005, pp. 61-77.

<sup>37</sup> Italian Canadian expressions that have entered the community at large, part of the lingua franca, originating from Toronto's CHIN International's programs. <sup>38</sup> See GOULIAMOS, K.; ANSELMI, W., Elusive Margins. Consuming Media, Ethnicity and Culture, op. cit., p.14.

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Italian Canadian writers, held September 1986 in Vancouver, out of which will be born the Italian Canadian Writers' Association. Unfortunately, the excitement is short-lived, as the association becomes hostage to the framing by go-between agents who will work to recuperate and domesticate any ethnoconscious practice both in the critical and artistic world. In short, the literary and critical boom that culminates in the early eighties, is already undergoing a negative transformation by the end of the decade, a neutralizing process that parallels that of the in-coming, fashionable cultural discourse of postmodernism.

Alongside the names already mentioned in the body of this text, only a few that follow the marked beginnings contribute to the on-going cultural and critical debate without falling prey to facile, domesticated replications of an already established poetics or descending into personalized, deracinated renditions. Pasquale Verdicchio is one who straddles both the critical and artistic world, and as a poet and translator shows the influence of neo-avant-garde practices. Fiorella De Luca Calce, with her first novel Toni in 1991, emerges as a unique voice, one capable of indicating reconfigurations of belonging by presenting possible, alternative communities<sup>42</sup>. As well, by the early nineties, Peter Oliva, with his critically acclaimed novel Drowning in Darkness, emerges on the culturalscape by offering an engaging re-reading of the myth of Ulysses with a definite twist: Ulysses, the migrant miner of modernity<sup>43</sup>. In contrast, we have the works of Nino Ricci, especially the Lives of the Saints trilogy - the first novel of the trilogy, The Lives of the Saints was awarded the 1990 Governor General's Award for fiction<sup>44</sup>. One of the problems with Ricci's works is his ambiguous position, in which he exploits the ethnic component to acquire a raison d'être within the literary and cultural landscape at large. Witness, as an example of this conscious, survivalist approach, the reconstruction of the trilogy for Canadian television (January, 2005), and the invention of a new character in order to allow Italian actress Sophia Loren a starring role. The Nineties, in this context, seem to offer little innovation, with the exception of Peter Oliva, or continuation in terms of the development of a literary trajectory. Beside new poets such as Giovanna Patriarca, a number of anthologies appear, either focusing on the gender issue or simply exploiting origins for an ephemeral, spectacularized appearance in the cultural market.

<sup>42</sup> DE LUCA CALCE, Fiorella, Toni. Toronto, Guernica, 1991.

<sup>43</sup> OLIVA, Peter, *Drowning in Darkness*. Dunvegan, Cormorant Books, 1993. 44 RICCI, Nino, Lives of the Saints. Dunvegan, Cormorant Books, 1990; ID., In a Glass House. Dunvegan, Cormorant Books, 1993; ID., Where She Has Gone. Dunvegan, Cormorant Books, 1997.

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# Gli Italo-Canadesi in esposizione

Intervista a Mauro Peressini, Curatore della mostra Presenza – A New Look at Italian-Canadian Heritage / Un nouveau regard sur l'héritage italo-canadien

Cosa ha spinto il Musée canadien des civilisations a dedicare una mostra agli Italo-Canadesi?

Mauro Peressini: Bisogna premettere che tra i vari musei che esistono nel paese il nostro è il museo nazionale canadese e il suo mandato include la storia, la società, la cultura del paese. Nel passato ha già dedicato mostre ai gruppi detti "etnoculturali" – come i canadesi di origine cinese, tedesca, ucraina – ed ai gruppi etno-religiosi, come i doukhobour.

Nessuna mostra era stata però dedicata agli italo-canadesi, che già negli anni 1970 erano il maggior gruppo etno-culturale, a parte i canadesi inglesi e francesi

M.P.: C'era stato un tentativo di sviluppare collezioni museologiche sugli Italiani, ma con scarsi risultati soprattutto perché mancanza di personale specializzato. Io sono entrato al museo nel 1992, dopo aver completato gli studi in antropologia culturale, e sono stato assunto come specialista delle culture dell'Europa sud-occidentale, e quindi sono stato incoraggiato a sviluppare collezioni sul nostro gruppo etnoculturale e ad approfondire le ricerche. Ed è ciò che ho cercato di fare fin dall'inizio. În fondo, le iniziative di un museo dipendono dalle risorse a sua disposizione, sia in termini di personale che di collezioni.

Si ha l'impressione che nel concepire questa mostra tu abbia voluto privilegiare il periodo del dopoguerra più di quello precedente che gode di una più ricca storiografia

M.P.: A dire il vero, non ho cercato di fare una distinzione tra i due periodi storici poiché il mio obiettivo principale non era di fare la storia dell'immigrazione italiana in Canada, ma piuttosto di individuare certe tradizioni, costumi, e valori culturali che gli Italiani avevano portato